

# **POST-CULTURAL IDENTITY OR POST-IMPERIALISM: CULTURE AS HYBRIDISED PRESENT IN THEATRE FOR DEVELOPMENT**

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## **Abstract**

Culture and language have always been an area that has undergone several discourse processes and discussions with variety of perceptions bandied. All these are geared towards attempts to identify areas of convergence that will serve as possible arena for development. Incidentally, this area of discourse is fraught with issues related the concept itself. The contact variously, the continuum of society makes it problematic to contextualise and utilise for such end results. Several emergent structures, both in consonance with an existing hegemonic (depending on the situation of this hegemonic, Western or strictly domesticated (?)), or as a counter to the existing structural imperatives-cult groups, religious groups, tribal groups etc., impinges upon it gravely. At the end of the day, there is a hybridised contextualisation that is imminently new, a phenomenon that, when accepted, would actualise desired goals of development. Would we accept this 'new' phenomenon as a terrain that can engender development? Would the recipients of this new culturally hybridised space or the artists that produce these, understand the contraption that is evolved or would the hegemonic play out in the end? This area must be understood for it to serve as 'real cultural' and/or basis for a desired consciousness shift in Theatre for Development.

## **Introduction**

I only have one language, yet it is not mine. The contradiction resides not only in the statement, but in the universal reality of language. That we speak, that we may only speak one language, that one language seems like home to us does not mean that we have any possessive control over that language; it does not mean we own it. Something always remains outside our experience of using language. "Each time I open my mouth, each time I speak or write, I promise". The promise dwells in language as its call to a language, which it can never be, which we can never have, and the promise always threatens; it terrorises (Glover 67).

We are starting this critical engagement from this premise because of the fantasy of ownership and possession of communication medium in the area of creative engagements and communication. As a result of this, the assumed possessor imposes the language and culture that 'is originally colonial', and makes sense only when we begin to

learn it, gaining mastery over it, that we begin to claim legitimacy over the space. This is in spite of the clear impossibility of such possession. With the foregoing, it clearly authenticates the possibilities of the issue of language/culture and its utility within the premises of development in creative processes of theatre, being a bit more complex than we could ever imagine. The important issue is that there is a complexity that requires articulation first, and secondly, placed within the terrain of analysis and raking out its functionality, may not be in tandem with the consciousness and kind of effect desired by the concerned. All these issues are discussed within the structure set as alternative dramatic practice, which is termed, Theatre for Development (TfD), with its processes guaranteeing likely shift in consciousness in the interest of the communities engaged with. The question of this 'ownership' guaranteeing 'liberation', 'empathy', 'emancipation', 'giving power back to the people where power originally belongs', utilising the structure of this dramatic practice, is what this discourse intends to interrogate.

We would start this discussion by first stating one of the most frequently used clichés in the genre of TfD. It is always considered to be 'theatre for the people, by the people and with the people' because of its inherently democratic approach in the creative dialoguing process. At the end, after going through what constitutes the practices and analysing the basic characteristics that underpins this theatre, with the language/cultural concerns, we can then deduce if the used cliché is appropriate for the description of the genre. According to Augusto Boal, the proponent of this kind of theatre, it is a poetics of the oppressed, which essentially is "the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself (Boal 155).

Boal began his approach by bringing into the fore the limitations and dangers inherent in Aristotelian theatre as it is consumed by modern audiences. He therefore, does not accept Aristotle's thesis on empathy and emotion because he feels that "...empathy is the emotional relationship which is established between the character and spectator and which provokes, fundamentally, a delegation of power on the part of the spectator, who becomes an object in relation to the character" (Boal 102). Accordingly, empathy immobilises the actor and dulls his consciousness. The spectator, who, through the technique of suspense, is sold to an indiscernible outcome in the action of the phenomenal dramatic rendition to provide pity and fear, is severely attacked by Boal who says it is preferable for the spectator to turn from being 'passive' recipient of the dramatic feat into a 'subject' or an actor in the whole process of societal transformation, rather than mere 'spectator' who is fed variously with an illusory reality.

Theatre is seen as a language and the barrier that existed between content of the drama that is produced, with the people's history, and their linguistic medium of expression is conveniently broken. It serves as an avenue where collective deliberation; and re-evaluations of relationships become an open intellectual insight and consent reflecting a collective experience. Theatre of the oppressed, therefore, develops the capacity of everyone to utilise that language,

with the objective of trying to discover what oppressions we are suffering; second, to create a space in which to rehearse ways and means of fighting against those oppressions; third, to extrapolate that into real life, so that we can become free-which means we can become subject and not object of our relationships with others (47).

In this genre of theatre, it is the oppressed that is significant and not the theatre. Boal states thus:

The Theatre of the Oppressed is a system of exercises, games and techniques that help everyone, whether professionally involved with the theatre or not, to try to develop a language that he or she already possesses (Boal, "Politics, Education..." 47).

The theatre we are concerned with here is one that tries to develop the capacity of everyone to utilise that language, in attempting to discover the nature of the oppression we are in and to rehearse ways and means of fighting such oppressions, all in a bid to become subjects in our various relationships with others.

In the language of the "Theatre of the Oppressed", it is the oppressed not the theatre, which is important. The oppressed person himself or herself is the artist that creates images through which to rehearse ways of liberation. That's why we also go into the realm of education, because images convey ideas. Images are a language that the child can create. Sometimes they have not mastered their native tongue well enough to express themselves precisely. Using the images of theatre techniques can allow youngsters to speak more profoundly what they want to say. And that is precisely why the theatre of the oppressed is a language (O'Tool & Donelan 48).

The oppressed supposedly takes advantage of the paraphernalia that is their forms of engagements, the costumes for festivals and other sundry activities, their songs and dances, their instrumentations, and so on., create through rehearsals images that highlight his liberation. Due to the fact that images convey ideas, the actor or participant becomes the focus. Theatre constitutes a powerful tool for the creation of aesthetic space that gives room for a democratic exchange. In this democratic space, the participant has the free hand to change images created of him to suit his own newly articulated self.

In theatre, the fictive image of self is changed to the newly acquired self-image, a progression from the fictive to the real world of exchange. In the process of the rehearsals, the actor penetrates the theatrical mirror image that is fiction, into another more concrete articulated self. But if the image is wrongly presented, due to misarticulation or aural and (or) linguistic displacement, then the new image constitutes a lie. Theatre of the oppressed, therefore, searches for a correct way of communicating the correct meaning. Since theatre is language, it becomes a suitable tool for developing the self and by extension the community, and again, by extension the nation, and the world. In a performance situation, therefore, be it a scripted play with stereotypes as the character or not, the stereotypes would be used to better understand what is beneath the character. Boal argues that it does not really matter if the storyline is based on a scripted

play as long as the stereotypes are understood within the framework of the problem. Accordingly, therefore, in part two of the interview, he says that,

if we are not stereotyped ourselves as spectators, we are going to use those stereotypes to understand better what the stereotype hides in persons. Because the stereotype is to repeat the same thing and not creatively. And the idea of Forum is to break, to destroy stereotypes by discovering what's behind the stereotype. Because sometimes the stereotype also gives comfort to people (4).

Sometimes, these plays are based on some predictable moral positions. But Boal says that it is not a problem either. Utilising the Forum Theatre approach, through questions and critical discussions, the situation is taken care of, because it is not the end that is important but the process. Says Boal in part one of the interview:

What I believe is the most important effect of Forum Theatre is not the solution that we can find at the end, but the process of thinking. Because what I believe is that in normal theatre, there is a paralysis, the spectator paralyses his power of action and he is suffering the empathy of the character and for some time he's only answering, he is only doing what the actor does; only feeling what the actor feels, the character feels. And what is important for me is not exactly the solution that we found, [but] the process of criticising, observing and trying to find solution. Even if we don't find any solution at the end of Forum Theatre, I say, "OK, it's good. We did not find that solution, but we looked for it" (1).

The process, therefore, is the goal and not the end in itself. You are presenting reality and society on trial. When you place such situations or stereotypes within the context of society in general, 'spect-intervening', dialoguing, the dialectical position emerges and the group take a stand based on their understanding of the reality that has been placed on trial. This theory of Boal was experimented in various locations in Africa with specific reference to the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The other most critical experiment was the Kamiriithu community that took place in Kenya, an experiment handled by Ngugi wa Thiongo and Ngugi wa Mirii. Ngugi wa Thiongo says that:

Kamiriithu then was not an aberration, but an attempt at reconnection with the broken roots of African civilisation and its traditions of theatre. In its very location in a village within the kind of social classes, Kamiriithu was the answer to the question of the real substance of a national theatre. Theatre is not a building. People make theatre. Their life is the very stuff of the drama. Indeed Kamiriithu reconnected itself to the national tradition of the empty space, of language, a content and of form (43).

The question of using the indigenous language was addressed when he came to Kamiriithu. This according to Ngugi, forced him to have an epistemological break with his past, particularly in the area of theatre. He turned to the usage of Gikuyu with a

conclusion that, “the question of audience settled the problem of language choice; and the language choice settled the question of audience (43). His conviction stems from the fact that the barrier that existed between content of the drama that is produced, with the people's history, and their linguistic medium of expression is conveniently broken. The product, Ngugi argues, is “a content with which people could identify carried in a form which they could recognise and identify: their participation in its evolution through the research stages, that is by the collection of raw material like details of work conditions in farms and firms” (59). Most of these practices have leaned heavily on the theories of Augusto Boal. Iyorwuese Hagher indicates that,

the community theatre for development appears in Nigeria to have descended from the experiments of Augusto Boal and Paulo Freire in Latin America, through East African experiment in Kenya, especially the Laedza Batanani campaigns to Botswana and the Chikwakwa travelling theatre in Zambia... (3).

Both Freire and Boal have also been influenced by the work of Bertolt Brecht, especially with his break with conventional Aristotelian theatre. The intention generally is to create in the practice of theatre, openness for participation towards a democratic decision-making in the creative process, to an extent that conscientisation is to be achieved. Theatre for development is concerned with achieving the objectives of development through theatre where there is an attempt at what Chris Nwamuo describes as “bringing the people within a particular location into consciousness and awareness to the extent that they can take positive action towards the improvements of their lives in the interest of communal stability and nation building” (78-79). This is why Steve Oga Abah contends that in making the choice of adopting theatre for development it must be viewed “as a practice that concerns change in the society, on which is concerned to return a certain amount of power to where it was originally” (3), enabling easy mobilisation toward action, and identifying their needs and suggesting ways of solving them. These needs should be evolved from specific communities who would contribute to the definition of the development and communication agendas, and evolving concepts such as participation and empowerment that would project to the forefront, replacing pre-packaged messages as a communication strategy with democratic dialoguing.

### **Culture and its Relationship with Language and Ideology**

It is easy to conclude from Ngugi regarding the language issue. Beyond the politics of multilingualism within the African states, and Kenya in particular, several issues come into play. Because the relationships inherent in a production process and the likely ideological/cultural issues that would arise with language guaranteeing and ‘carrying’ the former, it becomes expedient to understand the workings of the contentious existences. The desire to utilise the language of the people, their forms, traditions and cultures, unfortunately make these seem isolated areas that can be brought in as *Deus ex machina*. Are they really separate areas that are only effects of the people’s histories, or serve as part and parcel of these histories? For every relationship in production, either one of textualising, or performing, in performance, there are ideological contestations which

invariably affects whatever meaning that is presented not on a one-to-one equation, as is with the base and superstructure narrative or ‘determinisms’, or causalities, nor as the case may be ‘mere’ manipulation or ‘mere’ opinion, ‘it is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of the nature of man and his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear reciprocally confirming (Williams, *Problems in Materialism...* 38).

It would be difficult to draw a line or even attempt a description or definition of what culture that is carried by language in any relationship is or should be. As a result, we would begin by peeping into assumptions, suggestions and conclusions in relation to this complex parameter. Would we conclude that culture is ‘a repertoire of beliefs, styles, values, and symbols, therefore we can only speak of cultures, not just culture; because for a collective mode of life presupposes different modes and repertoires. Hence, the idea of a global ‘culture’ is practical impossibility, except in interplanetary terms (Smith 1). Or can we reduce it to sets of solutions shared amongst us as universal problems of external adaptations (how to survive) and narrowing it to the internal dynamics of how to live together, as Schein, in Yeboah Kwame’s *The Impact of Globalization on African Culture* attests as evolving over time and are handed down from one generation to the other? (4). Or can it also be simply put as a situation of changing our activities reflecting the changing times based on the changes in the environment in which it exist? Baffoe, Hofstede, and Adler see this phenomenon as collective programming of the mind that differentiates members of one group of people from another with the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence group’s response to its environment. It is therefore not an abstraction, but a product of a complex inheritance constantly submitted to scrutiny and the need to adopt a constant conquest to achieve. It is agreeable therefore that, no culture is possible without a language. It has been noted that culture is bound up with language. This is an essential pre-requisite and hence to kill a language is to kill a culture.

This debate has been on for a long time and has refused to leave us. It has turned into a stranglehold that we revert to unconsciously to seek out easy ways of arriving at solutions without first understanding our situations. At the end, from whatever conclusions reached, there is the tendency to see art, literature, textual production, and performance as resulting from an existing determining factor (Selden 432). Accordingly, therefore, too much emphasis is given to a determining base in the whole societal relationship; the superstructure placed on a mere reflection of an already existing base with an epiphenous status creates an impression of the various dialectical contradictions acting in isolation of each other. At the end, Lukacs’ position is in no way at variance with Adorno’s. This is instructive in Adorno’s conclusion that “art and reality standing at distance from each other and that gives the work of art a vintage-point from which it can criticise actuality” (188). For Althusser production is placed “instead to a region somewhere between ‘knowledge’ and ideology. Arts can achieve this, because it is able to effect a ‘retreat’ (a fictional distance) from the very ideology which feeds it” (Selden 456). Lukacs’ opinion is that; “reality is indeed out there before we know it in our heads, but it has shape, it is a dialectical totality where all the parts are in movements and in contradiction” (171). Adorno criticises Lukacs precisely because he transfers “to

the realm of art categories which refer to the relationship of consciousness to the actual world as if there were no difference between them” (Jefferson 188).

We are not just relating art to society but studying all the activities and inherent inter-relations, without any concession of priority to any one of them we may choose to abstract (Selden 432). Is it about difference? What kind of difference and where is the connectivity/interrelationships that should engage and is engaging both areas? In any production therefore, what is it that is tacitly implies and what does it does it not clearly state? In other therefore to say anything, there are other things not said “and to reach utterance, all speech envelopes itself in the unspoken” (Machery 85). Therefore, the mirror is expressive in what it does not reflect as much as in what it does reflect... the absence of certain reflections, expressions-in certain areas, is a blind mirror: but it is still a mirror for all its blindness (85). What therefore is there to conceal from the recipients? Eagleton in his *Criticism and Ideology* sees Althusser’s ‘absences’ as an ‘essentially negative conception of the relationship between text and history’. In spite of the relationships between the contradictions in text or any creative engagement, not being one of direct reflection, Eagleton sees some form of connection. So that, according to him, instead of ‘focusing on the gaps and absences, he suggests there should be concern for complex mediation that govern the relation between history and production’.

These issues: ‘determinations’, ‘absences’, ‘overdeterminations’, and ‘causalities’ are the concerns of Williams, when he attempted to evolve a likely discourse that would transcend these problematic through the concept of hegemony. He tried to explain it this way:

hegemony supposes the existence of something which is truly total, which is not merely secondary or superstructural... but which is lived at such a depth, which saturates the society to such an extent, and which as Gramsci puts it, even constitutes the substance and limits of common sense for most people under its sway... (37).

Williams tried to further espouse on the issue of hegemony, by making reference to the Dominant, Residual, and the Emergent. These he explains and clarifies, that the hidden other in production processes, the unexplained ‘absences’ as couched within the complexity of relationships in ideological power play within a creative work. Therefore, all activities that interplay with each other affects meaning at the end and not isolated except when attempting to give its specific understanding within the context of production. Through ‘selective traditions’, ‘accommodation’, ‘integration’, ‘coercion’, the existing subordinated cultures and institutions give credibility and workability of the dominant traditions/culture. These exist in hegemonic cultural institutions. They serve as conduits of values and norms that legitimise the functions of the dominant.

The deep relationship between the residual, the emergent and the dominant impinges greatly on interpretative mode, in control and domination. The residual, playing a function of legitimating the status quo and accepting as common sense whatever relationships that are crafted, for its consumption. It behoves on us to effectively stress that the supposed superstructure that is immanently seen within the framework of

literature, art and all creative processes, as being determined by an existing super economy or material as the base is particularly faulty. That is because, within the said superstructure there is a lived process and a huge ideological contestation as it relates with the supposed base, which in itself contains ideological contestations and as both areas related symbiotically with no particular overriding dominance. The unsaid meaning is the manipulative space where hegemony functions for purposes of same domination and control.

So, for whatever creative process we are engaged with, be it textual production, playwriting, the processes of Theatre-for-Development, there is interplay between language, ideology and culture. It becomes extremely important to articulately understand these complexities in relationships in order not to further complicate the area of desired reception of meaning. Even within the scope, it would be instructive to concretely relate them with the post-colonial situation that this artistic creativity is inchoately enmeshed. It is imperative to note that language, culture, ideology and thought, have an intricate relationship. When discussing these phenomena, the utility of one often denotes the utility of the other. Culture constitutes an all-embracing terminology. Ngugi wa Thiongo, in *Decolonising the Mind*, concludes that language is a carrier of culture. Conclusively, from this specific delineation, culture embraces one's concept of reality. Because language and culture are inseparable, and every community or groups conceive reality differently and as a 'lived' process, we must view culture differently.

The production of cultural practices may create an omniscient position outside the action itself, of the actor in production. This conscious neglect of the effecting variables outside this specific activity itself renders all other actions necessarily subordinated to the whole, and by some error, produces a monolithic identity rather than attempting to evolve a multiplicity of meanings and positions, without any form of false claims that would be extended to the audience as receptors. The alternative 'subject' audience and subject actors and representations become necessary in order to produce contradictory multiplicities of subject positions with varieties of accessibilities. This makes the participant in the dramatic activity already as subject because he or she has a history of ideological existence. Rather than talking on the meanings brought to bear in the creative processes, we can safely now talk about interrelationships where the 'subjects' would have been contextually determined, in which they all play relevant part, in their contextual determinations. But determinations?

Williams argues that history is a process but this process contains a subject that cannot be controlled, at the last instance. Hear his argument:

Determination is a real social process, but never (as in some theological and some Marxist versions) a wholly controlling, wholly predicting set of causes. On the contrary, the reality of determination is the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, within which variable social practices are profoundly affected but never necessarily controlled. We have to think of determination not as a single force, or a single abstraction of forces, but as a process in which real determining factors – the distribution of power or of capital, social and political inheritance, relations of scale and size between groups – set limits and exert pressures, but



neither wholly control nor wholly predict the outcome of complex activity within or at these limits, and under or against these pressures (133).

Language impinges greatly on our thinking faculties. Therefore, relating our consciousness with what come out as spoken language, several likely variables affect the structuring of thinking itself. When works come out therefore, it would be grossly inadequate to discuss the meanings and by extension, the cultural imperatives that it may carry along. For Williams,

all cultural forms and practices, even those colloquially considered to be debased, commercial, banal or frivolous, are embedded in larger social processes and can thus potentially serve as indexes of those processes with equally as much “hermeneutic success” as more sober cultural forms (126).

He concludes that while the social that takes the form of history and as that which is ‘fixed’ or ‘finalised’, is in error because history and the social are constantly in reform and in revision and “‘in process’ with the present acting on the past and the past informing the active present’. Therefore,

in most description and analysis, culture and society are expressed in a habitual past tense. The strongest barrier to the recognition of human cultural activity is this immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products.... This vision of experience as finished product is habitually projected, not only into the always moving substance of the past, but into contemporary life, in which relationships, institutions and formations in which we are still actively involved are converted, by this procedural mode, into formed wholes rather than forming and formative processes (Williams 128).

## **A Critical Look and Major Concerns**

### ***The Emotional/Empathy in the Process***

The problem of empathy has dominated the theatre scene from after the Aristotelian era. This has become a problem because there is the conception that emotion dulls the intellect. Bertolt Brecht developed his *Alienation Effect* in order to discover ways of erasing empathy in the theatre. In his theory, he intends that the *Fourth Wall* that separated the audience from the action on stage be broken down so that the action is not seen as a kind of ritual. He wanted an intellectualisation of the discourse of subject matter in the theatre. This is carried further by Boal who felt that the individualisation of the action on stage must be removed. Rather, the theatre must be seen as an area of academic discussion and not an illusion. The discussion must focus on the history of the people’s struggle as its subject matter rather than some far away issue. But this whole concern for the removal of emotions in the theatre is a removal of feelings. And if feelings are erased, then humanity is erased. How can you intellectualise on an issue if you do not feel strongly about it?

Your internalisation of the subject enables the actor, the audience/participant understand the workings and complexities of such a subject. It is the feelings/empathy that provides the humanity in forging ahead to resolving the matter. Important as it may be to intellectualise on the problematic in the drama, the attempt to remove emotions or feeling of empathy would turn us into automatons and materialise our existence and dehumanise our being. This kind of liberation or whatever end result we expect from the theatre is neither freely given nor freely accepted, as a matter of fact, not a process we freely participate and determine or negotiate for. This brings us into the issue of participation.

### **Participation**

Participation is said to be the bedrock of this process. Participation, which engenders identification with the subject matter of the drama and strategies of evolving a resolution of crisis that is being discussed therein, has become interesting. The question that bothers the would-be catalyst using this theory is how participatory is it? Whose idea is it in the first place to utilise Theatre for Development as a medium of resolving community problems? The community members are involved in the process but it is the catalyst whose agenda is presented and developed. Sometimes, the catalyst would have been given a grant by donor agencies that in almost all situations insist on their prescribed subjects, as the basis for the activity or the grant would not be given. At the end, it is the agency's prescribed result that is pursued rather than development for the target community(ies).

Sometimes too, the catalyst is too preoccupied with a particular end result that he virtually forgets the process for the communities. The cultural (residual forms) are taken into the process and the performance in order for identification by the people and give them a sense of participation, but at the end these traditional forms are merely spectacular integration that reduces their essences. It becomes rather a process of devaluation rather than evolution of a developmental strategy in the theatre for community benefits. It is for the same reason that Mazrui cautions that, "...for as long as the struggle for mental liberation is defined in terms that conform to the European ideal of humanity and civilisation it will only turn out to be an upward spiral to further alienation and conceptual imprisonment" (Mazrui, *Power of Babel* 62). In the same light, David Kerr feels that a superficially parroted process of 'cultural revival' without forms that provides "...communication channels by which subaltern communities are able to negotiate change" (243), will only be "tantamount to developmental imperialism"(248), or what he calls "atavistic forms or ethnic or religious fundamentalism" (249).

It is important therefore to conceptualise the issue of conflict from the point of view of containment because, to assume that conflict can be resolved, especially in relationship of human existence would be eliminating that existence in the first place. This is because conflict from whatever perspective serves as a medium that can guarantee development. Removing conflict or its suggestion would mean the halting of difference. Conflict where they occur, outside of violence, requires containment.

The important approach especially from the premise of a diversified Nigerian cultural and traditional situation is creating an enabling environment for coexistence,

learning to live together, accepting differences, relating with the 'others', and acknowledging the existence of the 'others'. This is so because when existing relationships are affirmed and are equal, it enhances dignity and a sense of freedom, from the individual perspective to group or community practice, validating the existence of such groups or entities. When such existence is affirmed, coexistence has fundamentally occurred. In Nigeria where change is fundamentally the focus of most creative endeavours, such affirmation is required to enable stronger individual communal identities. Identity is, therefore, necessary to the survival of the individual and the society in which the individual lives. Recognition of identity is essential for both universal and individual development. How could this recognition of difference work within the context of theatre for the oppressed?

The issue here is the kind of image the child or youngster or communities for that matter, get as a result of evolving these images. Clearly, the youngster is not or does not constitute part of that evolution, and therefore, he is given a cut and dry meaning. We must then begin to interrogate these kinds of images, taking into cognisance of the catalyst that assist in evolving such image. Does he really articulate very concretely the image that would be of benefit to his person and then transferred to the recipients? Does he really get the image to be able to understand what is expected of him/her? Is the catalyst not serving as mere conduit pipes to an already formed image in his consciousness, therefore he being an object deluded as a subject? For him, even more is in possession of a more muddled up image which he sadly transmits to the more 'sane consciousness' of the recipients of his image, thereby introducing the "common-sense that constitutes the tool of oppression of the hegemonic he is already enmeshed in? For success in the direction of 'liberating the members that are the recipients of this kind of drama,

...It becomes desirable that for communication to get to people, a language that serves the needs of the wider community and which is also rooted in the local community be used. Absence of knowledge of available resources and how to use them effectively easily creates passivity or disinterestedness among would-be beneficiaries. Language, therefore, should be regarded as one of the most fundamental aspects of communication. Drama artists, as community developers, should speak the same language as the people they develop (Odhiambo 24).

The cultural (residual forms) are taken into the process and the performance in order for identification by the people and give them a sense of participation, inclusivity, and ownership, but at the end these traditional forms are merely spectacular appendages and integration that reduces their essences and value. It devaluates rather than the evolution expected of a developmental strategy in the theatre for community benefits. In this quest for mental liberation that conforms with Western ideals, would only turn out to be an upward spiral for further alienation and conceptual imprisonment" (Mazrui 62). It evolves a situation of mere 'parrotting' of a deceptive 'cultural revival', where these communities do not have the same level playing field to negotiate change. This boils down to the question of the problematic of language, because theatre and theatre for

development is within the space of culture, whatever discussions and encounters in this space must be embedded within the clear articulation of existing or contextual cultural underpinnings. The complexities and ambiguities of culture would need to be looked at.

But the word language can hardly ever be used in any ordinary sense; indeed, it obviously shed all ordinary sense since its first paradoxical employment as a description of its own system—that is, as a system of socially agreed signification. For language does not operate simply as communication but as matrices of discrete activity including of course those of articulation and meaning (Soyinka 2).

This constitutively evolves several layers of meanings that creates apprehensions and leaves us unconsciously/or as a matter of fact, consciously, affecting the recipient of our commingled vagaries of unexplained heritages with their meanings, with that language “indisputably the language of alienation” (Soyinka 6). And because language constitutes a social practice, the process of identity construction explains how language constructs and is constructed by various stratum of relationships that are basically unequal, and because language operates from various strata in its relationships, identity is therefore ‘multiply affected and being affected, subject to change, and an area of struggle’. Relations of power in different sites influence this diversity conditions under which language learners speak, read, or write the second language.

The facilitator carries along to the communities with him his biases and heritages. Questions on whether he fully articulates his socio-political situation and the attendant complexities with the community or relational space he is emerging from is another matter entirely. Does he really understand the varieties of identities he constitutively carries in his day-to-day engagement with his social reality and possible encumbrances? What kind of identity has been constructed of his ‘self’ and its relationship with other ‘selves’, and what is the result of that relationship or engagements which he will carry along to the communities he will engage? In spite of his desire for the humanity of his ‘target community members’, interest in the elevation or their consciousness in their collaborative engagements, he is carrying a former that is entirely novel and carrying particular socio-political and cultural phenomenon—a dramatic encapsulated within a prism of a language of communication. The consciousness of the would-be catalyst or welfare officer has been muddled by effects of ideological experiences engraved in his consciousness. These experiences are varied and contesting for space in a huge ideological battle therein.

The concern for the welfare of the communities he/she intends to engage is understandable, but these several jostling for dominance within his consciousness, continuous as it requires articulation by the ‘carrier’ and must be sieved at least to an acceptable level of focus to reduce or diminish the shrouded hybridised space. To erase it completely would be impossible (or could be reduced to the deceit of erasing history), and to disregard it completely would be counter-productive and dangerous not only to the ‘carrier’ of the muddled consciousness but also to whosoever he encounters with intentions of any ideological consciousness shift. Note that ideology within the

consciousness is plural. And because we cannot adequately engage any discursive situation isolating or abstracting historiography, the subject of engagement (the communities in this instance) would require theirs for contextualised articulation.

The community members have or would have gone through their peculiar long drawn historical and social experiences that their consciousness has one way or the other been affected especially that socio-political and economic situations are a continuum. We must therefore pause to interrogate the traditional forms of the people we intend to inject into our dramas, for empathy and recognition towards a '*revolutionary change, and giving some powers back to the people*'. These traditional forms and language of disseminating such have undergone its own several histories and experiences. These forms carry specific ideologies that 'carry' the relationships with the contest of domination and subordination, which transmits into the reasons for the engagements in the first place. Without properly articulating these problematic of ideological power play, we would only be returning an assumed power that is deliberately shrouded with characters of the dominant, and the catalysts being conduit pipes and organic to the social formation we intend to counter as existing hegemony and make the situation even graver.

The community he is engaging has a history of language and development. They have grown with it and carrying or upholding these relationships all through the years, of course with their attendant continuum and dynamism. These communities easily can empathise and identify with their former structures of relationships that have become their attendant historiography. It is important to note that the traditional forms and language evolves from age-long communication and relationship with one another as they contact and are being contacted by the dynamism of change. The present cultural structure is therefore a result of that relationship. If there is an issue regarding the humanity of members of the communities, it could be linked or traced to the long inherited historiography.

The use of the people's language (one that carries along feudal relationships, oppressive relationships, or at least relationships that engendered the issues that attracted attention in the first place, or as the case may be, other structured traditional structures, in most cases that create the inhumanity and oppressive tendencies in themselves), to do theatre that may engender consciousness, constitutes a challenge. The people themselves are enmeshed in their own peculiar challenges. Their exposures with newly introduced relationship in which the facilitator comes along with his heritages converging with theirs, to evolve a novel structure in the social, cultural and political spaces becomes a problem. A shift into 'this new structure and consciousness could constitute a futile, deceptive and destructive arena for the purposes of changing perceptions, depending largely on the political desires within the superficial much touted consciousness mantra, or something new, a structure unknown to the facilitator and the community members themselves. This strange space could open up vistas of dehumanisation that could be even more destructive and dangerous.

Here, caution must be taken for a dialogue could constitute oppression when hegemonic purveyances permeate the 'language' that is the medium of this dialogue. It could manifest in cultural reproductions within the process of dialoguing and, therefore, carried in the seemingly liberating process of discourse. When we decide to approach this

from a negotiated discourse, there is an unconscious transcendence of dialogue. Within the negotiation process, there is always the dominating tendency that may evolve within the dialogue, and manipulation of the hegemonic in the process of deciding and accepting or altering the images within the aesthetic space. How can we, therefore, practice theatre of the oppressed within a nation like Nigeria with diverse languages, and by extension, traditions and cultures without compromising the medium of expression? Whatever structure we adopt within this cultural diversity, it needs to be in conformity with peaceful resolution of likely conflict that is or may result in the utilisation of a common space by these diversities. But before thinking of possibilities, it is necessary to stress that this diversity does not necessarily assume a possible concern for political instability or in any way a threat to nationhood.

Experiments have been conducted towards these possibilities, but the success of this process has been extremely limited. These limitations are easily identifiable where, the utility of the English is a carriage of a relationship of an unrecognised culture and tradition that is at variance with the inherently familiar, with the codes of the words that constitutes the dialogue carrying different meanings. Besides, in situation where local idioms and values are injected into the dramatic rendition, with English and/or other languages create something novel and diminishes the intention of recognition in the first place. The alternative choice of utilising the language and idioms of the people for cultural engagements in themselves is even more dangerous for the participants of these dramatic discourses, because the present status of the language has gone through a long history of feudalism, and/or of domination and subordination, and its utility invigorates only feudal cultural matrices, and therefore not in the interest of the participants of those involved in these dramatic engagements. There is then the issue of the Fourth Wall, the structural separation between the audience and the performers and the presentation of focuses for the audiences to take in without critically examining them. Rose Mbowa, concludes that, we

are a multilingual society; mime and dance can cut across the language problem ...in this kind of forum, you are able to communicate whether you are literate or illiterate because we talk in the language of the people, not in English. The images speak out loud and clear (111-112).

Instructive as this may be towards the resolution of the problem, images that result from gestures of dance and mime are not taken from the abstract. They are expressions from specific cultural backdrops. Images, therefore, that emerge in the process of mime or dance have cultural affinities with specific historicity and meanings derived only from that specific, except if what has been put together is not, and therefore an abstracted rendition of the spectacular. To conclude that dance and mime that would inevitably be derived from a particular language solves the problem of multilingual societies is grievously limited, shrouding reifying forms of particular hegemony. Just like language, body movements, gestures, and rhythm have cultural specifics within specific historical renditions.

There exist universal gestures, but these in themselves cannot constitute meanings when expressed in isolation. It is a conglomeration of gesture specifics that constitute meanings within the context of use, especially within the African cosmogony. For theatre and its 'valuation cannot be appreciated within isolated systems of signification with individual emotional disposition, aesthetic socialisation, world view or interest, because it would only reify subjective perceptions'. To adequately present an acceptable theatre that transcends this problematic of language, whatever meaning that is the preoccupation, the values of each language-gesture-mime-dance-specific (attempting though to escape from the inherently static), need to be taken into consideration, with 'a dialectical relationship between the context of the work or practice and its specific content and form, if the theatre is not intended to subordinate them and intensify particular hegemony. Or would it? Questions would therefore be asked regarding the place of development contextually. Can we adequately discuss development within this contextualised space? What kind of development would that be and from what parameter can we evaluate any existing structure resulting? Can we guarantee development within this hybridized space?

The contradiction between the assumed inevitability of development and the necessity of it being actively undertaken in 'Third-World' contexts works both to underscore and to undermine a White and/or Euro supremacy, that is, the positing of Europe and the West as the ineffable and inevitable site of human progress. White/Euro supremacy is facilitated by this contradiction because according to its logic the highest form of human development would only naturally spring from Europe and the West, whereas the 'Third World', characterised within most Development theories as backward, static, traditional and the lacking in the capacity to produce wealth, would 'naturally' require the assistance of the West (39).

Would we constitutively conceive of imitation of the centre as our basis for thinking ourselves as genuinely developed?

The ambivalence around reproduction and what I have called the politics of not resembling rest upon the fact the un/underdevelopment of the 'third world' is a reminder to the 'developed world' of all that it needs in order continually to reproduce itself. And yet the logic of modernity demands that development spread the world over, so that when the 'third world' persistently *does not resemble* the 'first', it gives the lie to the notion of universal development. The result is that this failure to resemble becomes a source of deep anxiety to the Western episteme because the logic of a universal subjectivity, the unquestionable value of development and the spread of the western model ("Collusion Course" 39).

Is it anything far removed from the practice of Theatre-for-Development, where we evolve alternatives to developmental parameters, but still reeling around reproduction of Western hegemony and its strangulation and consciously or otherwise we tenaciously stick to these with unconcern? Practitioners sugar-coat their bitterness and pains of unavailable alternatives than to convince ourselves that we are radically 'conscientising'

the community populace when in reality, it is a reenergising, reinterpreting, and mediating the inchoately hybrid that we as practitioners do not even articulate, let alone the community members we are desperately attempting to ‘conscientise’.

The cultural discourse that introduces and identifies the people as subjects (Boal reference) without necessarily subordinating even from the onset, thought processes and sensibilities become the focus. The critical premise underscores the value not only in the process of engagement but the participants in the engagement, reducing in the process possibilities of hegemonic strangulations, reducing also the shrouded hybridised spaces. That the area of engagement is a hybridised space is not contestable, and that it constitutes a problematic space for cultural engagement is also not contestable but the possibility of engagement (without a choice of reality) and a narrowing down of the difficulty of empathy for easy identification and access for utility, becomes a major concern.

Thus, we have to travel in language terrain through the tongue of our colonial masters beyond the atlantics in order to exchange meanings with our own African brothers. In spite of this constraint however the language of works that can really stand for African literature is not cast in European phonological, lexico-semantic and discursive patterns and standards. Rather, African literature displays the linguistic, gnomic and cultural symbols as well as oral verbalisation aesthetics and convolution both of cosmic, ethereal and terrestrial space, which make it to maintain a unique identity even in its relative hybrid status (Fashina 64).

The fundamental shift from the possibility of inarticulation refocuses the concern towards building bridges within the existing localities. There is the issue of incommensurability between the ‘senders’ and ‘receivers’ of messages as interrupted by power, a serious matter in relating with the indigenous and their histories towards their utility for developmental purposes. The type of reception here could be in several folds. It could be that of complete lack of it or could also be a distorted devaluation of the existing cultural essence because from whatever pipe hole the communicant is expressing from, it is done through the mediation of these essences that may be the heritages, double or ‘triple heritages’ or quadruples, as the case may be.

But can we afford to side-line or as a matter of convenience deny their familial histories with the essentially ‘cultural specific’ they belong? This would be inconclusive when dialectically thinking of a window of cultural exit. We definitely would not assume any originality in a deceptive continuum, but discussing a hybridised space. This space, ‘new’ as it may appear must be our starting point. Returning to the traditional/‘original specificity’ may further complicate and confuse the recipients who would not ‘hear’ and cannot ‘speak’ what they have not heard or articulated. Is there necessarily a post-cultural space for contextual identity or can we tag it post-imperialism of some sort? From whatever side of the political divide we choose to begin evolving our developmental structures or processes, the hybridised baseline becomes inevitable. Our concern now is evolving structures within cultural practices that would reduce dependency, imitation and ‘resemblances’ with the westernised cultural dictation and assuming contextualised supremacy within African cultural engagements.



## Conclusion

In conclusion therefore, the performances that historically engage our traditions and transmit them into our present socio-political cultural history mired by post-colonial relationships constitute two sharp and problematic edges. The side of ‘selectively’ making these residual elements that conveniently, protectively took refuge in the rural areas are being raked out to actively express our existing histories. Historically espousing as they may serve, they are put in danger. Its existing ‘aural’ activity is tampered with and disengagements from its continuum (slow and deliberate shift in content, context and meaning) viciously are experienced. Let us not forget this transition is in conjunction with the apparatus of Western representations, consistently and persistently devaluing them in the process. We are therefore not giving power to these communities or those engaged in the practice for that matter; rather we are aiding and invigorating the ideals and ideologies of dominant tendencies conveniently integrating the communities and ourselves consistently into the dominant hegemony.

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