

**Lighting Theatre Productions in Non-Conventional Spaces: *When Women Go Naked* and
The Village Lamb as Case Study**

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Abstract.

*This paper is set to discuss emerging trends in lighting productions in non-conventional space as a disruptive technique in neoslavery discourse. Beyond the core essence of theatre production which is for education, information and entertainment, the paper takes a strong position that what is known today as non-conventional theatre space is as old as drama itself and is still playing major role in most traditional performances. While it is true that lighting a play production in an unconventional theatre space is an emerging trend, such cannot be said about a conventional theatre space that comes with its entire paraphernalia. Since African performances are not just limited to conventional spaces alone, there is a dire need for lighting designers to free themselves from such tradition and devise a functional means of illuminating production in an unlimited space of performance. The methodology adopted in this study is qualitative research method which entails detailed analysis of lighting chats designed for the productions of Obi Pat Nwagbo's *When Women Go Naked* and John Iwu's *The Village Lamb* as produced in AE-FUNAI Theatre. The study is anchored on Richard Schechner's *Performance Theory* that negates existing formality in performance practice. By this, Schechner seems to argue that every activity around us is a performance and the space in which such activity takes place is a non-conventional performance space. Equipped with this, the study reveals that the selected play productions followed a lighting trend of improvisation since they are Afrocentric in textual content and performance outlook, thus made the process of lighting more practicable as it disrupts elements of Eurocentric adherence in terms of hanging, focusing and actual lighting. The paper therefore recommended that in order to achieve a functional approach to lighting production in nonconventional spaces, designers should maintain workable concept devoid of total reliance on established rules.*

Keywords: Emerging Trends, Non-conventional Spaces, Neoslavery

Introduction

The art of lighting play productions dates back to ancient Greek theatre when lamps were used to give some form of illumination to actors on stage, aside the use of natural light from sunlight which was not quite different from what was obtainable back here in Africa. In spite of this shape similarity, theatre lighting equipment can be traced to Medieval Renaissance periods. Remarkable as those periods, the modern era witnessed unparalleled technological transformation; having developed from the use of natural light, light sticks, touches, chandeliers to more enhanced incandescent lamps, floods, spots and light emitting diodes (LEDs)). In this light, Rob Napoli and Chuck Gloman reveal that "Lighting (of any kind) not only illuminates the set but also allows you to create a mood, time, setting, and look for your environment"(321). This can be achieved through skillful manipulation of lighting fixtures among other elements of theatre design. Based on this established background, this paper is therefore premised not on mere illuminative functions of stage lighting as it presents a lens through which theatre audiences view a performance in its aesthetic beauty in an atmosphere devoid of the trappings of a conventional theatre, but also to x-ray emerging trends in lighting theatre productions in non-conventional spaces and the burden of Neoslavery. It therefore hinges in the improvisational abilities of a lighting designer in achieving proper lighting of a play production using available resources within a given space of performance. Therefore, the performance spaces under review are non-conventional in terms of structure, lighting rigs and application, and it behooves on lighting designer to consider its peculiar tendencies within a constrained existing space and choice of equipment to achieve the given task.

Undoubtedly, the job of the lighting designer in a theatre production is quite crucial and demanding. Thus, the ultimate goal underlining the final experience of the audience is the satisfaction derived using materials, equipment and space deployed for lighting a production. For effective communication to be achieved therefore, the inherent architectural features of the performance space needs to be exploited to enhance the designer's art. With this indication, Wolf and Block opine that:

The type and the amount of offstage space for side-lighting positions may influence design decisions. Space limitations in front-of-house ceiling and side-cove positions dictate maximum fixture size as well as the number of fixtures. The number of hanging positions front-of-house and overstate matters significantly as well. (359)

This is so because the primary function of any theatrical production is to communicate with the audience without ambiguities. Adler and Towne in a similar vein, reveal that "all that ever has been accomplished by humans and all that ever will be accomplished involves communication with others"(1). From the above, it can be said that the responsibility of a technical designer is to harness all physical elements of theatre production which includes scenery, lights, costume and make-up. This is geared towards an optimal performance where the audience will be brought to the same level of understanding of the play by the process of production. It is however not the case with the elements of the performance space as this paper seems to argue. Consequently, the poise of the paper is that technical designers, precisely lighting designers are faced with restrictive and sometimes hazardous environment that leaves the designer with option of improvisation. The designer also manages the available space for proper deployment of lighting equipment, ensuring safety of performers and the audience and achieving the desired aesthetic and didactic effects of using stage lights.

The paper is set to reveal the emerging trends in stage lighting as how it was deployed in two theatre productions as produced on the non-conventional stage of AE-FUNAI Auditorium namely; Obi Pat Nwagbo's *When Women Go Naked* and John Iwu's *The Village Lamb*. Both productions are Afrocentric in terms of design of scenery, costume and deployment of lighting equipment. Equipment was brought into the performance space due to lack of fixed hanging spaces. The lighting designer engaged in improvisation to position equipment without obstructing audience viewership.

Theatre Lighting and Functionality

The cord of its essentiality that binds stage lighting be it conventional or non-conventional and functionality lie on the aesthetic relevance. This is why stage lighting is different from other forms of lighting such as domestic, street, industrial or environmental lighting. As such, Richard Dunham states that "light in its natural form " is a form of energy, specifically, it is a form of radiant energy that is associated with a given portion of the electromagnetic spectrum"(3) which is known as light. The light in its natural form is transmitted or radiated in an artistic and aesthetic way on stage production to produce the needed effects. It is this electrically enhanced theatre lighting that Wolf and Block began that gave rise to"... the invention of the incandescent

lamp"(309). Therefore, the concept of Lighting has been defined by various authorities with a convergence of thoughts explaining the practice as illumination of stage for visibility. One of these thoughts is from Gillette, who argues that "The reason that we design the lighting for an event or place is to influence the audience's perception and understanding of what they are seeing. That is the reason that lighting is thoughtfully designed for theatre..."(347) It surmises to say that Lighting in theatre performs other functions than mere visibility. Some of these are for depicting genre, period, time of the day, setting and mood of a play. Hence, lighting in non-conventional theatres is none the less effective despite structural deficit that pose some challenges to the lighting designer. This is because other theatrical design elements such as scenery, costume and make-up depend on light for the audience to notice and derive satisfaction in what they see. In the same vein, actors and stage properties also need to be seen as they move from one part of the stage to the other. In addition to creating for selective visibility of actors and objects on stage, lights reveal depth and make scenery appear realistic. It is against this background that Gloman and Napoli explain that "by using lighting and creating depth in your three-dimensional space, objects stand out from the background and look three dimensional. This is accomplished by modeling the object with your light and 'placing shadow' so that your characters or set do not look flat". (322) It is important to note therefore that Theatre lighting transcend mere illumination and display of stage lighting equipment to a more defined functions such as creating mood, period and others.

It is imperative to state that creative stage lighting began as imitative art modelled from features of natural light in the attempt to portray realism on stage and present actors and scenery as close to nature as possible. Developments in technical productions have been witnessed in scene design, costume, make up and sound effect. Whether on a closed or open stage architecture, the job of the designer has become even more artistically oriented and technically demanding especially with the advent of digitisation and its attendant demand for ingenuity amidst a variety of applications at the disposal of 21st century designers

Non-Conventional Theatre Spaces in History

Non-conventional theatre spaces represent a departure from the usual and already existing performance platforms. It means a performance venue that is devoid of regular architectural paraphernalia befitting of a theatre but with unattractively desirable features that makes theatrical

performance exhilarating and more empirical. Although such production space may not have standard stage with trap door, lighting rig and booth or safety precaution, the make shift or improvised lighting design technique employed by a designer brings a feeling of relative familiarity in the audience with regard to the content and concept of production. It therefore gives room for ingenious improvisation by a lighting designer. The non-conventional space replicates innovations of the renaissance when production went indoors. This allows for various experimentations in terms of sizes and shapes of auditorium and acting area. Writing about theatre of the renaissance, Gillette again reveals that "although the theatres were patterned after the classical forms, their designers made many interesting, and clever adaptations"(43). Revealing as this assertion is, Play Productions in Non-Conventional Theatres is not a novel practice in theatre but a practice that has gained acceptance by theatre practitioners.

Be that as it may, theatrical productions are either a product of meticulously conceptualised ingenuity that characterise western art form or the spontaneous conviviality inherent in the African performative experience occur either indoors or outdoors. Carlson explains that:

In more modern times, however, particularly from the 19th century onward, there has developed an extremely varied and widespread interest in and experimentation with the theatrical use of spaces outside those traditional structure, a trend this intensified in later part of the twentieth century, so that today performances in spaces outside theatre buildings comprise a major part of the contemporary theatre, especially the experimental theatre (6).

It is evident that the idea of putting up theatrical productions in non-conventional spaces is often a response to the growing inadequacies of existing theatre buildings. However different the space may seem, there is usually the need to observe safety of performers and audience in the process of design. Hence, stating the importance of safety precaution, The Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) recommends thus; "You need to make sure that the building is strong enough to be able to support the maximum number of people allowed in the venue at any given time. Even when the building may not have been designed for your proposed loads or may have been altered or has not been adequately maintained".(5) The lighting technician for Non-conventional theatre space must be environmentally conscious in the process of design since the space is a non-

conformist performance area that allows for greater opportunity for the director and technical crew members to create audience friendly atmosphere.

Non-conventional theatres are performance venues that are structurally temporal but with functional features that could house theatre productions. It is also evident that existing performance spaces within and outside theatre institutions cannot cater for production traffic in the system. As a result, more spaces, however convenient for theatrical productions, have become necessary in order to give student artists opportunity to be exposed to variety of accepted performance areas. Charles Nwadiuwe reveals that:

...the wave of experimentation in the (educational) theatre and increasing demand for command or sponsored performances call for the mounting of performances at unusual or non-theatre venues with the attendant challenges to design and technical production. Such situations are not peculiar to Nigerian environment (94)

As acceptable and convenient performance space, non-conventional performance venues lend themselves to easy manipulation towards achieving intended goals of meaningful theatre experience. It therefore allows for experimentation that permits for the use of conventional lighting and other technical equipment by theatre designers in the process of production. According to Constantin Stanislavski, "there are individual moments when you suddenly and unexpectedly rise to great artistic heights and thrill your audience. In such moments you are creating according to your inspiration, improvising, as it were..."(18) The word Improvisation here fit into Schechner's postulation on experimental theatre performance which clearly explain the conceptual premise of the research.

Arguably, in the early Greek and medieval performance arenas, theatre productions thrived in unconventional spaces using lights such as sunlight, lamps and chandeliers, since its aim, according to Bernard Orji is, "creating images in their picturesqueness to enhance communication propensities of a play"(21). Undoubtedly, for a play production to fully perform its functions of entertainment, providing economic benefits, instruction and communication, the visual as well as the auditory essence of such performance must be felt by the audience. As such, the use of colours and other aesthetic elements are usually deployed in appropriate measure so as to achieve its goal. That is why the effects of lighting a play production in any venue cannot be overemphasised as Wolf and Block admit that "Good lighting ties together the visual aspects of the stage and supports

the dramatic intent of the production" (308). As an element that advances the narrativity of a dramatic action on stage, lighting also reveals to the audience whatever they are meant to see in a production.

Synoptic account of the plays *When Women Go Naked* and *The Village Lamb*

The play *When Women Go Naked* is set in a typical Igbo community where patriarchy is practised. Men in traditional Igbo society possess ultimate powers to make decisions and administer the tenets of their people's established norms and values to the submission and admiration of the womenfolk. The patriarchs own the land, the body of their women, and even the spirits. Such expression of power is seen in the membership of the masquerade cult and some other socio-cultural organisations whose membership are exclusively reserved for men of certain age grade. Ogana, the ambitious and stonehearted self-acclaimed king of Umundiagu is not happy because his wife has just been delivered of, once again, a baby girl. Udenkwo, his niece who is staying with him is losing the chances of marriage due to Ogana's wicked ways. Dismissed to remain at home with dashed hope of ever getting married, Udenkwo begins to take responsibilities or roles which hitherto belonged to the menfolk, including being mischievous. She buys lands; a commodity and asset that is seen as exclusive to the men and male children and cuts palm trees. Ogana would not take this lightly. At the palm oil factory where the women led by Udenkwo process their palm fruits, the "gods" in the appearance of Opiankpala masquerades steal the women's cans of oil. When Udenkwo battles face-to-face with one Apianpkala and removes its mask, the face of the carrier and the confession of who sends them make the women to finally go naked. This intended unmasking of the masquerade is an act seen as sacrilegious in the society and usually should have attracted the stiffest punishment from adherents of the cult. As a result, the spirits and ancestors would not allow Ogana the king some rest as the women go naked.

The Village Lamb on the other hand is a play that centres on the character-Amadi Ujowundu who has just returned to his native land after his sojourn abroad (America) for years studying. Amadi has a foster father who has been taking good care of him from childhood. Ujowundu has no biological child of his own. It is agreed by the entire village that Amadi be nursed from infancy to by Ujowundu until such a time when he is required to return to his people for the purpose of traditional atonement; that is, the utmost price of being the village lamb that must be sacrificed.

Amadi eventually returns with lofty promises on how to make his land better with developmental programmes. His father tries to make him understand the true situation surrounding his intended plan to return by dissuading him to stay back because the fate that awaits him is death. Ujowundu therefore persuades him to remain in America. He however returns home due to Uzokwe's diabolical act and as a result of the need to retrieve an amulet from his father. After a scuffle with his father, Amadi gets the amulet back.

Amadi's girlfriend Janet who is American had conceived a child for him but Amadi is bent on the quest of traveling home because he feels his father is not well. Amadi does not know his fate yet, though everyone knows about the task that awaits him. He has interest in Udemba's daughter, Ugochi. She warns Amadi of his fate after he has declared his interest in her but he saucily dismisses her warning. Ugochi makes effort to get Amadi remove the neck bead and hand laces which apparently make him unaware of the impending doom. Amadi tells her that those pieces make him feel fulfilled. Amadi is called by the native doctor and the elders. He thinks that the tricks the elders are playing on him is for a good cause for serving his land. But they are bent on having the sacrifice performed. Amadi responds to the call. His genital organ is cut off and as a result, he becomes dizzy. In his dizzy state, he admits that he is fulfilled for adhering to the call by his instinct to return home only to be inadvertently slaughtered. Amadi eventually dies while Uzokwe is subdued and arrested by the police.

Deployment of Lights in the Productions of Pat Obi Nwagbo's *When Women Go Naked* and John Iwu's *The Village Lamb*

For the production of *When Women Go Naked*, key lights and fill lights were used due to the inadequacies of the acting area and the number of actors on stage at various scenes in the play. For a new and ill-equipped Department of Theatre Arts, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ebonyi State, the utmost goal of the lighting designer was to establish a solid foundation and functional approach to lighting productions. Meticulous attempt was made in order not to entrench a one-off tradition that may not stand the test of time. Although the stage is not standardised in consonance with Western norms of size of acting area, it was however adapted to functionally accommodate production which depicted the traditional essence of African society. Drawing from Richard Schechner's ideology on experimentation, the stage was designed and it was an amazing

experience. This effort was a fusion of artistic ingenuity and the use of new lighting equipment that conforms to Oliszewski and Fine's, "digital technology that is changing at a breathtaking speed"(2). To help achieve that needed illumination, Dimmer Rack was added to other fixtures while the ParCan lighting instruments were used as both key and fill lights to illuminate both sides of the stage and the apron. No backlighting was used. Most of the Oganaiwe's actions were illuminated at stage left position while the women and Udenkwo were lit on the stage right. The masquerade and warriors were followed by one Par Can light in place of a spotlight. Mood and time of the day were aptly conjured using the available lighting facilities at the proper intensities to create the needed atmosphere. This also helped to establish and heightened suspense as required by the play text. As expected, the masquerade performance scene was placed off stage, by the apron and was accordingly lit by two light sources placed at crossed opposite ends of the Tripod Stand.

Light Chart for the Production of *When Women Go Naked*

Scene	C u e	Equipment	C o l o u r	P o s i t i o n	L i g h t s o u t
1	Lights meet Oganaiwe	PARcan light	Y e l l o w	Stage left	When he is lost in thought
2	Meets Udenkwo	PARcan lights	A m b e r	Centre stage	As she leaves the stage
3	Udenkwo and two other women are dancing	PARcan and LED colour lights	Yellow, red and white	Centre stage	As they dance out
4	Lights meet women carrying new born baby while singing	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Yellow and blue	U p s t a g e	As Oganaiwe enters furious
5	Lights meet Opiankpala masquerade stealing palm oil can	LED colour lights	A m b e r	A p r o n	As the masquerade runs off
6	Meets Oganaiwe insulting Udenkwo	PARcan lights	Y e l l o w	A p r o n	As Udenkwo cries and sings
7	Lights meet Udenkwo in prison	PARcan light and LED colour lights	Amber and red	Stage right	As she sleeps off
8	Lights meet Oganaiwe as he threatens to kill his wife	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Yellow and red	Stage left	As the leave the stage
9	Meets Udenkwo unmasking the masquerade	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Yellow and red	Down stage	As she screams
1 0	Lights meet Abiriba warriors dancing	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Yellow, blue and red	Apron and down stage	As they dance out from the stage
1 1	Lights meet naked women	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Amber and red	Entire stage	Lights fade as they leave the stage

For the production of *The Village Lamb*, a total of eight lighting sources were deployed using one tripod; six Par Can lanterns and two LED aesthetics lanterns. Due to the peculiarity of the performance arena in the AE-FUNAI Auditorium, the lights were hung and focused on a Tripod with the cables taped together and discreetly placed under seats and on the aisle of the auditorium to avoid contact with audience and members of cast and crew. After the lanterns were hung, the job of focusing began. In order to achieve precision, selective visibility and the right mood and atmosphere, the art of focusing the lights was guided by textual analysis of the play and Schechner's idea that makes it possible for improvisation to occur. Utmost care was observed by the lighting designer and his crew in hanging and securing each light firmly on the grid. For the production under review, the lighting designer imagined the performance while working with well laid out lighting plan that captured the reality on set. As Adesina Adegbite puts it, "The means of deployment is regarded as artistic because the involvement of these elements transcends just mere addition, illumination, patterning, arrangement and designing to project the production concepts" (79). This exercise was first broadly tested during the technical rehearsal which involved the process of carrying out repetitive action by performers and equipment to ensure that all aspects of the production were error free. Angles of lighting focus on set and on actors were tried out and corrections effected preparatory to a smooth production. Having understood the peculiarity of sightlines of the performance venue, placement of lights was done so as not to obscure viewing for most members of the audience. Focusing of lights followed after the tripod with its extended batten was rigged in position by members of the lighting crew. One Par Can light was used to illuminate a few elders with Amadi both at the apron.

Light Chart for the Production of *The Village Lamb*

Scene	Cue (lights on)	Equipment	Colour	Position	Lights out
1	Lights meet Amadi and Ujowundu	PARcan lights	Yellow	Centre stage	As they talk happily
2	Light meets Amadi in a prologue	PARcan light and LED	Amber	Down stage	As he finishes his narration
3	Lights meet elders as they present Amadi with gift	PARcan light and LED aesthetics light	Yellow and red	Stage left	As they take their exit
4	Meets Amadi proposing to Ugochi	PARcan light with gel	Amber	Stage left	As Ugochi leaves
5	Lights meet Amadi and Ujowundu	PARcan and LED aesthetic light	Amber and red	Centre stage	As they argue

6	Meets Amadi and Janet on her birthday	PARcan light and LED colour lights	Yellow and red	Stage left	As their mood become sober
7	lights meet Amadi and Ujowundu	PARcan lights	Amber	Centre stage	As they argue
8	Meet villagers celebrating festival	PARcan lights and LED aesthetic lights	Yellow, purple, blue and green	Entire stage	As celebration continues
9	Lights meet Ujowundu and two elders	PARcan lights	Amber	Apron	As they continue to drink palm wine
10	Lights meet Ugochi's father in a confrontation with Amadi	PARcan lights and LED colour lights	Amber and red	Stage left	As Ugochi's father leaves the stage
11	Lights meet Amadi in Chief Priest's shrine	PARcan and LED colour lights	Dimmed amber and red	Stage right	As Amadi dies
12	Lights meet villagers as a policeman arrests Chief Priest	PARcan lights	Yellow	Apron	As Chief Priest is taken away

Challenging elements of Neoslavery in the Productions

Most theatre buildings in Nigeria, especially those in many theatre schools are replicas of western styled theatre architecture that emanated from the Renaissance when theatre performance went indoors. They exude features of Neoslavery which are evident even in elements of our Afrocentric theatre performances. From structure, language of line delivery and lighting equipment, theatre productions have failed to be completely rid of traces of Eurocentric appendages. Non-conventional performance areas however, have brought a new vista whereby venues now bring some form of familiarity in the minds of the audience. Lighting equipment is deployed without shrouding the process of hanging, focusing and lighting in secrecy. There is therefore a syncretic practice of employing foreign equipment in familiar venues. Writing in his Ph.D. dissertation, Aborisade states that:

Consequently, the present search for a new theatre form, architecturally, would yield better results if the merger of the traditional and western modern architecture employing modern technology in equipping them to achieve flexibility, adaptability and timelessness could be pursued. In order to achieve that, what one has to do now is to critically examine the functionality of the present spaces and modify or refurbish them to suit the demands of the contemporary Nigerian theatre. (32)

The adaptable nature of non-conventional performance theatre allows artists, designers and audience to make valuable input in the process since art is subjective and lends itself to varied interpretations. In the words of Nwadiigwe, the theatre can refract because the artist is not always

the mouthpiece for all the people. Art involves selectivity and the creators and performers have the license to choose those elements and symbols that can best convey their messages" (95). The burden of Neoslavery is therefore lifted off the shoulders of the lighting designer as a result of the choice of achieving proper illumination in a non-conventional theatre space.

Theatre architecture in Nigeria is guided, to a large extent, by Western styled architectural design with some modern installations and internal structures. Some of the theatre structures now have comfortable temperature regulating system for the audience with well-designed fire alarm gadgets and emergency exits as precautionary measures. Enhancement of a performance venue with such amenities will ultimately influence the outcome of productions. In the words of Nwadike, "there is a strong connection between performance venues, architecture and the presentation and enjoyment of the theatrical event". (53) A number of the theatre structures, however, have more simple design that creates an atmosphere of the African communality. According to Oyebowale, "the bringing of theatrical activities out to people of Nigeria, would not be out of place, if individual groups and cooperate bodies can utilise the available spaces though unconventional to reach the audience" (6).

There is the need for a theatre space that is flexible with transformable features especially with regards to lighting actors and scenery in this era. Such space tends to de-emphasise traits of neoslavery. Although theatre architecture has evolved into masterpieces especially in the Western world, found spaces have however been attributed with hosting more functional productions especially in the African performative essence. Writing about non-conventional arenas in Zimbabwe, Sibanda avers that, "Found spaces include unconventional spaces where(alternative) theatre performances take place...They also include open spaces, bus terminals and village centers, with dormitory entrances and exits"(6). This type of venue became necessary because according to him, "conceptualisation of performance in rigid physical three-dimensional terms (height, depth and width) that distinctly separate the stage and auditorium created challenges for indigenous performance styles"(5).

Conclusion

Lighting theatre productions in non-conventional spaces have followed a trend of improvisation in order to achieve effective illumination of actors and scenery. As a functional means of

neutralising the effects of neoslavery in the art of theatre, unusual performance venues such as the AE FUNAI theatre provided a lighting designer the opportunity of hanging, focusing and lighting using handy equipment. The performance space enabled for spontaneity and experimentation in terms of placing equipment with successful outcome. For instance, Lighting Pat Obi Nwagbo's *When Women Go Naked* and John Iwu's *The Village Lamb* followed Richard Schechner's experimental process by not adhering to established rules and theories of hanging lighting equipment. Both performances were Afrocentric in design and as a result, the non-conventional nature of the performance area demanded unusual introduction of techniques of lighting that brought about functional illumination. Characters and scenery were illuminated with detailed effects without shadows and unwanted lighting intensity. As satiric plays, with little elements of tragedy, the stage for both productions were mostly illuminated for better part of the production.

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