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**The Economics of Theatre/Entertainment  
Technology in Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

*Research work on theatre technology in Africa is at its very infant stage. Consequently, African scholars are engaging themselves in pedagogical writings to shore up upcoming professionals. However, since it is fast becoming a profession, it is expedient to postulate upon it as an enterprise. This essay therefore, discusses theatre technology and its attendant economic impact as business in Nigeria using Bradford DeLong's (2004) discourse on international capital mobility. Aspects of DeLong's position and David Throsby's cultural capital theory form the theoretical base for this work. The essay is more situated within the realm of field experiences. Sources and references are intertwined between text, performances and interviews. A substantial part of this essay is based on eclectic field experiences and*

*contacts. Nigerian and South African based entertainment technology companies are prominent analyses in this article.*

**Key Words:** Theatre Technology, Design, and Cultural Capital.

### **Introduction**

Technology and the economy involved in it have always played important roles in the theatre. This fact began from the well documented anonymously built classical Greek Machina and Periaktoi through the mediaeval trap doors to the Italian Renaissance theatres, especially Teatro Farnese built by Giovanni Battista Aleotti at Palma which by design and structure heralded the Proscenium stage into world theatre space. The design and constructions of all the above involves personnel and technicalities that aided the classical, mediaeval and renaissance economies. Till date, the construction of theatre structures does require the services of various consultants in the fields of theatre and applied arts and engineering. These constructions as well as lighting, stage design and costume making in the theatre are assuming more roles in theatre and Para-theatre events. They therefore consume a greater percentage of over budgets in production planning process.

Bett (2012) in her essay on the role of arts festival in developing and promoting street theatre in South Africa discussed extensively issues relating to street theatre and its adaptation to arts festival in South Africa. She talked about the appearance of street theatre and the systematic enlargement of dance and music theatre in theatres festival that was started in 1992 by the Johannesburg Metropolitan Council. Quite often, the dramaturgy of such festivals is always discussed with less attention given to the scenography of the performance environment.

Adolphe Appia being one of the pioneer proponents of modern staging welcomed technology in the theatre. Appia's work was in furtherance of visual arts in the arts of the theatre and entertainment world. In his essay titled "Mechanisation", Appia recognized the

changing world of the first half of the 19th century. In it Appia's question is thus – How do we respond to the incursion of technology on our society? Appia says, having realized the limited potentials of beasts of burden, man began to seek the inanimate mechanical assistance, which derives its initiative from human beings. This development, he says, contributes to physical efficiency. He says:

Actual intellectual efficiency arises primarily from new methods introduced into our work by mechanization (Beacham ed. 1993: 203).

Appia puts man at the centre of all measures. He contends that technology in itself is not harmful but for the use we might put it to. He therefore admonished that we should not submit our will to the machine because the machine is dumb. He says things will go as far as we allow them to go because in his words:

The possibility offered by one scientific discovery or another does not have to be applied to everyday existence (Beacham ed 1993: 203).

Thus in alignment with trends of the society of our time, the theatre has in furtherance of theories and practices embraced technology in all ramification from the manual to the automated and the digito/computerized encounters. The theatre has a way of fusing the old and new order as carefully relayed in Mark Reaney's situation of his Theatre of Virtual Reality into the most powerful classical Athenian theatre performance (Reaney 1993), which aligns with Appia and his theories. Appia having stated his stand on technology did this practically by converting the text and music scores of Richard Wagner into physical movement and location within the scenic arrangement (Beacham ed. 1993:12). To achieve this, capital must be expended. This is the basis of us situating our discourse on economics of entertainment technology among the disciplines of the arts and science of the theatre. Using Nigeria as a base, I shall therefore proceed to discuss aspects of theatre design and technology as enterprise with relevant training foundations.

However, I am constrained to use available information because economic data are not readily available and our agencies in Nigeria are not research friendly. An email to the central bank of Nigeria requesting for assistance with information and data on equipment purchase was not responded to.

### **In Search of a Framework**

Theatre design and technology being at a very infant stage in Nigeria has had its scholars engaging in ensuring that its pedagogy is understood within our environment. One of such scholars is Duro oni who in his major treatise titled “*Stage Lighting: The Nigerian Perspective*” (2004), dwelled more on stage lighting as scenery. He argues that a substantial part of stage setting will eventually be subsumed into lighting. In presenting his position, he says:

The typical settings for most Nigerian theatrical performances are: river side, foot path, market-place, king’s palace, court rooms, etc. All these can be satisfactorily created/represented on stage with stage lighting rather than elaborate sets.

This does not, of course, mean that certain dramatic productions such as Wale Ogunyemi’s *The Divorce* would not require the use of, sometimes, elaborate stage sets. But, irrespective of this, since the important element is the concept agreed upon for a production, it should be possible for even a Shakespearean play to be performed within the framework of the theoretical proposition in this book which advocates a shift away from the use of sets to that of lights (Duro Oni 2004: 27).

Oni proceeds to the analyses of his case studies (stage production of “Things Fall Apart” and “Sikulu”) in which he describes the scene-by-scene use of lighting. He observes that with the aid of lighting, scenes are indicated, demarcated and transited. This we see in the physical separation of a multiple location situation, which was portrayed by

three pools of lights. This has been the only major published treatise on design and technical theatre in Nigeria till date.

It is therefore against this background that this essay wants to use a restricted macroeconomics and cultural capital framework to analyse our position. For this we have chosen the positions of Bradford Delong and Throsby.

In discussing capital flow, Delong claims that the reasons capital flowed into America and other developed countries were largely not based on the supposed superiority of investments. He gave three reasons. I am however concerned with the last two reasons in this essay. Of the second and third, he says:

Second, there were investors, governments, and banks from developing countries themselves. Central banks sought to keep the values of their home currencies down so that their workers could gain valuable experience in exporting manufactured goods to the post-industrial core.

Third, the third world rich often thought a large Deutsche Bank account would be a good thing to have in case something went wrong and they suddenly had to flee the country in their rubber boat (or Lear jet) Again stability in investment as opposed to future returns – was the key.

For over two decades now, Nigerian central bank has ensured that the value of Nigeria's currency is perpetually down. Not being a manufacturing nation, the purchase of entertainment technology equipment from Europe, America and of recent China became like the upward hill toil of Sisyphus. This is caused by the attendant result of automatic weakening of purchasing power of consumers. We are a consumer nation in all ramifications. In purchasing equipment and having them shipped to Nigeria, the total cost may not be known until it arrives at the end users warehouse. This is because it involves additional costs of freighting, custom and other duties and movements to end users destination. At certain points, it gets incongruous to want

to calculate total cost of equipment purchase in Nigeria. For instance in 2002, Daar Communications<sup>2</sup> (the biggest privately owned media conglomerate in Nigeria) owners of the Africa Independent Television and Ray Power radio station engaged in importation of electronic broadcast equipment to Lagos-Nigeria. Of all the equipment purchased, four Hundred thousand Great British Pounds (GBP) was moved from Nigeria to White Light Limited and Strand Lighting in Europe for lighting equipment. In similar vein, the company expended One Hundred and thirty three thousand GBP on soft lights for the installation of its new virtual reality studios and the renovation of its existing ones in 2007. These costs usually exclude the unstable X cost of duties and exercises at the point of reception in Nigeria. These are as a result of monetary policy instability that occasioned precarious reviews of import duties at the tail end of reception of equipment purchases.

Delong's macro analyses of wealth favour Western Europe and America on the basis of their being safety nests for crises prone countries of the world as he stated. Within the position of Delong that directly discussed developing nation is the indirect portrayal of issues related to the growth of theatre design and technology in Nigeria. This is manifest in the difficulties experience in capital movement from the west to Nigeria. However, In contrast to Delong's discourse, Throsby's cultural capital theory is of direct link to this work.

Throsby defined cultural capital as

.. an asset that contribute to cultural value. More precisely, cultural capital is the stock of cultural value embodied in an asset. This stock may in turn give rise to a flow of goods and services over time i.e. commodities that themselves may have both economic and cultural values.

Throsby's position is from the non-conventional economics point of view in which he argued that cultural value may give rise to economic value in both its tangible and intangible forms. The inclusion of music in the intangible cultural capital assets by Throsby makes music of

Wagner in itself of immense cultural value. This music's scores were always interpreted into physical stage settings by Adlphe Appia. Stage setting in itself being a relevant aspect of theatre design and technology.

It is essential at this point to proceed to the processes involved in our theatre technology in Nigeria before returning to forms of capitalism as an acceptable concept above.

### **The Enterprise**

Modern theatre has always been an enterprise that combines aesthetics and functionality. This was what motivated Robert Edmond Jones in his 1956 lecture tour of some American Universities. In it, he used the theatre design and technology medium to motivate theatre arts students into learning how to do things differently in the arts of the theatre (Unruh ed. 1992). Returning to America with the Appia/Craig school of thought, Jones rose to become a prominent American theatre designer who in his life time, designed set, lighting and costume for uncountable theatre production. He had no other known trade other than being a scenographer. Certain peculiarities are in the areas of sales/marketing, employment and training in Nigeria shall be further discussed.

The training process in Nigeria was designed within the eclectic theatre school processes. A prototype of which is in the University of Ibadan–Nigeria. Students in the department of theatre arts of this institution are guided through a general course procedure in their first two years in the, while the last two years allows for students to specialise in chosen areas of competence. Thus, students are put through general introduction to theatre history and practice at the initial stage. They are also taught fundamentals of design, directing, playwriting, theatre arts theories and criticism, theatre management and drama sociology. They are then expected to opt for a major and a minor area of specialisation in the arts of the theatre.

Within the design and technology units, students are taken through two courses on design and theatre technology at year three and another two in year four, which is the final year. However, of interest in the training process is that the design and theatre technology students who spend most of their time in the theatre and workshop learning the art and science of theatre design and technology with the resident technologist and their lecturers. At the final stage of training, they are all expected to design and execute the designs for the specialised directing students as their own practical project. This is in addition to the classroom conceptual approach. Some of the graduates of our institutions have directly invested and aided movement of capital to Nigeria, particularly graduates of the university of Ibadan theatre arts department that has been in existence for fifty years now. At the Master of Arts level, the system makes provision for only one course titled *Theatre Design and Planning*. This writer, within the departmental curricula system is addressing the need for a complementary advance studies in Theatre Technology.

In 1997, we experienced a substantial singular movement of capital in the department. Teju Kareem (a university of Ibadan trained theatre technologist) and his Zmirage incorporation facilitated this movement. In a reversal of DeLong's policy of the third world's rich moving money to bank accounts in Europe due to instability, Zmirage moved capitals to Nigeria to start the biggest theatre technology enterprise in West Africa. This entry opened up the horizon of theatre design and technology practice in Nigeria, marking the beginning of organisation and full time professional practice of theatre design and technology as business in Nigeria; the difference being that most of those that preceded Zmirage were university academics with strong professional links that led them to periodic works outside the university system as against full time professionals (Orisaremi 2012). Similar to Duro Oni's major treatise on lighting, there is no record of any full time professional stage and lighting company that is fully in practice employing other professionals on full time basis in Nigeria till the advent of Zmirage Multimedia incorporated.



Marketing of this profession depends heavily on professional skills over and above marketing skills. Thus because of the cumbersome and practical nature of theatre design and technology, elements in other areas of the theatre such as directing and acting seldom develop any form of interest in this area. The attendant challenge in this is that theatre management experts in Nigeria often shy away from marketing theatre design and technology. Technology in the theatre offers services to sporting and other para-theatre events that are not in the curricula of theatre arts in Nigerian Universities. The transferred technology and designs of the theatre to such events is easily adapted to by theatre designers and technologist but not easily understood by theatre client services and marketers. This therefore has informed my incorporation of some sort of entrepreneurial topics into my course outlines as a university teacher of theatre design and technology.

Added to the above is also the employment market of professional manpower for entertainment technology companies in Nigeria. This manpower is in multiple folds. The stage and lighting designers/technologists are basically products of Nigerian Universities and on-the-job trained technicians. The Public Address System (PAS) and sound designer/technologists are also products of music departments in our higher institutions. However, the churches in Nigeria have also contributed in no small terms to the development of sound technology professionals. Somehow, these categories of sound technologists start by managing and modulating sound systems for their churches and eventually grow to secure jobs outside the church. Thus in a sharp reversal of the current Nigerian situation of labour seeking employment, these professionals generate productivity that fits into an emerging market.

The above market situation is also turning up its attendant problems. The most fundamental among these problems is the seeming non-coordination of the profession into interest serving groups (maybe a union) that will carter for the interests of practitioners.

In portraying the effects of DeLong's second point, it is worthy of note that arts and entertainment thrive in peaceful environments and not under certain levels of terror attacks and instability being experienced in the north eastern part of Nigeria presently. We have witnessed a reversal of a booming period. During this period (the Harmattan period), we do experience increase in huge outdoor concerts and religious crusades. These events usually occasion scarcity of theatre technology equipment due to demands. Its attendant effect is the fact that almost all professionals become engaged. This thriving situation was completely reverted in 2011 due to insecurity in the land. Huge concerts and Christian religious shows such as Star Megajam<sup>3</sup> and Total Experience<sup>4</sup> were either cancelled or moved indoors. These movements created serious underemployment for entertainment technology professionals. This situation was occasioned by a guerrilla type arm struggle in Northern Nigeria that as at now has totally paralysed economic activities in the region with threats to expand to the economically vibrant Southern Nigeria at the peak of their activities in 2011. Although the violence did not extend to the South, but the attendant economic violence of deprivation on entertainment technology affected professionals because we experienced multiple concert and event cancellations based on the precarious security situations. Part of DeLong's third point is clearly manifest in this prototypal instability he portrayed in developing countries. Audiences can only enjoy performances in peaceful atmosphere.

Theatre design and technology professionals have organised themselves in a way that they do have huge exhibitions/trade shows all over the world where they meet to chart the future of practices. On the other hand, theatre design and technology academics have organised themselves into units that meet at conferences and working groups to discuss and theorise on developments. This also breeds vibrant economic activities. According to Roche, exhibition,

it brings people to the said city or country spinning money in hotels, tourism and other sector of tourism related goods.

As above, it exposes both the seller and potential buyer or a simple member of the public to what can be done today and how it is done (Roche 2012).

Sequel to the above is the fact that the production and supply chain of entertainment technology tools to Nigeria is a one-way Euro-Dollar traffic movement from the West and China to Nigeria as a consumer nation. It is incontrovertible from all points of discourse that Nigeria as an economy is basically a consumer nation. Within this context, the totalities of the tools for entertainment technology are all imported from America, Europe and recently China. The initial takeoff equipment of Zmirage multimedia incorporated in Nigeria was imported from Denmark and the United Kingdom. Similarly, the moving lights with which Gold Myne<sup>5</sup> Incorporated, Nigeria started its trade in Nigeria were imported from the United States. Unlike twenty years ago, the choice of equipment available today for entertainment technology is simply huge and varied. It is impossible to begin to name them in this work as new ones will soon be out in the market place.

Beginning from the year 2005, the Nigerian entertainment technology horizon gradually opened up to the Chinese lighting, sound, stage and trusses manufacturing factories. Nigeria professionals and theatre businessmen were able to procure equipment at reasonably affordable rates that witnessed rapid movement of goods from China to Nigeria for practitioners. The influx became rapid from 2007 to date when all major entertainment technology companies in Nigeria possess some major work tools such as stage/roof system, public address systems and lighting that are made in China. From field experience of equipping theatre technology laboratory with stage and lightings, I realized that the Chinese equipment is about half the cost of purchasing the same equipment in Europe and America. Thus ten metres by six metres square trusses that cost about fifteen thousand GBP in Europe costs an average of seven thousand GBP in China.

Field experience has also proved that these trusses are as good as the trusses imported from Europe probably because of the large deposit of iron ore in China. The stage and roof systems from China are standard in most of the cases. However, same cannot be said of lighting. It seems the Chinese technology is still yet to advance greatly in the art and science of making entertainment lighting equipment as at today. This is manifest in all the Chinese made automated and light emitting diodes (LED) lighting systems in Nigeria. Thus apart from not being designed for touring, most of the moving head are permanently cased in breakable plastic in comparison to all the European made systems that are in rubber made encasements. While plastics are breakables, rubbers are elastic insulators and in this case the elastic insulator is more functional. These are, however, minor minuses that is being improved upon by the Chinese manufacturers as recent indicators portrayed. For instance, in 2008, Theatre Projects Limited<sup>6</sup> (a Nigerian company in which this writer has considerable interests and shares) purchased thirty six units of stage decks and accompanying trestles. As at 2010 when the company requested for similar stage and trestles, the manufacturers informed the company of the phasing out of the manufacturing templates for upgraded ones. The stage decks and trestles finally settled for appeared stronger and firmer than the previous ones we purchased. The consequence of this diversion to China for equipment is a direct change in settings for rallies and campaigns in Nigeria and the creation of jobs for professionals who were constantly on the move setting up roofed stage and public address systems for political rallies.

Closely linked to the above, is the creation of wealth among professional outfits in Nigeria. I shall begin with a Nigerian incorporated firm named Group Africa<sup>7</sup>. Group Africa is a well-structured multi-million Pounds entertainment technology company that has engaged in numerous huge concerts packaging in Nigeria. They have well-structured state of the arts entertainment technology equipment in their warehouse in Lagos-Nigeria. As at today, they are the only company that possessed the arch dome shaped roof system in

Nigeria. They work with other consultants and professional companies towards achieving their aim of service delivery. Group Africa with its roots in South Africa also engages in training and retraining of its staff as a matter of policy in Nigeria. Trevor Henning (Group Africa's Technical Director in Nigeria) did confirm their recent return from the United Kingdom and South Africa (in September 2012) where their technical staff went to train on theatre design and control desk programming and manipulation. Aside the above company, Theatre Projects limited is another Nigerian company that expends acquired production capital in human development capital in Nigeria. The company operates like a theatre technology laboratory that makes wide varieties of state of the arts stage/roof systems and digital/computerised lighting systems available for students to train with. Thus, having direct access to the equipment and being aware that all over the world the industries are ahead of the universities, they ensure periodic workshops and exhibitions of specialised students to these tools of production. Ultimately Theatre Projects has grown to become a clearing house for the graduates of the University of Ibadan who specialised in theatre design and technology. This is due to the fact that being an incorporated company, theatre projects also does entertainment technology enterprises in Nigeria. As the young graduates leave school, some join theatre projects working while awaiting vacancies in the fast growing entertainment technology industry in Nigeria. Today high profile international game shows such as the Nigeria's "Who Wants to be a Millionaire"<sup>8</sup> have our graduates as lighting designers, riggers and console operators. Of course this also elicited consultancy and equipment rental fees. This enables us as an enterprise to keep maintaining and updating our equipment for the dual purpose of training and professional practice in Nigeria. It is also aiding the project's consultant as a university teacher to contribute to knowledge through the supply of human capital to the entertainment technology industry in Nigeria. In it, we are able to see the underpinning economy of entertainment technology in glamorising products launching, experiential marketing and advertising that uses theatre and entertainment as means of reaching out to their mass

consumers apart from the creation of synergy between the academia and the industry.

The causal connections of all of the above should automatically lead to a fusion of cultural and physical capital in conceptualising relevant cultural policies framework. Nigeria cultural capital shall lead to further development of its cultural sector. The influx of professional tourists into an entertainment technology exhibition in Nigeria will create the multipliers situation Roche stated above while talking on the benefits of exhibitions in Europe and America. Thus aided by theatre design and technology tools as incorporated capital in the culture and tourism sector, further employment will be generated in the real culture sector to our teaming graduates and graduating students.

### **Conclusion**

According to Roche, the Nigerian entertainment technology scenario is grossly under equipped. He says that South Africa, with a population of 47 million has over 500 professional companies while Nigeria with over 140 million has only 20 companies most of which are grossly underequipped.

However, South Africa with its over 500 companies, has favourable environmental factors working for them. As at today, South African entertainment technology sales and rental outlets have secured multiple distributorship and marketing rights from stage, lighting and sound manufacturers in Europe and America. Apart from this, they also have fully organized entertainment technology companies that have training and retraining as their prioritised agenda. Gear House South Africa<sup>9</sup> (an entertainment technology company) not only trained its staff but also train professionals from other parts of Africa. Companies such as Southern Lighting<sup>10</sup> with a head office in Johannesburg and a branch office in Lagos do direct businesses in Nigeria.

Although the theatre technology world is developing at a slow pace compared to other arts of the theatre in Nigeria, we are quietly making progress in the development of the human and material capital in this field in spite of strenuous processes of purchase from the west and China by professionals as already described above. What needs to be done after providing conducive environment (which is nonexistent right now) is to observe, copy, and adapt the end products of theatre/entertainment technology to our socio-cultural conditions and circumstances. Encouraging data provision is practically non-existence. In the course of writing this essay, I did make a request to the Central bank of Nigeria to provide data on annual cost expended on purchase of theatre equipment but got no response till date. This lack of synergy between the academics and other career professionals is plaguing most research institutions in Nigeria.

According to UNESCO,

Multinational corporations are becoming increasingly aware of the benefits of diversifying and customizing their products in order to penetrate new markets and meet the expectations of local consumers. Efforts to check these commercial inroads by marketing rival brands under different names with local associations only serve to promote the ‘universalization’ of the generic flavour. Some multinational enterprises base their image on a synthesis of the local and the universal. In practice, a product has to take account of local conditions and preferences” (UNESCO 2009).

It is these practices that are partly creating the market for the growth in theatre design and technology in Nigeria. To catch up with the growth we need, a conscious attempt must be made towards the production of more professionals in all aspects including the university systems.

## **NOTES**

1. Zmirage is an entertainment technology company with its headquarter in Lagos – Nigeria.
2. DAAR Communication is a television and radio conglomerate with its headquarter in Abuja–Nigeria. This writer is a lighting consultant to this company. This informs my access to its data on lighting purchase.
3. Star Megajam is a fully sponsored outdoor concert. It's been consistently staged annually for the past ten years except for 2011.
4. Total Experience is a Christian religious performance that features international Artists like Ron Kenoly. It is usually staged every December.
5. Goldmyne is an entertainment technology company with its headquarter in Lagos – Nigeria.
6. Theatre Projects Limited (TPL) is an entertainment technology company with its headquarter in Ibadan – Nigeria.
7. Group Africa is a Nigerian based an entertainment technology company with its roots in South Africa.
8. “Who Wants to be a Millionaire” is an international game show owned and licensed to Ultima Studios in Nigeria by Sony Pictures Television in the United Kingdom.
9. Gear House is an entertainment technology company with its headquarter in Johannesburg, South Africa.
10. Southern Lighting is a South African company that established an office through partnership in Lagos-Nigeria.



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