

Theatrical Musicality in Olu Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*

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Abstract

This article examines theatrical musicality employed in Olu Obafemi's play, *Scapegoats and Sacred cows*. In doing this, effort is made to analyse the songs in respect to the scenes or the dramatic actions in the play. The role of music in play production is succinctly considered. Also, the songs in the play are subjected to structural analysis, which focuses on the rhythmic structure in terms of beats and instrumentation, harmonic pattern/structure, melodic scales, musical forms of the selected songs, which include call and response antiphonal and repetition and variation. At the end, it was observed that although *Scapegoats and Sacred cows* is neither a melodrama nor an operatic theatre, the playwright consciously employs the concept of 'total theatre' by including music and dance, prominent features of African theatre in the play.

Keywords: Theatrical, Music, Drama, Performance, Structural analysis.

Introduction

Since the inception of theatre, music has played an integral role in theatrical production. The Classical Greek theatre was well known for its utility of music. In fact, the latter predates the origin of drama. In the 5th century BC, choric odes were composed to be chanted and these chants were accompanied with dances as the tragic pieces of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides came to be on stage. In fact, most of the lines rendered by tragic heroes and heroic figures such as Oedipus, Orestes, Ajax, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and the Greek Chorus were lines laced in the singsong model. Music is a language

and an art. This implies that music has symbols, vocabularies, connotations and so on. It augments or complicates the counter-language of theatre, and, because the two languages are expressed at the same time and in the same space, the combined effect is magnified, especially emotionally. The two arts have complemented one another for centuries even before the advent of the opera. For instance, virtually all of Shakespeare's plays contained musical scenes. The lines of his plays were sometimes rhythmical. Songs have always been written or adapted for the purpose of dramatic performances. Many of these are examined in this study. In the same vein, African theatre has long embraced the concept of 'total theatre' where all theatrical elements are imperative in any performance. In the words of Adeoye (2010, p.85):

The traditional African theatre is a festival theatre. It housed the total theatre performance aesthetics which is a theatre of collective rhythm. In all its ramifications, the total theatre idiom is the essence of the African theatre. African theatre is also technophobic and even within its monologic theatricals; the total theatre idiom welds many performance kernels into one unique, communicative, entertaining and educative performance...African theatre relies heavily on the total theatre aesthetics of dance, music and song, puppetry, poetry, acrobatic display, incantation and invocation, evocation and chanting, mime and pantomimic dramatisation and so on.

Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of the Nigerian theatre and father of Nigerian modern theatre was noted for his use of all the theatrical elements of songs, elaborate costumes, dances, drumming and scenery in his performances. He wrote more than 50 plays, most of which incorporate dramatic actions, dance and music with narratives that reflect the political and social realities of the period. He founded a traveling theatre troupe, *The African Music and Research Party* and he was able to tour round various Nigerian cities and across the country's border. Some of his notable plays include *The Garden of Eden and The Throne of God, The Tiger's Empire, Strike and Hunger and Bread and Bullet, Yoruba Ronu*, and his first celluloid film, *Aiye* among many others. All these plays incorporate all the theatrical elements. Also, Olu Obafemi being a versatile playwright who has been prolific in the art of playwriting is aware of the importance of incorporating numerous elements, especially music in his plays. Against this backdrop, this study examines theatrical

musicality employed in Olu Obafemi's play, *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*.

Scapegoats and Sacred Cows

This play is principally dedicated to all avowed opponents of all dictatorship, who suffered mortally and brutally for their conviction...most of all; the martyr of the Nigerian democratic struggle was killed for daring to win the 1993 presidential elections 'Moshood Abiola'. I write this as a testimony in that aspiration that there shall be no more sacred cows in the Nigeria of our dream. (Obafemi, 1999, p. IV)

The play is an expository narration of what is obtainable in the Nigerian socio-political setting. The playwright presents two variables: the Scapegoats and the Sacred Cows. Both variables represent two sets of people in Nigeria, which could be interpreted in different ways like; 'the Poor and the Rich, the less privileged and the Privileged, the Masses and the few people in power, the Citizens and the Government, the Oppressed and the Oppressors' and so on. Based on the content of the play, Obafemi's *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* is able to portray the few amidst the masses that challenged the government for their wrong doings as the 'Scapegoats', and the few privileged ones in power as the 'Sacred cows' because, they are powerful and enjoy all sorts of immunity that makes them untouchable or unchallengeable.

The 'Sacred Cows' are portrayed in the play as people of nonchalant attitude or insensitive leaders to the plights of their subjects in as much it does not affect them directly.

The play starts and ends in the prison with inmates and prison officers as characters. The Lead Character of the play is an inmate, a social crusader called 222 (inmate number on his uniform) or G the T (Gafa the Tortoise) or Gafa. This character reflects the image of a renowned legal luminary Gani Fawehinmi. The play is a reflection of dictatorship, a notable component of what held sway in the military era. The primary locale, which is 'the prison', is highly philosophical as it relates to the state of the masses in Nigeria. In the words of the play, the author echoes the location: "we are all in a huge prison of want and poverty in a land over-flowing with abundant human and nature's endowment" (Obafemi, 1999, p.46). It also captures how deteriorated Nigerian's prison is with the

experience of some notable government opponents across different fields of life especially, the ordeal of Gani Fawehinmi as a result of his human right activism. Gafa: ...I find myself in a moment in history; I obey the dictates of my heart. They clothe our earth like an embroidered garment. All I do simply is to call for justice. I asked those who sew garments of thorns for the rest of us to show us how to wear them. They accuse me of all sorts of crime (Obafemi, 1999, p.10).

Scapegoats and Sacred Cows is a play that anticipates a sane Nigeria where the rule of law will be absolute, where there will be no scapegoat or sacred cow, where Nigerians will dislodge all sacred cows who feed fat from the wealth produced by others, where meritocracy will be celebrated in place of mediocrity and where Nigerians will leave as one without any discrepancy.

Theatrical Musicality in *Scapegoat and SacredCows*

The role of music in the African theatre cannot be over emphasized. There is virtually few or no performance where music is not evident. Goodwin (2017) notes that: music as an art of the theatre has its roots in primitive ritual and ceremony and its branches in every modern means of theatrical presentation. Its functions are as varied as the forms require and range from being the primary reason for performance, as in opera, to mere noise, filling a vacuum in imagination for some screen and stage presentations (<https://www.britannica.com/art/theatre-music>). With Goodwin's submission, one understands that one of the functions of music as an art form is that, it can function as a collaborative or supporting art with other art forms like drama and dance to produce, melodrama, ballet, dance drama to mention a few. In the case where music functions as a collaborative art, it is subjected to all forms of conventions and can be used as a tool to serve different purposes other than music for concert or the conventional opera where music is dominant and dictates the form in which the dramatic visual imagery is presented.

The music in the *Scapegoats and SacredCows* are songs composed primarily for the play which therefore connotes that, these sets of songs cannot dictate in totality the dramatic experience. Whereas, music as a collaborative art with dance, may dictate to a large extent the form of movements and other dramatic visual imagery presented

on stage “which is in line with African’s concept of music which incorporates movement, drama, dance, clapping, swaying and others” (Okpeki 2019, p.107). According to Nketia (1999, p.210), “it is generally the rhythmic structure (music) that influences the pattern of movements. The dancer(s) derives his motor feeling from the rhythmic structure, whose elements he articulates in his basic movements”. This position implies that, logically, every dance performance must be in consonance with the music played which is live or recorded. Although, there are few instances where a dance could be choreographed with none identified music (music not heard by spectators).

Music has long been used in drama to serve diverse purposes. As both arts has the capacity to not only integrated spectacular visuals and aural events in theatre, but they have a distinct capacity to support each other. According to Nketia, the conception of a musical piece and the details of its form and content are influenced not only by its linguistic framework of literary intention, but also by the activities with which it is associated. Music performed in the contexts that dramatize social relations, beliefs, crises, history, and communal events naturally develop a dramatic orientation and stress the use of those sound materials, texts, and elements of structure that stimulate or provide avenues for motor behavior (Nketia 1999:206). Songs may function dramatically in several ways. One of such is to define the character. The best type of character song fits the dramatic situation and cannot be fully appreciated if taken out of context. For instance, below is a character song in *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* specifically for the lead character (Gafa):

Song	Translation
221: E ma jeofesekanle (2)	Lift him aloft
Chorus: E egbee (repeat after each call)	Carry him high
221: Enimekununfeni	Darling of the wretched
Chorus: Aagbeoo	We will lift him high
221: Eniosisenfeni	Companion of the workers
Chorus: Atigbee	We have shouldered him
221: Enitarayenfeni	Friend of the world
Chorus: Aagbeoo	we'll lift him yet
221: Eniijoba e pa ni	The state hounds him
Chorus: Aagbeoo	We shall mount him
221: Eni 'Yalojanpeni	Wanted at the market place
Chorus: Angbeoo	We will lift him aloft
221: Enitomo we nwani	Patron of students

Chorus: A roo ye o	Salutations
221: Enitalakankini	Saluted by the needy
Chorus: A waloni o	He is ours
221: Enitielewonngbeni	Inmates lift him high
Chorus: Aagbe o, aagbe o, aagbe o	We will lift him high

(Obafemi, 1999, p.9).

The above song explains in detail, the personality of the lead character (Gafa) as the song is principally composed for the character and therefore cannot be used for any other character in the play. In highlighting some other functions of music in theatrical performances, Brown (2007:92) is of the opinion that “the addition of music to a standard play heightens emotion, reinforces dramatic action, evokes atmosphere and mood in ways that words alone cannot”. This captures the fact that music can function as an interlude or link in-between scenes. It can also be used to kill the dead silence in a play, and make a theatrical performance livelier. Music can as well be used to create significant effect(s) in a play.

Structural Analysis of the Songs in Obafemi’s *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*

Within the ambit of structuralism, this section examines select songs in the play. This is in relation to the prevalent stylistic forms, melodic scale, instrumentation, rhythmic pattern and harmonic structure of the songs in *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*. Form in the context of this study refers to the germane or fundamental characteristics of the songs used in the play. Omosilade (2012, p.93) defines form as “the overall appearance of a musical piece”. That is, form is the arrangement of musical piece from the beginning to the end of a play. Vidal (2012:96) identifies four different vocal forms of Yoruba songs which are “call and response antiphonal, the through-composed, the strophic and strophic responsorial”. However, there are other forms that are not identified by Vidal (2012) that are present in the songs used in the play. Some of these include the repetition and variation form identified by the ethnomusicologist, Sam Akpabot. Forms that are judiciously used in the play are: the call and response antiphonal and repetition and variation. Example of a call and response antiphonal song in the play is:

Gafa: Kurubetekurubetekuru	All: Ayaya
Gafa: Esorolilukan	All: Ayaya
Gafa: Ohiobajeunemesu	All: Ayaya

Gafa: Mo suuleP'olughanlibe	All: Ayaya
Gafa: Bi ma ku o me momo	All: Ayaya
(Obafemi, 1999, p.43)	

The cantor is the lead character (Gafa) which can also be likened to the band leader. He makes the calls while other inmates chorus 'Ayaya' in response to the call from the cantor. Akpabot (1999:32) observes that "call and response is a common pattern in African music form where a cantor leads the singing and other members of an ensemble answer". The response of the chorus could be "an extract repetition of the cantor's melody, a melody that borrows a motif or phrase from the cantor's call, an entirely different melody. Of all the three ways chorus respond to the call from the cantor as identified by Samuel Akpabot. It is the last one (an entirely different melody from the call) that is employed as the response to all the calls. There abounds the repetition and variation which occur when a line, section, statement, phrase or sentence of a song or composition is repeated within the body of a composition. This often indicates emphasis and amounts to aesthetics in musical piece. The repetition sometimes is not whole as it sometimes slightly varies from the initial one. Agu (1999:48) submits that, "repetition is one of the basic structural features of African songs. It has already been noted that all songs are characterized by short melodic motifs which conform to the short phrases of the texts". Therefore, the performance technique makes extension of these songs possible and easy through repetition. Example of repetition used as form in a song is shown below:

MulalaMulala
 Sojabanzakopuruwofi (2ce)
 A berimutanecommonbanza
 A berimutane, commonwofi
 Mulalamulala
 Sojabanzakopuruwofi (2ce)...
 (Excerpt from *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*, 1999, p. 27)

Akpabot (1999, p.27) states that African melodies are either ritual or non-ritual in conception and are produced by singers or instrumentalists. He goes further to identify six different African music scales which are: ditonic, tritonic, tetratonic, pentatonic, hexatonic, heptatonic. Melodic scale is inherent in the songs in the

play. The melodies of the songs in *Scapegoats and SacredCows* are largely built on a pentatonic scale with the exemption of very few songs on other scales. The pentatonic scale used is anhemitonic scale without any semitone notes that is the fourth and the seventh note. Example is provided below.

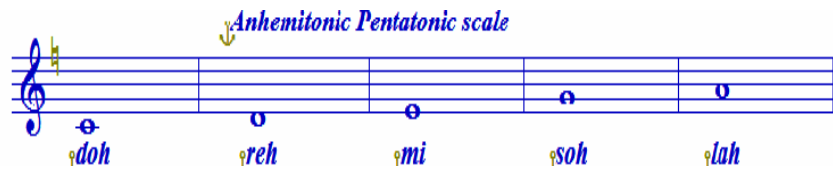
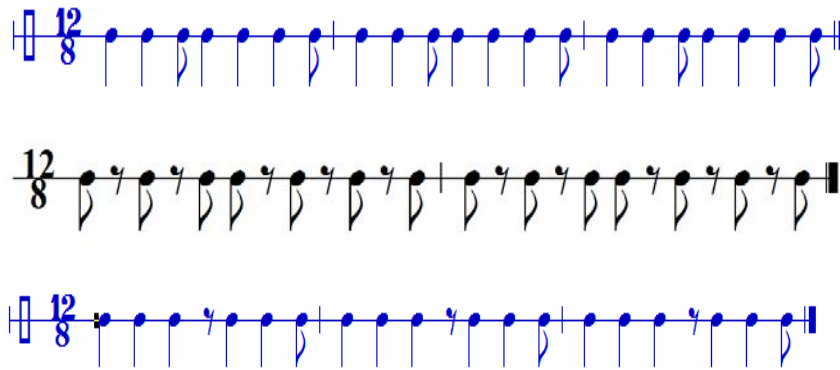


Fig. 5.5 staff notation showing an anhemitonic pentatonic scale

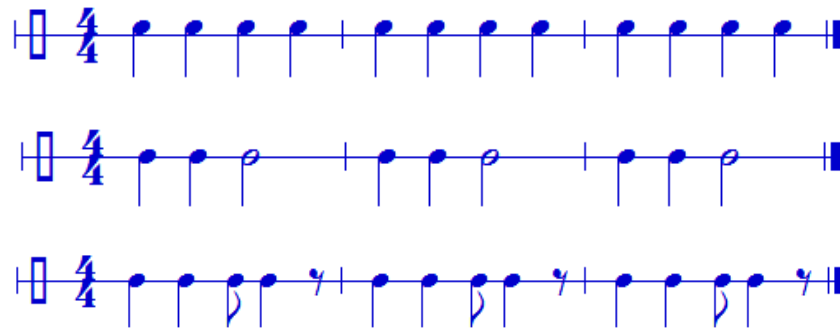
The instrumental resources used by the inmates for the performances are subjected to available materials in the prison like: the inmates' voices, prison gate or door, stone, sticks, palms (clapping), stamping of feet on the floor and so on. These are what that can be easily improvised to create rhythms that accompany the songs. Nketia (1988, p.124) states that, "the instrumental resources at the disposal of performers naturally tend to be limited to those in which their respective communities specialize." Based on the available resources at the disposal of the inmates to be improvised on, all the above listed materials but the inmates' voice can be used to generate percussive rhythm to all the songs. This is in consonance with Nketia's (1988, p.125) assertion that "since African music is predisposed towards percussion and percussive textures, there is an understandable emphasis on rhythm, for rhythmic interest often compensates for the absence of melody or lack of melody sophistication". Rhythmic structure or organization describes how rhythms are harmoniously and conjointly arranged to form a whole music. Akpabot (1999, p.49) submits that:

Trying to define rhythm is an almost hopeless task because of its complexity. Broadly speaking, rhythm can be defined as the organization of music in respect of time. This can be expanded by adding that it is the regular or irregular recurrence of groups and motions in relation to each other; these relations being in respect of pulse, meter, stress, duration, accent, pitch, contour and design; functioning within the architectural structure of the artistic whole. Rhythm can be free, flexible, measured or metrical.

The instrumental rhythms for all the songs in *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* are organised in both linear and multi-linear forms to reflect the complexity of African rhythm. All the songs are composed to compound quadruple $^{12}_8$ or simple quadruple 6_8 and common time beat⁴.



Staff notations showing varieties of bell's rhythms on $^{12}_8$



Staff notation showing samples of bell rhythms on 4_4 beat

The percussive rhythm that is commonly used in Africa is the bell rhythm known as 'agogo' in the Western region of Nigeria. As a matter of fact, the lead singer can rely solely on this rhythm and performs excellently because it forms the basic rhythm that other percussive instruments build on. However, in the case of performing

all the songs in *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows*, 'agogo', which is one of the basic rhythmic instruments that all other instruments build on is absent but, it is represented with either clapping or striking of sticks on the prison gate or door while other available improvised instruments build on the created rhythm.

In his analysis of African harmonic structure, Agu (1999, p.44) states that "most African songs are performed in at least, two parts. The basic two parts are the primary and secondary (harmonizing) melodies. In some cases, the secondary melody is sung on an octave lower or at an interval of minor third, perfect fourth or perfect fifth. The songs in the play are predominantly on unison harmony with occasional heterophony from some of the inmates or the orchestra in form of response to the call by the cantor. However, this is done with discretions not formally arranged in the play.

Conclusion

The interest of this study was essentially built on the musicality features in the play not undermining its dramatic plot. Also, attempt was made to look closely into the structural design of some selected songs in the play which encapsulates the musical forms, melodic scale, instrumentation, rhythmic pattern and harmonic structure. Conclusively, although *Scapegoats and Sacred Cows* is neither a melodrama nor an operatic theatre, the playwright consciously employs the concept of 'total theatre' by including music and dance, prominent features of African theatre in the play. Also, the songs in the play serve various functions.

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