

CHANGE IMPERATIVES IN THE STAND-UP COMEDY OF ALI BABA

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Abstract

*Against the backdrop of the change mantra as propagated by the Muhammadu Buhari led-administration in Nigeria, the paper examines the transformational potentials and impetus in the satirical jokes of Ali Baba. While brandishing the Nigerian stand-up comedy as an emergent and viable theatrical form, the paper establishes Ali Baba as one of the trailblazers of the stand-up comic tradition in Nigeria as well as a unique comic whose jokes take a satirical swipe at the degeneracy in the standard of living in Nigeria as a result of the collapse of the leadership structure. The study adopts the qualitative research approach as it uses some selected jokes of Ali Baba as performed in such notable comedy variety concerts as Opa William's **Nite of a Thousand Laughs** and Ayo Makun's **AY Live** as paradigm for other Nigerian jokes in this satirical genre. The paper notes that like most theatrical experiences, stand-up comedy serves the tripartite functions of education, entertainment and enlightenment. It is for the foregoing that the study advocates the inclusion of stand-up comedy in the secondary and tertiary education curricula not just as a one-off subject or course but as a special field of study. The paper also canvasses the need for Nigerian stand-up comedians to take into cognizance the audience factor when crafting their jokes. Also, the formation of a purpose-driven comedians' guild in Nigeria is long overdue.*

Introduction

Since the institutionalization of democratic governance in Nigeria on May 29, 1999, there has been one form of linguistic coinage aimed at capturing the leadership vision of each serving administration or the other. While Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration emphasized the three Rs agenda of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation, the Umaru Yar'Adua-led administration harped on the Seven-Point Agenda with emphasis on education and Youth empowerment. For the government of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, it was the Transformation Agenda. Today, the Muhammadu Buhari-led

administration has adopted yet another slogan which it christens 'Change'. Whereas it is not within the scope of this paper to analyse the lexical disparity between the terms "transformation" and "change", emphasis must be made that none of these leadership visions and approaches has brought about the much desired national growth and development.

Seventeen years and more into a supposed full scale democratic governance in Nigeria, the nation is still engulfed in severe dilapidation of the entirety of its social structures. In spite of its huge foreign exchange earnings from the lucrative oil and gas business, the Nigerian country still gropes for an average standard of living among the citizens. Such indices of underdevelopment as poor health care delivery, epileptic power supply, outdated educational infrastructures and policies, youth unemployment, systemic corruption, religious cleavages/tension, tribal/ethnic rivalries, corrupt judiciary, suicide bombing, militancy, kidnapping, political assassination and various manifestations of insecurity among others. What is however permanent, is the introduction of interesting and captivating leadership templates that may or may not be implemented. The leadership slogan in vogue is the change mantra of the Buhari-led government.

Amidst the experiments of leadership strategies amongst Nigerian leaders, the common masses are made specimens whose business would be mainly to fold their arms and savour the biting and crushing effects of these failed experiments. In the face of the masses' resignation to fate, the artist stands out of the crowd to speak for the oppressed masses. Regardless of the form which art is expressed, the motive is usually to occasion social change through education, enlightenment and entertainment. Of all the art forms that make up popular culture in Nigeria, stand-up comedy seems to be the most sensational and vibrant in the portrayal of societal happenings. Taking advantage of poetic license and artistic immunity, Nigerian stand-up comics feel at home to lampoon highly influential political and religious figures in their jokes. There are arrays of instances where such notable Nigerian comics as Ali Baba, I Go Dye, Basket Mouth, AY and Gordons make 'expensive' but humorous jokes on personalities such as Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, the late Umaru Yar'Adua, Alhaji Aliko Dangote, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, Rev. Chris Okotie and Pastor T.B Joshua among others. Zolten notes that comedy is beautiful to the extent that it gives license to say things you could not get away with otherwise. In order to underscore his argument, he exposes the immunity of Will Rogers, a veteran American stand-up comic, thus:

Will Rogers, one of the first political stand-ups, was an exception during vaudeville era. Rogers would come out in cowboy clothes, doing rope tricks with a lariat as he offered astute and cutting political commentary. He'd joke acerbically about the politicians and policies of the day and get away with it. (2)

It is for the foregoing that the paper takes a critical look at the change imperatives in the satirical jokes of Ali Baba. The focus of the paper is to examine how Ali Baba, through his jokes, lends his voice to the ongoing crusade and clarion call by the Buhari-led administration for the Nigerian citizenry to change from their corrupt ways and embrace functional transparency and accountability in the discharge of their duties.

Social Change: A Theoretical Exposé

The concept 'social change' has quite a handful of definitions. However, the predominant definition is that which refers to the concept as any significant alterations over time in behaviour patterns, cultural values and norms. By "significant alterations" we mean changes that yield profound social consequences. Social change may refer to the notion of social progress or sociocultural evolution, the philosophical idea that society moves forward by dialectical or evolutionary means. Accordingly, it may also refer to social revolution, such as the Socialist revolution presented in Marxism, or to other social movements, such as Women's suffrage or the Civil rights movement. Social change may be driven by cultural, religious, economic, scientific or technological forces.

Defleur defines social change alterations in the pattern of social organization of specific group within a society or even of the society itself. (31) Similarly, Moore sees the term as the significant alteration of social structures (that is, patterns of social action and interaction), including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct), values, and cultural products and symbols (366) The definitions at our disposal point to the fact that the concept of social change emphasizes changes in the social milieu rather than changes in the physical environment. Through human action, such social structures as social networks and social institutions are brought into prominence for purposes of making life more meaningful. However, past and present studies reveal that such structures are never static as they often change from time to time. The consequences of this

dynamism include the alterations of relationships between individuals and groups. Against this backdrop, Anele asserts that:

In whatever way we define social change, what is important is that restructuring or mutation is seen to have occurred in social relationship between members of a community, group or the society at large and that culture has been influenced by such restructuring or mutation. This could be at the macro or micro, institutionalized values and attitudes, or personal levels, such a mutation implies the modification or replacement of hitherto existing patterns of doing things within any given society, social institution, organization, etc. It means a new thing that is taken over from an old one.
(12)

For Kimberly, social change is the transformation of culture and social institutions over time. He goes further to identify four basic characteristics of social change, thus: Social change happens all the time, it is sometimes intentional, but oftentimes unplanned, it is controversial and that some changes matter more than others (304).

Within the context of this paper, social change would be examined against the backdrop of the alterations in the totality of the social structures in Nigeria with emphasis on the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural. However, the change agenda propagated by the government of President Muhammadu Buhari is that which is all encompassing as it includes both the transformation of the mind-set of the average Nigerian down to the transformation of all the social structures of the country. In his inaugural speech on May 29, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari unequivocally assured Nigerians that his administration would be devoid of any form of social stratification. This, he captured in his slogan “I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody” (qtd. in *New Nigeria* 2) In an attempt to bring to the fore his change campaign, President Buhari bemoans the sordid state of the Nigerian nation whereby past leaders have underplayed the ideals and philosophies of her founding fathers and heroes. According to him:

In recent times Nigerian leaders appear to have misread our mission. Our founding fathers, Mr Herbert Macaulay, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa...and their colleagues worked to establish certain standards of governance. They might have differed

in their methods or tactic or details, but they were united in establishing a viable and progressive country. Some of their successors behaved like spoilt children breaking everything and bringing disorder to the house... (2)

It is against the backdrop of the failure of successive governments to build on the efforts of the founding fathers as conceived by Buhari that he initiated the change agenda. As he puts it:

Daunting as the task may be, it is by no means insurmountable. There is now a national consensus that our chosen route to national development is democracy. To achieve our objectives we must consciously work the democratic system. The Federal Executives under my watch will not seek to encroach on the duties and functions of the Legislative and judicial arms of government. The law enforcing authorities will be charged to operate within the constitution. We shall rebuild and reform the public service to become more effective and more serviceable. We shall charge them to apply themselves with integrity to stabilize the system... (2)

The deduction from President Buhari's address above is that his government would transform the social structures in Nigeria which are in a state of decay and collapse. His change agenda is anchored on the cardinal principles of rule of law, transparency, security of lives and properties and aggressive fight against corruption. Whereas the change agenda of the Buhari -led administration is aimed at occasioning social change, the paper expresses some form of pessimism over the actualization of the change mantra given the untold economic hardship, conflicting judicial pronouncements and myriad of insecurity issues borne out of ethnic and religious cleavages one year and more into his administration.

The Comic Spirit: A Conceptual Statement

There exists in contemporary discourse a handful of comic theories by both accomplished and fledgling comic theorists and critics but for purposes of precision, time and space, we would anchor our review on the comic postulations of Arthur Schopenhaur, George Meredith, and Henri Bergson with emphasis on their areas of convergence and divergence. Meredith sees comedy as a cure for "the malady of sameness, our modern malady" (qtd. in

Sypher ix). His thesis is more of an attack on materialism and mechanism that have characterized modern thought. He banishes the world of science and evolution arguing that "...science can tell us little of human life, simply because we have little to learn of apes..." (qtd. in Sypher ix). For him comedy teaches us to look at life exactly as it is, undulled by scientific theories. It banishes monstrous monotonousness as well as teaches us to be responsive, to be honest, to interrogate ourselves and correct our pretentiousness. According to him:

The comic spirit is "born of our united social intelligence", which shows us "our individual countenances" and thus keeps us alive. The comic spirit is the "ultimate civilizer" in a dull, insensitive world. She watches our vanity, our sentimentalism, with a birch rod; she strips us of our affectations. In comedy is the singular scene of charity issuing of disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter. (Sypher ix)

For Meredith, one excellent test of the civilization of a country is the degree of flourish of the comic idea and comedy and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

It is interesting to note that the relationship between Bergson's essay on comedy and Meredith's is adjudged healthy essentially because both were reacting against the coarse logic, the "machinery" of the nineteenth century, against everything cut and dried. Bergson believes that life is a vital impulse not to be understood by the reason alone. For him, life is instinct, and the real meaning of experience must be sought along the fringe of intuitions surrounding every clear idea. In their respective essays, Bergson and Meredith believe that comedy is a premise to civilization. For Bergson, comedy can make us human and natural in the midst of mechanical societies. In a parallel vein, Meredith implies that comedy can enlighten us and redeem us from our worst stupidity- the original sin of pride, or complacency.

However, long before Bergson published his book titled *Laughter* in 1900, Schopenhauer had explored his discourse on the ludicrous. Whereas Bergson's thesis embodies some characteristics of the incongruity theory, he is careful to state that he does not attempt to be proscriptive in his analysis of comedy, nevertheless, his structure could be considered guilty of being too rigid and mechanical in his description of some comedies as a result of "something mechanical being encrusted on the living" (74, 84). Bergson sets up his problem much in the same way as Schopenhauer did, referring to the

historical problem of comedy and laughter. According to him: “The greatest of thinkers, from Aristotle downwards have tackled this little problem, which has a knack of baffling every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again, a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation” (61).

While Bergson’s purpose is similar to Schopenhauer’s, his tone is much more playful and in this passage, he hints at the mechanical rigidity that he believes is the source of humour. His central metaphor seems to be a product of the industrial and mechanical era in which he was writing. His model of laughter and humour is one that is essentially mechanical. He describes it as “...a mechanical inelasticity, just where one would expect to find the wide awake adaptability and the living ‘pliability’ of a human being” (67). Indeed, the rest of his theory can be extrapolated from this basic principle. Bergson elaborates on how his theory applies to the human factor when he states that “the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine” (79). When a person continues to function mechanically by doing the same thing, despite changing conditions, then this, to Bergson, is what makes the situation laughable.

It is also imperative that we establish the fact that this mechanical basis for humour is not confined to the individual, but nature and society, also fall under the definition which Bergson sets forth in this theory of comedy. Although for Bergson, this lack of logical thought or unthinking mechanical behaviour is the source of comedy, comedy itself follows certain logical rules. For the comic spirit has logic of its own, even in its wildest eccentricities. It has a method in its madness (Bergson 62). The recognition of the existence of this set of rules appears to be necessary for us to understand comedy and experience laughter. Bergson is clear to point out that emotion and laughter are mutually exclusive and therefore comedy’s “appeal is to intelligence, pure and pure” (63). Because the appeal of the comic is intellectual in nature, Bergson argues that this puts laughter exclusively in the domain of humans. This is in consonance with Schopenhauer’s observation that “...because of the lack of the faculty of reason, thus of the lack of universal concepts, the animal is incapable of laughter as well as speech” (Representation 2, 98).

The obvious deduction here is that by denying the idea that animals can experience laughter because of their lack of reason, both Bergson and Schopenhauer reinforce the idea that comedy must have a logical or rational framework. Although this logical infrastructure is necessary to understand comedy, Bergson points out that the rules are not always hard and fast. In describing his definition of the comic, he states, “It is suitable only for cases

that are elementary, theoretical and perfect, in which the comic is free from all adulteration” (74). In practice, the definition of the comic is much more ethereal than fits neatly into Bergson’s theory of the comic. He admits the limitations of his theory in describing this ancient problem of comedy. It is imperative to note that some of Bergson’s rules seem to be suspiciously similar to those proposed by Schopenhauer, even though it is unclear whether he would have recognized or admitted the similarities.

For Bergson, incongruity theories are inadequate since they came to be as a result of something that can be interpreted simultaneously in two different ways. He states:

It is natural that certain philosophers should have been specially struck by this mental instability, and that some of them should regard the very essence of the ludicrous as consisting in the collision or coincidence of two judgments that contradict each other. Their definition, however, is far from meeting every case, and even when it does, it defines not the principle of the ludicrous, but only one of its more or less distant consequences (123).

Bergson believes that incongruity theories describe the symptoms of the ludicrous rather than the ludicrous itself. It would be like describing someone with bronchitis as suffering from cough. It is an accurate description of the problem, but is inadequate in describing what is really going on. In discussing absurdity, Bergson states that it does not create the comic rather the comic infuses into its own particular essence. It is not a cause but an effect of a very special kind, which reflects the special nature of its cause. He cites an example which he thinks incongruity theories are inadequate in describing. Why is it that there is something comic in the repetition of a word on the stage? No theory of the ludicrous seems to offer a satisfactory answer to this very simple question. This, indeed, is one of the areas of comedy that Bergson thinks is problematic for incongruity theories.

Amidst divergence in opinions as regards the comic premise, Bergson and Schopenhauer share some striking similarities as far as the ludicrous is concerned. Instead of describing the ludicrous as a conflict between opposing ideas, Bergson avers “The reciprocal interference of two sets of ideas in the same sentence is an inexhaustible source of amusing varieties” (138). Although Bergson continues to describe things in mechanical or scientific terms, he seems to be saying something very similar to what Schopenhauer is saying. Indeed, at times, it seems that he is paraphrasing Schopenhauer.

According to him; “A situation is invariably comic when it belongs simultaneously to two altogether independent series of events and is capable of being interpreted in two entirely different meanings at the same time” (123). Bergson’s statement above parallels Schopenhauer’s description of the ludicrous as ‘...the paradoxical, thus, unexpected subsumption of an object under a concept that is in other respects, heterogeneous to it (*Representation* 2, 91). Even some of Bergson’s more central concepts in his theory of laughter are foreshadowed in Schopenhauer’s writings. Schopenhauer makes a statement which is in consonance with Bergson’s theory thus:

The incongruity then between the concept and reality soon shows itself here, and it becomes evident that the former never condescends to the particular case, and that with its generality and rigid definiteness it can never accurately apply to the fine distinctions of difference and innumerable modifications of the actual (*Idea 1*, 78).

One point on which Schopenhauer and Bergson differ significantly is their understanding of the purpose of laughter. Schopenhauer defines laughter in very specific terms:

The cause of laughter in every case is simply the sudden perception of the incongruity between a concept and the real objects which have been thought through it in some relation, and laughter itself is just the expression of this incongruity (*Idea 1*, 76).

For Schopenhauer, laughter is the method through which humans express pleasure at the ludicrous and it is closely related to joy. Laughter, for Schopenhauer, is directed at the ludicrous, the ridiculous and the incongruous. However, his conception of laughter is limited by his conception of the comic as a conflict between the conceived and perceived. Smith questions the capacity of Schopenhauer’s theory to address all areas of comedy. As he puts it: “It is to be questioned whether this explanation accounts for much more than the laughter at jokes; laughter in which the rationalizing process is obvious” (46). He argues that Schopenhauer’s theory does not adequately account for other types of laughter, such as laughter at repetition, which by definition does not have the surprise necessary for the sudden tension of contrasting incongruities (47). The need also arises to note that Bergson’s concept of laughter is not merely a physiological response to a stimulus or a result of conceptual conflict in our minds. His theory of laughter is,

essentially, a social one: “Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it. It would fail in its object if it bore the stamp of sympathy or kindness” (187).

Laughter, in Bergson’s conception, is a social corrective always directed at someone or something that is not behaving according to social norms. In this sense, it is a training technique that provides negative stimulus when people do not behave as they ought to. This underscores the import of the theory of incongruity in Bergson’s analogy. Interestingly, while Schopenhauer, Meredith and Bergson might disagree on why something is funny, it seems fairly certain that they would still laugh at it because they understand some of the meaning-making processes involved in creating comedy.

Profile Statement of Ali Baba

Ayunyota Alleluya Akporobomerere popularly known as Ali Baba was born in Warri, Delta State on June 24, 1965 to the royal family of Agbarha Otor, Ughelli North Local Government Area. He had his primary, secondary and university education at Ojo Primary School, Lagos, Command Secondary School, Ibru College and Bendel State University (now Ambrose Ali University, Ekpoma) respectively. The data gathered from Ali Baba’s official website reveals that Ali Baba relocated to Lagos in 1990 after acquiring his first degree with the conviction that Lagos is a fertile ground for him to experiment his rib cracking jokes.

Ali Baba started his comedy career way back in his days at Bendel State University in 1988. Then as a student, he discovered his huge sense of humour and took advantage to make a living out of it. At first he earned as little as #100 and #120 per show and by the time he left school, his earning had improved to #150. His relocation to Lagos did not pay off immediately since he needed to study the attitude of Lagos residents to jokes. In the process, he carved out a niche for himself thereby currying the attraction of Charley Boy who engaged his services in his mega *Charley Boy Show*. His successful outing in the show made him a popular face in Lagos and in no time, individuals and corporate bodies began to sign up his services. His major breakthrough into corporate stand-up comedy business was in 1999 when Chief Olabode George invited him to a birthday party organized for the then President Olusegun Obasanjo. His scintillating performance at the event made a good impression on Obasanjo and this paved way for him in the corridors of power. This has also brought him such accolades as President’s Personal

Jester and Aso Rock's favourite comedian. His consistency and pioneering effort in the business of stand-up comedy in Nigeria has also earned him the award of the Grand Comedian of the Federal Republic (GCFR).

Performance Dynamics, Form and Content of Ali Baba's Comedy

Ali Baba's performance structure is organized along the lines of cause and effect. The beginning is often expository in nature as he observes the protocol of recognizing the modest effort of his host and reputable members of the audience. This recognition is an art of its own as he laces it with some kind of caricature aimed at tongue-lashing his friends and hosts. For instance, in one of his outings at *AY Live* concert, in a bid to commend the host for putting up such a robust show, he expressed surprise that such a concerted show can be organized by AY in spite of his timid, primitive and cantankerous dispositions as one of his disciples. He puts it thus:

You can imagine AY. People like AY, Igors are like rope tiny. Na people like AY go run go hold pole for road when truck dey pass so dat breeze no go blow dem throway (mimicks holding a pole) (*AY Live Concert* Vol. 1).

Due to the intellectual nature of his jokes, he throws his audience into a state of amazed wonder as they strive to pick threads of meaning from each joke thus, building a high magnitude of suspense. However, the suspense is broken towards the end of the joke or during the introduction of a fresh joke. Ali Baba is not given to protracted length of time in his delivery of jokes rather he releases them in quick successions to a climactic height where he bids the audience goodbye amidst thunderous ovation. His jokes are linked thematically in a chain of causal relationship and in tandem with the overriding philosophy of the concert in which he performs.

The bulk of Ali Baba's jokes harp on the pandemic of underdevelopment which has engulfed Nigeria as a result of ineffective leadership. His affiliation with Aso Rock notwithstanding, Ali Baba serves as the voice of the common people as he continuously reminds the ruling class of their failures in providing basic amenities for the citizenry. Like George Carlin, his American counterpart, Ali Baba conceives stand-up comedy not just as an entertainment panorama but an avenue to address issues of national concern. For him, stand-up comedy is a serious business that requires a high level of creative energy and strength. He draws raw materials for his jokes largely from the harrowing experience faced by the common man in such a developing country like Nigeria where the leaders are not sensitive to the

plight of the suffering masses. Though in a subtle tonality, his jokes dwell on the leadership question in Nigeria and its attendant effects on the citizenry. He bemoans the average Nigerian's insincerity to politics thus:

Now election is here. Have you noticed that the people that campaign are different from the people that vote? I have noticed that the same crowd that shout for Atiku, shout for Buhari and shout for Yar'Adua (*AY Live Concert Vol. 1*).

He is daring and unbiased in his ridicule of the obnoxious policies and deviant attitudes of most Nigerian politicians regardless of the politicians involved. In one of his earlier jokes, Ali Baba crafted a joke where he lampoons the extravagant lifestyle and the excessive quest for material wealth by Nigerian politicians. In the joke, he paints a scenario where Obasanjo (referred to as Baba in the joke) received a mini budget from the serving Minister of Internal Affairs. In the budget, the minister had slammed a huge sum of ten million naira (₦10,000,000) for the erection of Obasanjo's effigy at the entrance to Aso Villa. At the mere sight of the huge amount, Obasanjo insisted that the money be given to him so he can permanently stand in as the monument since he already looks like one.

The drift of the joke above is that most Nigerian public office holders get excited in squandering public funds on such trivial concerns as mounting effigies of their political godfathers in a bid to curry favour at the expense of providing basic amenities for the suffering masses. In a parallel vein, some of his jokes tongue-lash the common masses for exhibiting varieties of awkward social behaviour all in a bid to sustain their livelihood. He also frowns at the high level of lawlessness and indiscipline amongst working class Nigerians. In one of his jokes, he ridicules the average Nigerian worker's attitude to work as characterized by late coming, thus:

This is the problem with all of you Nigerians. You are here past ten, you are sitting here with your bosses, you can get to work for ten tomorrow. That was how one guy got to work late. The oga was waiting for him two hours... three hours, wey Suleiman... twenty minutes later Suleiman steps in at about 9:45. The oga asks him (*Mimicks in Hausa accent*), where have you been (*Suleiman responds still in Hausa accent*). I was with Mohammed (*The boss responds*). Which Mohammed?... Go to the notice board and see... Suleiman gets to the notice board and discovers that Mohammed had died four days ago and has been

buried according to Muslim law. From the notice board he sacked himself. He didn't come back (*AY Live* Vol.1)

The joke presented above speaks volumes of the nonchalant attitude of most Nigerians towards their jobs. Using his Warri background as reference, Ali Baba is interested in depicting the rapid growth of moral degeneracy, corruption, tribal sentiment, favouritism, religious cleavage and other anti-social mannerisms in the Nigeria society. Ali Baba's jokes also border on the menace of environmental degradation as evident in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where he hails from. The bulk of his jokes in this regard point to the fact that a degraded environment such as we find in the Niger Delta can only produce lawless, aggressive, violent and morally depraved citizens. This is in consonance with the theory of environmental determinism as captured by Emile Zola in his dramatic style of naturalism. In one of his jokes, he portrays the alarming rate of armed robbery in the Niger Delta thus:

You know how armed robbers dey behave now... before dem dey steal property dey hide but for Warri dem go see you greet you... (*Mimicks Warri robbers*). Bros, na we wey round you up for that junction... (*Beckons on an imaginary robber mate*). Tobore come greet Oga wey you collect him wrist watch (*AY Live Concert* Vol. 1).

Other recurrent subjects in his jokes include such human eccentricities as miserliness, kleptomania, uncontrollable libido, over-suspicion, pilfering, gossip, poor health practice, amnesia, absentmindedness, abnormal dietary attitude, abuse of GSM telephony operation and the intrigues and subterfuges that characterize the average Nigerian marital experience. It suffices to state at this juncture that the sum of Ali Baba's jokes set out to take a satiric swipe at the poor standard of living of the generality of Nigerians occasioned by corruption, greed and nepotism among the ruling class.

Change Imperatives in Ali Baba's Jokes

The change imperatives in the comedy of Ali Baba lie mainly in his sense of ideological commitment in his jokes. Ali Baba's jokes reel out in high satirical tonality. The satire is often directed towards the ruling class regardless of the persona's political standing. His swipe at the political chicanery and megalomania of Nigerian politicians occupy centre stage in his comedy. Ali Baba's satirical comedies came into prominence since the inception of democratic leadership in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 with President Olusegun

Obasanjo as his major comic victim. Ali Baba often puts Obasanjo in a comic situation by portraying him as an ugly person whose ugliness rubs on the nation's economy. In one of his Master of Ceremonies outing during the dinner event organized by Corporate Elites at Eko Hotel, Lagos in 2015, Ali Baba makes a mockery of Obasanjo, thus:

I have learnt that if I was doing business in Nigeria, I don't just need money or study the Nigerian economy or environment or probably where to do my business whether it will be in Lagos, Abuja, Enugu or Port Harcourt, etc. But the major thing is that I have to know the face of Nigerian President at the time I want to do my business. It is because if the president face fine the economy go dey in good shape. And if the president face wor wor (ugly) the economy go still wor wor Just imagine the state of Nigerian economy when Obasanjo be our President. (Corporate Elite Dinner)

Ali Baba's joke above serves huge satirical and critical purposes as it sets out to curry laughter by talking about Obasanjo, one of Nigerian's most influential figures, derisively. The joke also raises a critical revelation of the harsh economic realities which Obasanjo's administration bequeathed Nigerians. However mild Ali Baba's joke above may read, the message that Nigeria experienced economic woes in Obasanjo's administration's, has been aptly captured. In the joke, Ali Baba relies on the comic devices of travesty, caricature and parody to drive home the comic spirit. Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychoanalyst advocates for the comic of situation whereby we make other people comic by putting them in situations in which a person becomes comic as a result of human dependence on external factors, particularly on social factors, without regard to the personal characteristics of the individual concerned (835). He also identifies mimicry, caricature, parody and travesty as fresh sources of comic pleasure since they are often directed against people and objects which lay claim to authority and respect.

Another striking feature in Ali Baba's comedy is his high sense of dynamism. He is often abreast of trending political and administrative policies in Nigeria. Conscious of the aggressive hunt to recover looted public funds by past political office holders and public servants by the Buhari led administration, Ali Baba crafts a joke that satirizes President Buhari's unrelenting and uncompromising position in the crusade. In 2015, Ali Baba

delivered a joke at the Ogun State Government House during the state's 40th anniversary amidst the rank and file of Nigerian politicians. According to him:

...you know before now, when I perform, especially when Mr President Obasanjo found out how much I got paid for what I perform, he was livid, and when they now ask me to come and perform for the new president, considering that he is collecting money from everybody, he said (*Mimics Buhari*) "How much do you charge?" I said anything you want to give me, Sir. (*Aside*) There is no need to tell him the amount because he will add me to that Dasuki's list (*exclaims in Yoruba*) Olorun maje o! (God forbid) ... And you know that that man has not finished confessing...he is still in the custody of EFCC, make him no go mention my name join.

In this joke, Ali Baba satirizes President Buhari's high-handedness and doggedness in his fight against corruption and resolve to recover monies looted by past Nigerian leaders. The satire in the joke derives partly from the random and aggressive approaches with which the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under President Buhari's watch, clamped down on Dasuki, the immediate past National Security Adviser (NSA) and other perceived corrupt politicians and public servants especially from the immediate past administration of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. Also satirical and consequently, comic, is the reckless abandon with which Dasuki keeps revealing indicting ordeals amongst public office holders and some chieftains of the People's Democratic Party (PDP). In spite of the comic treatment which Ali Baba infuses in the joke, it is a call for caution when dealing with public funds especially in this current administration of President Buhari that is characterized by massive hunt for public fund looters. Also ridiculous is the degrading and cowardly disposition which Ali Baba ascribes to Dasuki by referring to him as "...that man has not finished confessing...". His reference to the immediate past National Security Adviser (Dasuki) as "that man", is a deliberate attempt by Ali Baba to make a caricature of his personality given his being found guilty among the odious bracket of looters of national treasury.

The change imperatives in Ali Baba's comedy also lie in the brutal frankness with which he portrays and makes ridicule of the excesses of influential political figures in Nigeria. In this regards, he serves as the mouth-piece of the suffering and common masses whose sighs and complaints are

hitherto, silent. He is often sceptical of Nigerian political leaders and their inability to live up to their campaign promises. In one of his jokes, he portrays the harsh feelings and realities confronting the Nigerian nation as well as his fears for President Buhari's ability to complete his tenure successfully, thus:

If only Buhari knew the problems of Nigeria, he would not have promised all the things he promised in the election. He said he would bring back the Chibok girls, stop Boko Haram, eradicate poverty, stop corruption and all he should have known that before President Goodluck Jonathan called him on phone immediately he lost his election to him, he should have known that Nigeria's problem is bigger than promises...that was why Goodluck ran away immediately after the election (*Basket Mouth Uncensored*, Vol.11)

The joke above commands high pessimistic undertone since it portrays the Nigerian state in some form of socio-political and socio-economic quagmire such that no one leader can salvage not even President Buhari amidst his lofty campaign promises. The joke also puts some form of question mark on the immediate past administration of Goodluck Jonathan. The joke portrays Goodluck Jonathan as a coward who is eager to relinquish the leadership of the country because he is overwhelmed by biting and excruciating socio-political and socio-economic forces. In this joke, Goodluck Jonathan and President Buhari are put in comic situations by ascribing to them qualities of being lily-livered (Goodluck Jonathan) and ignorant of political leadership (Buhari).

Ali Baba's jokes do not spare human frailties and eccentricities regardless of the personality of the persona. In this regards, he crafts a joke that the double-pronged in his satire of traditional rulers and police in one stretch of joke. The persona in the joke is the personality of the Oba of Lagos. In the joke, he recounts, thus:

We were in a flight once and em...the Oba of Lagos was on the flight too and we went into a serious covalence, in fact we had to divert to Ghana and we were leaving Lagos and as the plane was going like this and like that, I turned to the Oba of Lagos and said "Kabiyesi" (*greetings for a King in Yoruba*) He said (*mimics Oba of Lagos*) "keep quiet, kabiyesi wo? Plane is not landing and you are doing Kabiyesi" I said, ah, kabiyei egbadura (*Oba of Lagos cuts*

in more harshly this time) What is your own? Kabiyesi is on the ground not on the air, let's land first, ah!. And em...kabiyeis is someone that em... he is my friend, so most of the time, when he sees me at events, he keeps asking me Ali come and visit me, Ali come and visit me, but the problem for me to visit the kabiyesi is that em...when you go you give him something when he comes to your own house you give him something and to make it worse, the Oba is a retired policeman ...so that one self you don't really need to see him, anywhere he sees you, he collects...(Pan Atlantic University Gala Night)

The joke above mimics man's fears and cowardly dispositions in the face of danger regardless of one's social status. This is evident in the response of the Oba of Lagos to Ali Baba's greetings in the plane during a turbulence. The scenario portrayed in the joke is a manifestation of the Machiavellian position that man is cowardly in the face of danger. Oba of Lagos is put in a comic situation whereby he denies his exalted royal position contending that he is a king only on land and not on air. The joke also takes a satirical swipe at the Nigerian Police Force who are often in the habit of collecting tips from innocent citizens. The joke presupposes that a typical Nigerian police officer is in the habit of exploiting the innocent citizens entrusted in their care.

The jokes presented so far are largely satiric in tonality and content. They ridicule the excesses of the different tiers of leadership in Nigeria. In this sense, Ali Baba serves as an ideal social activist and political watchdog of the Nigerian society. The jokes portray Nigeria as a country where there is incessant inconsistencies and dislocations in the body politic which have in turn, occasioned functional malapropism and socio-economic stagnation. The change imperatives in these jokes are drawn mainly from the satirical treatment which Ali Baba has injected into them since satire, characteristically, lampoons and ridicules in order to bring about social change.

Conclusion

The idea which this paper has put across is that Nigerian stand-up comedy transcends making us to laugh and goes as far as serving as critical commentary on the anomalies and chicanery that characterize the Nigerian political landscape. The study has also brandished Ali Baba as a political satirist whose jokes lampoon and ridicule eccentric dispositions and social

excesses of societal and influential figures in Nigeria. It has also been established in the study that one of the reasons why Ali Baba gets away with it even after making parody of those in power is because of the humorous tonality with which his jokes are delivered.

As a consequence of the above, the need arises for stand-up comedy to be given visibility in the nation's secondary and tertiary educational curricula. This would, in no small measure, help to improve the standard of stand-up comedy in theory and practice. There is also the need for governmental intervention which should come by way of creating the enabling environment for live theatre culture in Nigeria to thrive. This includes addressing thorny issues that engender insecurity in the society. It is common knowledge that theatre practice cannot flourish in an environment or society that there is breach in security operations. It cannot be over emphasized that there is the need for the formation of a formidable guild of stand-up comedians' in Nigeria.

Another peculiar point to note is that the emergence of stand-up comedy as a vibrant means of entertainment in Nigeria has occasioned a major boost for live theatre culture in Nigeria. Since its inception as an emergent popular culture, it has continued to serve one social purpose or the other. However, the most paramount advantage of stand-up comedy in Nigeria is the economic advantage since it is partly responsible for the livelihood of a generous number of youths who would have hitherto, resorted to such criminal past times as kidnapping, armed robbery, bunkering, obtaining by tricks and cyber fraud among others. In terms of its relevance to the change mantra, it becomes imperative to observe that satiric content in the jokes of Ali Baba and his contemporaries create some form of social consciousness among the citizenry by drawing their attention to the excesses in Nigeria's body politic. This underscores Barzun's submission that the inherent danger in arts as a medium for the expression of man's intuitive feelings and experiences goes beyond its potency to dignify and exalt a civilization or political system for, arts could weaken or destroy it. It could also precipitate a revolution or betray a struggle by the way citizens are sensitized and tuned. (qtd. in Adeniran 21).

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