

INSECURITY ADVOCACY IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: THE VISUAL ART PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The built environment is a man-made habitat designed and built for the comfort and safety of lives and properties of people living there. However, such comfort and safety are usually threatened by insecurity. Efforts in the form of public enlightenment and oral advocacy in the media have been carried out to abate the situation, yet insecurity is still prevalent in the built environment. This paper takes a look at this social menace from the perspective of visual art with a view of abating the situation. It sets out to examine issues of insecurity and its implication on the built environment; underscore the effectiveness of visual art in social advocacy; and emphasize the need for incorporating visual art as a means of abating insecurity in the built environment. The paper relied on library sources, internet, interview and review of related works of art. It concludes that much as information from artistic representation is more didactic, accessible and memorable than that of verbal language, the employment of massive insecurity advocacy in the form of visual art can abate insecurity in the built environment. It recommends the inclusion of visual art in the master plans of built environments, not mainly to serve aesthetic purpose but also utilitarian purpose of communicating crucial social messages to the public.

Keywords: Insecurity, Built environment, Visual Art, Advocacy

Introduction

Going by the World Employment Conference of 1976, traditionally the three immediate basic needs of man are food, clothing and shelter, (Santos, Kassamitaki and Chiesa, 2020). However, many authorities have now differed in their positions as regards the basic needs of man. Abraham Maslow, for instance, published a list of human needs called Hierarchy of Human Needs. Maslow's list includes many requirements that are not actually ingredients toward happiness, instead the needs are description of how people are when they are in a long term state of contentedness, for example, self esteem, sense of security, sense of belongings and self actualization, (Gravagna, 2018). Although Maslow never considered these as being needs in their own right but

as side effects of contentedness, the sense of security appears inevitable in life because its absence translates to insecurity. Suffice to say that it is only when a person is secured that he or she could ever think of other needs.

Insecurity has always plagued mankind from history. It is noticed everywhere in the world, even in the developed countries. As the world advances in technology, it creates more avenues for insecurity to thrive. There is no built environment that is void of insecurity. In Nigeria, for instance, insecurity is a recurring decimal in the built environments. Insecurity arises from religious conflicts, boundary dispute, political violence, corruption, inequalities, injustice, illiteracy, poor government, lack of basic amenities, unemployment and the like. The lack of security constitutes a threat to lives and properties of people in the built environment. In Nigeria presently, the wave of insecurity has assumed a greater dimension which has even become a threat to her corporate existence as a nation, (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014). There is, therefore, need for advocacy on insecurity to enlighten the public on how to stay safe and also discourage acts that lead to insecurity.

In an effort to abate the situation, there have been series of enlightenment on the part of government, corporate bodies, individuals who have made use of seminars, workshop, symposia, print media, radio, television and social media for the purpose of creating awareness on security issues in the built environment. However, it appears not to yield the expected result as insecurity is still prevalent in the built environment. One may, therefore, wonder if such enlightenment has not been given wide enough coverage. It appears that it does, given the advancement of Information Communication Technology in the 21st Century, at least, within the built environment. Going by this, the issue of ineffectiveness of awareness created lies on the medium(s) employed in disseminating the information. This paper, therefore, takes a look at the same task but from the perspective of visual art. It examines the issues of insecurity and its implication on the built environment, emphasizes the effectiveness of visual art in social advocacy and underscores the need for incorporating visual art in the design of the built environment, not just for aesthetic purpose but mainly for utilitarian purpose of communication. The paper relies on library source, internet and related works of art. It is modelled after Leo Tolstoy's art theory of communication as propounded by Jahn (2000) which posits that the definition of art, which is a means of communication, lies in its function rather than in the concept of beauty.

Insecurity in the Built Environment

The built environment, from the stand point of Hancock (2019), is now the most significant environment for humans. It covers the residential buildings, schools, workplace, recreational facilities and the like. It is not only a physical environment, it is also a social environment where people gather and relate with one another. This sums up to the fact that it is man-made and also a social and residential area, in line with Roof and Oleru (2008)'s submission cited in Sampson (2016:178) that built environment is "the humanitarian-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis". It is an environment that accommodates the setting for various human activities. By implication, it is a normal human habitat built by man as different from the natural habitat.

It is designed for the comfort of people living in it. That the built environment is not only a physical environment but also a social environment, (Hancock, 2019) suggests that it goes beyond just an environment that provide physical shelter alone. It accommodates structures where social services can be benefitted from. These include schools, place of worship, parks, airport, restaurant, hospital, recreation centre and other settings that gear towards satisfying human needs and providing them with comfort and safety for a better living. However, the comfort and safety are usually threatened by insecurity which according to Umana (2019), is "a breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethnic, regional, civil, social, economic and political that contribute to recurring conflicts, and lead to wanton destruction of lives and properties.

It is imperative to stress here that insecurity does not only amount to breach of peace as it can also involve situations other than physical safety. There are other situations that can make a person feel insecure which can generate either a long term or short term feeling of insecurity. Some people feel insecure sometimes while some feel it most of the time; it depends on the weight of the situation they are facing. The kind of childhood one had, past traumas, recent experiences of failure or rejection, loneliness, social anxiety, negative beliefs about oneself, perfectionism, or having a critical parent or partner can contribute to insecurity, (Greenberg, 2015). No matter what situation is involved, once there is a feeling of fear, uncertainty and/or lack of protection in whatsoever situation, that is insecurity like the emergence of Covid-19 which threw the whole world into health insecurity when it generated serious fear and anxiety as people were dying owing to lack of protection and cure for the sickness. This is at par with Ewetan and Urhie (2014)'s opinion that the

concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty and lack of protection. Beland (2005) cited in Ewetan and Urhie (2014) affirms that insecurity is "the state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. This paper, therefore, submits that insecurity is the state of fear and uncertainty due to absence, inadequate or lack of protection.

The need for security is very paramount that countries of the world enshrine it in their constitutions like in the case of Nigeria that her 1999 constitution specifically states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government", (Ewetan and Urhie, 2010). This, however, does not guarantee the fact that there are no security problems all over the world. The built environments have experienced insecurity as a result of the numerous crimes arising from failure of government, failures and deliberate actions of individuals and natural occurrences. These can be categorized under three subheads: government factor, individual factor and natural factor.

Government factor: This covers insecurity which stems from failure on the part of government to protect its citizens. Security is the prime responsibility of government. The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria specifically states that "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". Unfortunately, government on this constitutional responsibility has failed to provide a secured and safe environment for lives, properties and conduct of business (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014). Failure of government in this direction creates room for insecurity to occur, for instance, armed robbery, a social menace that persistently continues to retard the development of the Nigerian society which involves stealing, during which force and violence or threat of violence are employed, (Abanyam, Luman, David and Orugu, 2013), generates fear as anyone can possibly be a victim at anytime. This social menace that constantly retards development in the built environment, is not only a threat to lives and properties of people in the built environment but also a threat to the social life of the built environment because whenever it occurs, it injures the minds of the people collectively. There are also cases of kidnapping, rape, assassination, thuggery, theft, religious violence, violent protest against government and terrorism. All these account for insecurity arising from failure of government.

Human Factor: These are cases of insecurity arising from failures, mistakes, inability and even deliberate efforts by humans which sum up to insecurity in the built environment like illiteracy, carelessness, avoidable accidents like fire outbreaks which occur in the built environment as a result of reckless driving, gas leakage, use of mobile phones at highly inflammable places like filling

stations and gas stations. The outcome of these generates fear, like the incident of gas explosion which occurred at Abule Ado Built Environment in Lagos as a result of reckless driving of a truck which plunged into a gas processing plant and hit some gas cylinders. It resulted in an inferno that later spread to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) oil pipeline passing through the area. It killed not fewer than fifteen people and destroyed more than fifty buildings, (Rosane, 2020). This threw the residents into a state of fear and uncertainty.

The issue of building collapse is avoidable accident yet it is allowed to happen courtesy of poor construction usually undertaken by unqualified workers and/or the use of poor quality materials as a result of corruption on the part of building contractors. Whatever being the case, residents of such built environments are usually encapsulated in fear and uncertainty whenever an accident like this happens.

Natural factor: Natural disasters also account for insecurity in the built environment. There are certain natural occurrences that jeopardize the peace and comfort of people in the built environment. Some are minor which can easily be combated like harmattan and heavy downpour, sometimes they become so serious to the extent of becoming damaging, for instance, a heavy downpour can lead to flood. Although flood is a common occurrence in Nigeria, in some extreme cases, it turns out to be very destructive. Floods do not only damage properties and endanger the lives of humans and animals but can as produce other secondary effects like outbreak of diseases such as cholera and malaria, (Okon, 2019). The source further cites the instance of year 2012 flood disaster in Nigeria which was unprecedented in the last forty years. Most parts of the central states of Nigeria and other adjoining states along the River Niger and River Benue were devastated by these floods, causing huge destruction to the rural and urban infrastructures (farmland/crops, roads, buildings, bridges, power lines, etc) and socioeconomic lives of the area.

Some natural occurrences are major like tsunami, hurricane and earthquake, although these are not common in Nigeria. There are some types that cut across the globe like the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic which caused panic and a feeling of health insecurity as it killed so many within a short period of its existence.

Visual Art as an Effective Means of Communication

A visual art work has three basic components; subject, form and content. The subject refers to a person, a tree, a thing, a house, that part of the work that the

viewer can easily recognize. The form is the unique way the artist employed the element, principles and media while content is the message that the artist is trying to communicate using the language of art, (Ocvirk *et al*, 2006:10-11). What we see in a work of art is referred to as form, while what we allude as the meaning of what we see, is the content. The total effect of the combined visual qualities within a work, that is, such components as materials, colour, shape, line and design is what is termed form. Whereas, content is the message or meaning of what the artist intends to communicate to the public, (Ochigbo, 2006:4). This means that the language of art is a visual means of communication, just as there are other means of communication like verbal communication. Ragans (1998:10) explains that a person can share his or her idea and feelings with another person using either spoken or written means to communicate. In the same vein, one can also communicate through the visual arts. The arts can offer a very special type of communication. They are languages for expressing ideas and feelings that everyday words may not be able to explain. It goes beyond simply describing something or telling a story. Art does not merely exist for aesthetic purpose; it equally must serve utilitarian purpose of communication. It must be didactic; edifying the public by its content. It must play a crucial role of improving the collective existence of the public.

It is often used to convey information in both literate and non-literate societies all over the world. In the Middle Ages in Europe, visual art was used to teach Bible stories to an illiterate population, (Prebble, 1994:2). Ragans (1998:10), while submitting that visual art is a language that can help humans communicate even with beings from other planets, cited the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) officials who attached a special plaque to Pioneer 10, the first rocket sent beyond our solar system in 1972. On the plaque were drawings of earthlings and a diagram of our solar system with the thinking that those objects of the visual art had the greatest possibility of successfully communicating with whatever beings the rocket might encounter.

It is a truism that the use of verbal language for information dissemination is characterized by difficulties owing to the inability of everyone to understand the numerous verbal languages in use. Udoh (2002:145) observes that bringing more languages to a system brings about more misunderstanding, citing the Biblical example of confusion arising from the introduction of languages to building the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-8). Also, the attempt by the organizers of Sidney 2000 Olympic Games to use many languages for the event proved abortive. It takes visual art to communicate effectively without any need for translation as art has the capacity of successfully conveying information to

people all over the world regardless of languages spoken. It is capable of expressing human ideas, feelings and thoughts which are read visually and understood globally, making art a universal language.

Visual Language for Insecurity Advocacy

Visual art has been described in this paper as a visual means of communication. The aim of art is not only to serve aesthetic purpose, it also serves functional purpose as it is a means of expression of any experience or any aspect of human condition, in line with Tolstoy's position that the definition of art lies in its function rather than in the concept of beauty. Art is a sort of language, a means of communication by which an individual communicates his or her thoughts to another visually. What is transferred is different, in that, it is not rational thought but feelings. 'Feelings' here refers to what is expressed by the artists and understood by the public in a work of art, (Jahn, 2000). The mind can easily be infected by feelings from another through the eyes, which Preble cited in Ochigbo (2006:2), sees as the direct avenue to the mind. He further expounds that the language that art uses to communicate forms the visual experience of the world that is so profoundly influential that it constitutes a non-verbal language all on its own. To explain this further, we can take a look at an instance of a visual language through which viewers are infected by the artist's feelings of how damaging cigarette smoking is.



Fig. 1: "Stop Smoking"
Medium: 3D Visual Art
Artist: Rosemary Okon
Year of Production: 2014
Source: Researcher



“Stop Smoking” (Figure 1), is a three dimensional art piece for antismoking advocacy. In conveying the message of the danger of smoking, it goes deeper to give a visual appearance of the heart damaged by smoking. The feelings of the artist, as expressed in the detailed visual explanation of what happens to the heart as an outcome of smoking, is transferred to the public who, upon understanding, are infected by the feelings of the artist. Sandy Dike (Personal Communication 2014) stressed how the work in question became very impactful on him, that even when it is written on packets of cigarette that smokers are liable to die young, he never felt that smoking was dangerous until he saw the piece of art. The feeling was so deep that he decided to quit smoking. This is how impactful a visual advocacy can be, as avouched by Ochigbo (2009:324) who averts that “through artistic representation, information becomes more didactic, accessible and memorable than it would through verbal language.”



Fig. 2: “Project 84”
Medium: Tape 3D Sculpture
Artist: Mark Jenkins and Sandra
Fernandez
Year of Production: 2018
Source: www.independent.co.uk

There is also an instance of visual advocacy against suicide that is equally impactful and didactic as the rate of suicide later in the affected built environments reduced drastically after the artist communicated his feeling via the language of art. As at 2018 in United Kingdom, suicide was the biggest killer of men under the age of 45. Every single week, about 84 men took their own lives. In view of this, ITV HQ promoted “Project 84” campaign launched

by charity CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably). The project was a visual advocacy which involved 84 statues produced by Mark Jenkins and his collaborator, Sandra Fernandez, and mounted on top of the ITV building in London Southbank (Figure 2). It was made to represent real men who took their own lives. The poignant visual campaign was to create awareness about suicide. It was the hope of the sponsors that it will stop people from taking their lives. For Sculptor Jenkins, he believed that the public sculptures had the power to make a change, (Barr, 2018). Their beliefs came true as the rate of suicide later dropped drastically.



Fig. 3: "We are all in a Gutter"
Medium: Tape 3D Sculpture
Artist: James Golding and Mike Snelle
Year of Production: 2018
Source: www.thedrum.com

Another visual advocacy was put up, still in line with addressing male suicide in the United Kingdom. It took the form of a painting for the Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM) produced by a British duo, the Connor Brothers (James Golding and Mike Snelle) entitled "We are all in a Gutter"

(Figure 3). The piece reflects the statistic that 84 male took their own lives weekly in the United Kingdom. It communicates an anti-suicide message meant to shine a light on male mental health - a means of preventing male suicide in UK, (Young, 2018). The work portrays that everyone is facing similar difficult and harsh situation but the difference is that some choose to look beyond the situation, looking at the stars which connotes hope of a better tomorrow. As such, it is needless thinking of suicide when there is hope.



Fig. 4: “Vaccines”
Medium: Cartoon
Artist: James Golding and Mike Snelle
Year of Production: 2018
Source: www.thedrum.com

Informed by the news of two Covid 19 vaccines being effective against corona virus, from two drug giants - Moderna and Pfizer, Daryl Cagle communicates the news which he termed great news in a visual language - cartoon. For him, finally the monster corona virus would soon be injected with a killer substance produced by the two drug giants. The work showcases the potency of the vaccines against Covid 19. Although the vaccines were not yet put to use as at the time Cagle created the cartoon, the mere fact that they were ascertained to be between 90 and 95 percent effective against Covid 19, he had to communicate the message of hope to humanity in a visual language, to put humanity’s fear of uncertainty, panic and feeling of health insecurity to rest. As the work is viewed by the public, the feeling of health insecurity gradually fades off as there is light seen at the end of the tunnel for humanity in the built

environment. Although this had already been communicated orally and in print, reechoing it using a visual language makes the information more memorable than others. Beyond that, it is intelligible to all regardless of languages spoken, there is no need for translation as it is spoken in a universal language - visual art.

It is possible to curb some insecurity issues while others could only be avoided or prevented. The bottom line is to make people not become victims of insecurity. Since insecurity bothers on inadequate or lack of protection, it therefore means that once there is protection, insecurity dissipates. Protection can be secured by avoiding the avoidable. Being aware of and making plans ahead of impending danger and acting on it is beneficial. Creating visual art to sensitize the public on what to do in a given situation of insecurity can abate such insecurity. One may wonder why people who are often sensitized concerning an impending danger still fall victims of such danger. It reveals the weakness of oral and written information as against visual information given that the latter is more didactic, accessible and memorable.

Conclusion

The built environment is designed for comfort as it accommodates structures which social services are derived from. Such comfort has always been threatened by insecurity. Efforts so far carried out, which are mostly verbal and written, have not been able to address the problem as insecurity is still prevalent in the built environment. The massive employment of visual art, which is a universal language that is more didactic, accessible and memorable than verbal language, to enlighten the public visually would blaze the trail.

Recommendation

The relevant authorities responsible for designing the built environment should accommodate public arts in their designs of the built environment, not only for aesthetic purpose but also for functional purpose of communication.

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