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Dramaturgy of Activism: Austen-Peter's 'Man Enough' and Fafunwa's 'Hear Word' in Discourse

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Abstract



Theatre activism is kaleidoscopic as it advocates for various issues in society with a universal trajectory - Change. In all aspects ranging from political to social, cultural, or economic, the main line of discourse transcends reprimanding, advocating with a provocative tone to alienate and instruct the audience, steering a course of action in society. It is however observed that in searching for the immediate ephemeral actions of laughter, tears, and jeers, many directors ignore the dramaturgical influences of performances based on the magnitude of the psychological and after-effects of such sociological events. This research, therefore, interrogates the directorial interpretations of Bolanle Austen-Peters and Ifeoma Fafunwa in the staging of 'Man Enough' and 'Hear Word' respectively. These selected works are analyzed and juxtaposed against the concept of theatre activism with an emphasis on the implication of

theatrics and subtexts, particularly in the dialogues of the works. The study employs Diana Taylor and Kershaw Baz's theoretical perspective which suggests that to judge the efficacy of performance, instead of using the audience and questionnaires which in the past are inconclusive, one should judge with the conditions of the performance as it is most likely to provide "efficacious results". The study shows, therefore, that dialogue constitutes an important aspect of communication; hence, the message, as well as underlying associations, must likewise be structured for clarity in the avoidance of misinformation or misplaced priority.

Keywords: Dramaturgy, theatre activism, performance, cultural identity, Nigeria

Introduction

At the end of the performance of "Man Enough", I witness the audience laughing as the protagonist contemplates suicide. Likewise, as I watch the narration of the sexual abuse scenario of an underage girl in "Hear Word", I cannot express my bewilderment hearing raucous laughter from the auditorium as the scene ends with a blackout. I started to ask what these two performances have in common; a room full of cold-blooded humans, a dramaturgical error or it is just a twenty-first-century world where people laugh at the face of tragedy. Fisher (2020) explains dramaturgy as a "creative structure" that "addresses the decisions of structural component" ... and "points to the directorial decisions that frame a play's performance" (p. 4). On the other hand, theatre activism has experienced its fair share of structural changes over the years from the avant-garde techniques of breaking the fourth wall that enhances audience participation and engagement; to community-focused theatre activism that takes theatre right to the environment where change is needed like theatre of the oppressed of Augusto Boal. Theatre activism is a broad subject with no rigid doctrines, but some theoretical concepts and ideologies have shaped the plays and performances that catalyze change. Theatre activism is not restricted to a genre rather it cuts across different forms like applied theatre, theatre of protest, tribunal theatre, theatre of the real, theatre for development, documentary theatre, theatre of fact, theatre of truth, verbatim theatre, social justice theatre, civic engagement theatre, theatre of the oppressed and many more. While the reactions of audience members cannot be controlled or emphatically predicted; the role of dramaturgy is to architect the foundation of a play giving it a solid dramatic composition and representation for a nuanced outcome. This

paper analyzes the performances of Bolanle Austen-Peters's *Man Enough* and Ifeoma Fafunwa's *Hear Word* with a focus on the meanings produced by the live performances on stage through a performance studies lens.

Diana Taylor and Kershaw Performance Theoretical Perspectives

Diana Taylor (2007) in *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, posits the efficacy of performance in deciphering and producing knowledge, memory, and identity. Further, she affirms that performance “serves as a methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance” establishing it as an epistemology (pp. 2-3). Although performance is theatre and theatre is a performance, theatre is just one of the various events that fall under performance. Richard Schechner (1985) defines performance as “twice-behaved behavior” and stretches the types to include weddings, football games, and funerals- any reiterative action (p. 36). Taylor (2007) gives a distinctive difference between the two saying that “theatricality strives for efficaciousness and not authenticity (p. 13)”. This means that in a situation where the play is for example a documentary theatre with the notion of truth at its core, the director or writer may edit, select, and discard for message clarity. Taylor dismantles the adoption of Western logocentrism to analyze embodied practices and nuances of the non-western systems, rather, she suggests scenarios as the lens to theorize non-western epistemes emphasizing the language of the non-westerns. “Again, as with the dramaturgical model, the linguistic emphasized the cultural agency at work in the use of language” (p. 7). Quoting J.L Austin, Taylor questions how we are doing things with words because Austin (1975) believes that “issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action (p. 6)”. This dramaturgical model provides the lens in which to critically analyze the use of language within the environment in which plays were created. To further support Taylor’s war against Eurocentrism and Western logocentrism, a Western audience would not likely decipher the meanings and adverse implications of language as applied in non-Western plays.

Practically, activism is relative as there are different methods people adopt; from barricading a toll gate to seek justice and retribution for the killings and disappearances of the youths defiantly chanting “ENDSARS!!!”, invading a place and catching the dwellers unaware to capture their attention, to just sitting quietly inside the air-conditioned auditorium and watch a radical performance unfolds. All these forms can be classified as activism if it is intentional and driven towards a mission - Change. However, Madison (2010) highlights some pertinent questions when conducting activism;

How do activists utilize performance as a tactic in their work for human rights and social justice? How do these tactical performances of public protests emerge into varied modes of performative gestures and actions? How do advocacy and ethics become inseparable factors in Ethnographic, transnational performances? What makes radical performances radical? How is political economy implicated in radical performance? In addressing these questions, the relevant terms become: "tactics and emergence," "advocacy and ethics," and "radicalism and political economy." (p. 2)

Judging from the above, performances are expected to be relevant, deliberate, and concise and most importantly must cater to "communal yearning" in the society. In line with performance and its social efficacy, Kershaw (2002) analyses it as an ideological transaction between a company of performers and the community of their audience; the mode of encoding and decoding signifiers during the performance is somehow symbiotic, which becomes a transaction as the actors and audience depend on each other's behavioral responses, to take the play from beginning to the end. On the contrary, Dolan (2001) simply relates performance activism as a practice that lets us rehearse new social arrangements in ways that require visceral investments of time, personal, and cultural history (p. 6). This definition further supports Boal's (2000) statement that theatre is not revolution but rehearsal towards the revolution itself (p. 161). The process of reenactment or 'rehearsing' either on stage or on the street is the first step to getting one closer to achieving the cause and that is how activism begins.

Activism: A Critical Perspective

Activism as a word projects two sides of a coin. It's either in support of a phenomenal and revolutionary cause or vice versa. Merriam Dictionary encapsulates activism as "a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue". Elam (2003) gave an illustration of the efficacy of theatre activism with *Lysistrata* where spectators were able "to agitate for peace symbolically, creatively, and practically, testifying to the unique nature of the theatrical event" (p.3). Just by reading, the play created an immediate peaceful resolution for an impending Iraq conflict in 2003. This act of activism brought the world to a still with the participation of fifty-six countries through the reading and performances of the play by various troupes, repertories, and individual bodies all around the

globe. Since the play's inception in Ancient Rome, it continues to comment on contemporary conflicts questioning cultural history and the need for a revolutionary change but most significantly, addressing a social cause- War. Therefore, activism in whichever method "propels" people to act with a sense of urgency to a particular social cause (pp. 3-4).

Regardless, questions such as whether a radical and reactionary response from the audience leads to actual change in society continue to be an ongoing object of discourse among scholars. Although Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt*; a "politically-motivated" technique was used to steer changes in society, its effects on judging the responses outside the theatre, have changed and evolved significantly. However, there were iconic responses within the theatre that trail history up to date; the performance of *Slave Ship* by Amiri Baraka by the Free Southern Theater in 1968 provides a graphic illustration of these iconic responses in Felner's (2006) article;

During an enacted slave auction, female slaves were stripped topless and thrust at white men in the audience, who were asked what they thought the women were worth. Many white audience members were so disturbed by this aggressive confrontation with history that they left at the midpoint; others wished they had. At the end of the piece, cast members, invoking black power movements, invited black audience members to join them in encircling the white audience, while shouting for violent revolution. At many performances, black audience members, feeling empowered by the performance, joined the cast in shouting and intimidating white spectators. Many white audience members felt threatened and angry that they had paid to be abused, or felt helpless to express their sympathy with the blacks in an atmosphere of hostility. This play was meant to provoke different responses from different audience members to teach the lessons of history, and racial background could not help but influence the audience's experience of the play (p. 30).

In recent times, there has been a decline in political drama with radical dramatizations like that of *Slave Ship* due to various factors; for one, Chinna's accusatory statement that the place of postmodernism is to move on to the next "new" thing and response to late capitalism (p. 18) resonates the drastic shift in the proliferation of the act of activism which Madison emphasizes is based on tone. Furthermore, the likes of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht,

popularly known as the most renowned exponents of the twentieth-century political drama amongst many others, came from a country where tyranny and the degradation in humanity was the order of the day. This raises the question of whether the urge and inspiration to produce can only blossom in the face of terror and abject abuse of law and power like that of Russia and Germany amongst others. This, therefore, calls for retrospect, does that mean the reclining of such performances is a result of global peace and order the society now enjoys? or the world has just decided to move to the next “new” thing?

On the other hand, pushing the act of activism also brings about consequences. Records of artists and scholars who engage in attacking the status quo face retributions and death at the hands of the opposition or attacked parties. This led to counter-productivity of the subject as a thematic concern due to threats, arrest, and exile in the 1960s. Moreover, dramatists start to adopt new terms and techniques in advocating relaying the subtleness of such performances by sugarcoating and veiling the messages so as not to get arrested. Historically, the majority left that line of theatre embracing entertainment to earn and feed their families. Currently, with the invention of smart devices, globalization, and digital theatre; freedom of speech and media coverage have restored stability and power to the people; the latest observable political instrument has since shifted to social media memes; a comical representation of salient issues in words and pictorial illustrations like that of newspaper caricatures. A significant example is the Pro-Democracy Belarus struggles that skyrocketed in 2020 and have left some theatre makers displaced or in exile for their Free Theatre advocacy against the Belarusian government like Andrei Kureichik's *Insulted Belarus* and *Voices of Belarus*.

Activism in the Nigerian Contemporary Theatrical Space

Ogunbiyi's (1975) prophetic summation of what Nigerian theatre ought to further prove the need for a theatre with purpose and how performance activism cannot be separated from a country's history as it's the bedrock on which theatre lies at every heart of each country;

The Kind of theatre we speak of here is not a cathartic one where the masses of people get a chance to get their bitterness and frustration off their chests. Neither is it the type of theatre where the people are presented with prescribed solutions to their problems. This is, in a manner reminiscent of the best of Bertolt Brecht, a theatre where the people are challenged to look critically at their situation and

compelled to want to change it, a theatre that will debunk the myth that reality is unchangeable and the world cannot be transformed. Far from being the passive recipients of finished products, the “audience” is acutely engaged in the production of meaning. (p. 43).

Arguably, while many scholars continue to resound that one can't judge the efficacy of performances, the reactionary responses of the government can be used as the first point of contact. For instance, Hubert Ogunde in his performance of *Yoruba Ronu* (1964); an allegoric piece that captures the political rivalry between Chief Awolowo, and his former deputy; Chief Akintola, calls for the people of the western region to unite again to become the formidable force they were known for. During the performance, the traitor in the story; Chief Akintola, who won the election at that time and happened to be watching this performance, recognizes that he had been attacked and walked out of the theatre with his supporters- he went ahead to ban the theatre troupe from performing in the western region. It wasn't until a new military regime took over, which resulted in the death of Chief Akintola, that Ogunde's troupe was allowed to perform in the western region. This particular performance remains a constant reference when discussing activism in contemporary Nigerian theatre.

Many performances fall under activism for their attributes and subject matter. For instance, the guerrilla theatre mode of reenactment is termed political and reactionary due to its “attention-getting” means of arousing interest in pertinent issues. For example, Wole Soyinka is popularly called a liberation for his oral and dramatic genre of revues producing performances with strong political themes commenting on current issues. His revues, *My Father's Burden*, *The Night of the Hunted/The House of Banigaji*, and others raise pertinent dichotomies in the Nigerian political corridors and humanity's degradation at the hands of stoic traditions and belief in witchcraft. In his interview with Harry Kreisler, Soyinka clarifies the usual mix-up of activism terms and the sole functionality of its cause;

What I call “guerrilla theater” [sic] for instance, can respond immediately. Some people call it living theater, some people call it Newspaper Theater. Whatever it is, street theater, it can respond immediately to both events and the changing pattern of events. It responds to the dynamics of any situation (pp. 2-12)

Consequently, by responding to the dynamics of situations, artists were arrested, detained, exiled, tortured, jailed, or killed. To sum up, these statements only prove that the magnitude at which activism is inculcated into the performance

differentiates between what can be termed “radical” activism. That is, many performers to stay alive must have buried the overriding message deep into the dramatic piece so as not to be the target of the law, which left the continuum research question of whether truly activism works beyond the theatre after the ephemerality and reactions within. The question should rather be whether the performance is well-indoctrinated to be called a radical performance with specific deliberate dialogues and interjections that are tactical and highly relevant with the right tone, or whether they are for commercial purposes.

Activism in Bolanle Austen-Peters’ *Man Enough*

The play *Man Enough* is a sociological drama that addresses the travails of man in a capitalist world with a subtle political undertone shedlighting police misconduct and corruption. Discussing with the director after the performance, she highlights that the purpose of the play was to draw attention to the challenges men face, trying to be there for every member of their family all in the name of being “enough” for everyone but themselves; leading to adverse effects like suicide. The general assumption is that “men don’t cry” and must “act like a man”. The themes discussed in the plays include; suicide, poverty, bad economy, internet fraud, infidelity, class struggle, abuse of power, police misconduct, bribery and corruption, and oppression at the workplace. The play features eight physical characters whose attributes address the strong thematic issues in the performance;

- i. Bruno a very rich business mogul, stands for class struggle, abuse of power, infidelity, power intoxication, self-esteem, and its adverse effects, jungle justice, etc.
- ii. Onyilo; a young man on the receiving end of capitalism projects the themes of abject poverty, marital issues, abortion in marriages due to financial difficulty, perseverance
- iii. Thino a major character with seemingly minor character traits disappearing before the eyes of the researcher due to his weakness from problems depicts the strong theme of suicide, oppression at the workplace, psychological effects of family, and societal pressure.
- iv. Enitan; Onyilo’s Wife projects the place of women in the home as subordinates to husbands, the female gender as a property to be owned and cared for solely by the man, African notion of bride price and its effects

v. Suzan; Bruno's wife just like her husband projects the saying "birds of the same flocks together" with socio-vices and sentimental intent towards good deeds.

vi. Okombo's character projects the role of an oppressor in the workplace.

vii John's character; (a character that wasn't seen on stage) tackles the subject of internet fraud by youth in Nigeria and the bribery and corrupt business of the police force.

viii. Rajesh's character just like the Lords and Colonialists in the name of imperialism continues to exploit the masses with a new modern-day term called globalization.

ix. Mama stands for the pressure the society puts on men in the family regardless of their situation.

Techniques Adopted in *Man Enough*

One of the major techniques that work for activism is addressing the audience directly. This technique is evident in the works of Brecht, Boal, etc. This not only captures the attention of the spectators, but it breaks the illusion of the fourth wall which according to Boal is the first object of oppression. The three major characters; Bruno, Onyilo, and Thino had most of their dialogues one-on-one with the audience and this ubiquitous method led to symbiotic interrelated dialogues between the audience and actors even though the fourth wall, in this case, was still obvious and firm, as they speak from an elevated platform to a room filled with over 300 people with no possibility of an eye-to-eye contact due to the darkness that envelops the rooms except the stage.

The plays fulfill the techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed whereby it creates awareness towards "politicization of gender, class, race, family, and/or psych" (82), delineating the characters of Bruno and Onyilo through the use of narrative technique paints the struggle between the lower and the upper class. The Former drunk with too much power and wealth is now being hunted for his weaknesses and fear of losing it;

I hate competition man, I kill it in any way possible! Until I'm the only one standing on top of the ladder. They say the top is lonely. But I don't mind loneliness as long as I am rich.

On the other hand, Onyilo told his wife to get an abortion because of financial constraints.

A philosophical glance at Boal's technique on the aspect of psychodrama was aimed towards adapting people to the existing social system while his work was directed toward enabling protest changing oppressive social mechanisms and offering healing powers in a socio-political sense. For instance, the character of Thino- his indignation in the hands of the family further opens up what goes on in his head and gives the spectators who the oppressors are;

Being a man takes everything from you

It takes your time

It takes your rest

They take your finance

I am the camel working so hard, yet seeing no reward for my hard work.

Because I am not my own master; the people who made me take all from me

Taylor (2007) posits that "scenarios exist as culturally specific imaginaries—sets of possibilities, ways of conceiving conflict, crisis, or resolution—activated with more or less theatricality (p. 13)". Distracters however took everything from the issues being tackled with character's dialogues that are loaded with comical effects "watering down" the moment of truth. The theme of empathy and moment of reconciliation was filled with comments from the audience like "only you""wetin happen" and raucous laughter as Thino narrates his ordeal and travails. His use of words like "But I will rise O" with similar patterns is evident in Austen-Peters's play "Wakaa The Musical" a satirical play with a strong political scene and graphical depiction of Nigerian decadence. Retrogressively, the play supposedly a show of patriotism and advocacy for change in the political affairs of Nigerian became a depiction of buffoonery trivializing the issues, thereby leading to raucous laughter and jeers across the hall; highly of importance in the reactions of government officials present in the hall cheering as a comical depiction or imitation of political leaders stealing and laundering unfolds.

The concept of dark play narratives, where the last momentous action is left to the audience to decide, is the height of experimental drama. It resonates with Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman's (1994) words that "the richest and most productive way to work with oppressed groups is to help them find their voice,

not to speak for them" (p 35). The concept of politics in every performance is to change the nature or attitude of their audience members to make better choices in the future, therefore leaving the way the story is to end to them, giving them a better understanding of their responsibilities in the society where they live. Ironically, the decision of choice was trivialized with an infidelity issue rather than the macro-level issues that project the degradation of the Nigerian state of rule of law, where employees are dehumanized and physically abused to the point where they commit suicide; like the case of Thino in the play.

Looking at the thematic concerns of the play, it is indeed a serious play talking about delicate issues like Suicide, poverty, abortion, etc. However, more attention seems to focus on trying to make the audience laugh as much as possible as if they were trying to make the audience forget that Thino committed suicide, which is what is *modus operandi*. A credible mention is the play "I Won't Mind My Business" by Toyosi Morgan, the director replays the typical reactions of Nigerians to incidents happening in the country, however, the director points it as a decadence that must be fixed, not by playing to the audience as performed in *Man Enough*. Playing to the audience, with utterances that bring about laughter, takes away from the message that is been passed at that moment. That said, the performance however still puts the issues silently in the minds of the audience according to the director, in my discussion with her after her show where I frankly asked her if she thinks the messages were successfully delivered based on the audience's reactions. Nonetheless, the perception of seeing men as metallic objects with no emotions was unveiled, and acceptance of the male counterparts as human beings and should be treated just like the opposite sex was established. All the male characters through dialogues emotionalize the realities of men and not the perception of what a man ought to be.

Activism in Ifeoma Fafunwa's *Hear Word*

Hear Word relates to the life experiences of women and girls in a patriarchal society. Through a monologue technique, it narrates the ordeals of women in the hands of their predatory- men and the parts women also play in tying down their female counterparts instead of advocating girl-power and engaging in human trafficking. The play debuted in 2013 and has since become an annual event to advocate and educate the masses on issues relating to women. I watched them play in 2014 at the National Theatre, Iganmu Lagos, and in 2018 December at Muson Centre, Onikan respectively. The play maintains ninety-nine percent of its content in those two times I participated as an audience member with four

years in between, the only observable change was some members of the cast were changed. Directed by Ifeoma Fafunwa and the theatre company iOpenEye production owned by the director, it has toured locally and intentionally since its inception. Each character represents and addresses issues as subject matters rather than characters with names and personifications.

Techniques in *Hear Word*

The play opens with a chant in Yoruba language reprimanding the act of abusing women irrespective of who they are; Mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, friends. The use of chant as the medium of protest declares that it is unacceptable for women to allow themselves to be “degraded” or “abused”. The Chanter (Debbie Ohiri) calls attention to the severity of the issues to be discussed preparing us for what is about to unfold. The beginning sets the play’s tone as a platform to provoke and inspire action for women. The chant is tactical and deliberate projecting a radical front to the fight for women’s equality. It was well-conceived with the specific function and purpose, especially the casting of all-female actors. The performance was methodically arranged: from the coordination of choreographed movements by the women, with dramatic monologues and graphic storytelling format, to the synchronization of the percussion and the chants, to the pivotal moment of rally protest by the women as they take a stand against gender inequality and abuse resonating the performance as “the people’s theatre” filled with heroic acts of activism.

Artistically, the imagery pattern of the theatre was dominant with pantomimic dramatization, picturization, and stylized movement. The movement was intentional, defined, and dramatized as a rendition by one of the actresses unfolds just like the “parallel action” of the Newspaper Theatre (a Boal’s technique that creates graphical imagery of scenarios for clear understanding by the actors and spec-actors using their bodies as the props). The director utilizes abrupt gestures and words to end each scene with a sharp blackout. This highly intentional directorial style leaves an eerie feeling as if the whole auditorium is holding its breath for what is to come next.

The dramatic composition of African culture and nuances elevates meanings. Interjections were deliberate and heavily loaded with comic satire and sarcastic linguistic terms. The sitting positions depict the African ideology of the “gathering of elders” as it features the older cast of the actresses. This significant dramatic stand sheds light on the static position where elders sit to continually body shame and use derogatory words on women counterparts; a common

term “Ashewo” meaning prostitute was chorused at intervals. This scene actively points fingers at the ideology of the Yoruba proverb; *Àgbà kí wà lojà kórí ọmọ titun wo* (An elder who is not present at a market permits a child’s head to rest askew). However, such is not the case in society today, where elders use their position as older ones to abuse, chastise, and dehumanize the younger generations. For years, respect for the elders perpetuated abuse due to the African beliefs and the fear of “terrestrial or supernatural retribution” of a mythical curse that strikes anyone who disrespects their elders..

Furthermore, the play transcends into a revolutionary phase with a unified chorus “Hear Word” as lines calling attention to the ills and problems in the communities. By reciting lines together, a formidable stand with invocations and provocations at different levels draws the play to the crescendo to provide, incite, and retaliate. This reflects them as activists in a momentary community of mutually empowering comrades as they collectively chorus “Hear Word” during the rally. A technical element that supports the action providing evidence of cultural significance was the use of Ankara; an African textile print full of colors by all the cast from the beginning of the play to the end. This graphic artistic element resonates with the idea of feminism and a highly structured protest which Kutz-Flamenbaum (2007) called “Performance Activism” by enacting conflicting forms of gendered behavior (p. 91) which is a defining moment in Forum theatrical performances.

Forum theatre provides the platform to explore behavioral responses in scenarios or environments that stand in one’s way. A statement uttered by the character about to be raped by her Aunty’s finance- “I should have fried the dodo”- was however misdirected. First, it instigates the act of rape as penance for refusing to obey the predator’s instruction. Typically when one is in a bad fit, emotions tend to run wild while the victim tries to psychologically make sense of what is happening, however, that point in the play is significant and reveals the mind of prey, but in reality, it shouldn’t be what is said because the only message passed was she is suffering as a result of her disobedience to fry dodo (plantains) for the guest that arrived unannounced at their doorstep. Therefore, focusing on the immediate embodied obstacle that a protagonist faces, the behavior provides alternatives unless regret is the solution. For instance, if one refuses to visit the doctor and now suffers a disease that is too late to be cured, such a protagonist can say “Oh I should have gone to see the doctor earlier enough”. Playing to the audience and playing to activism are entirely different and should be portrayed accordingly to avoid misrepresentation.

HearWord is a Forum Theatre without the intervention, so there was no avenue to disarm the oppressor collectively by the protagonists- however, there were joint declarations and utterances made towards the end of the play revealing what needs to be done- but was somewhat rushed because it seems like they were trying to close the play to meet with the duration of time. This analytical process resonates with the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, Mikhail Bakhtin, Paulo Freire, and Bertolt Brecht. Schmanz (1988) warns that each person must determine who the enemy is and how, given one's personal and social circumstances, to combat this enemy in the case of the character that was about to be molested by her aunt's finance (p. 80).

In praxis, through techniques, one can identify the type of play or activism that a director has adapted to communicate a case. Using Kershaw's statement that what makes a performance an act of activism is that it focuses on a social cause, the play Hear Word had a strong theme through which various stories of the same issue were relayed-women oppression in a patriarchal world. Collectively, it narrates the experience of women at the hands of domestic violence, women trafficking, girl-child sexual abuse and molestation, and injustices at the hands of culture and traditions guiding an African woman or the girl-child. The director using the power of reenactment is the reason why psychiatrist and trauma specialist Judith Herman remarks that one of the most important goals in recovery is to put the story, including its imagery into words (9). Therefore, the monologues of ten women narrating their ordeals revealed their state of mind, which Freud (1997) calls an "essential form for remembering and articulating" trauma (p. 29).

Highlights, Observations, and Recommendations

In 2018, the suicide news of a male doctor who jumped into the third mainland bridge in Lagos Nigeria went viral. Since the incident, there have been reported cases of attempted suicides stopped by the police patrol stationed on the bridge by the state government. This ignited social media awareness and conversations on the issues of suicide in Nigeria. The role of Thino was specifically to shed light on the travails and societal pressure men go through. However, the dialogues depicted a version of a man all he does is talk about his problems and then end it with "This is just for a while. I will rise to be what God wants me to be. E go better. As long as God is on the throne, e go better". The intentions of the director at this point are provoking two things; either it is lampooning Nigerians by calling the attention of people into taking life decisions into their own hands and not wait

for spiritual signs or it's mimicking the African dogmatic beliefs in crusades and religious fanatics that rely on their pastors and visions in everything they do.

Addressing the audience was intentional and direct but gimmicks and strong effort to make them laugh with deliberate words that sent raucous laughter through the auditorium relate the idea of the perception of Nigerian leaders like Dino Melaye, Oshimole, and Senator Adeleke that continues to create comedy and dramatic attacks to their opponent with songs and dances, and in the process distracting the citizens from the impoverished condition of its country. Thino's dialogue relates a picture of a man looking for self-pity however just like the real world that doesn't care about what you go through, the audience laughs at him as he expresses his ordeals and misfortune in a capitalist world. By playing to the audience, some events like that of the lady narrating a rape incident in *Hear Word* results in boisterous laughter across the auditorium. And at that point, the role of the play as a platform to discuss suicide and its effects wasn't well defined.

The thematic focus of the act of activism was submerged in theatrics. While *Hear Word* drives a strong storytelling technique with experiences that made the auditorium gasp at the revelation of a cultural tradition where husbands offer their wives to visitors as a sign of goodwill, the highlight of *Man Enough* which was supposed to be the point where Thino commits suicide was destroyed, as we were distracted by the conflict between two men over the infidelity of a woman. The act of activism was rather missing than silenced due to the misplaced priority of the director. Also, the adoption of a childlike voice in the place of the actor, Odenike in *Hear Word*, a lady in her 30s turns out to become a comic relief due to the high pitch childlike voice the director adopted to portray an incident being narrated by a child about rape.

In contemporary theatre, the role of dramaturgs is increasingly becoming indispensable for navigating the complexities of representations and audience reception within play production but the Nigerian theatre is yet to catch on. A glance at Nigerian theatre programmes solidifies this claim as the position is rarely included. In Lahr's (2016) interview with playwright Tony Kushner, Tony aptly notes that "Dramaturgs serve as both custodians of the text and ambassadors to the audience, ensuring that the playwright's intentions are conveyed effectively." (p. 26). By accepting the involvement of dramaturgs, Nigerian theatre director can benefit from their expertise in analyzing text, historical context, and thematic coherence, thus enriching the production

process. Moreover, Elinor Fuchs (1982) emphasizes, "Dramaturgs contribute to the creation of layered, multi-dimensional representations that resonate with diverse audiences (p. 45)". Through collaborative engagement with dramaturgs, Nigerian theatre makers can manage representations, ensuring that the production engages with social, cultural, and political complexities while fostering meaningful audience connections. Therefore, integrating dramaturgs into play production is not only a prudent choice but a transformative one that enhances the artistic integrity and reception of theatrical works.

Conclusion

Schutzman (2007) warns that one should not evaluate work based on the quantity of political activism it stimulates but with techniques through which the work yields tangible results that are mostly private; (change in subjective reasoning), in one-to-one relationships, or perhaps with one's family or work associates (p. 80), the play *Man Enough* is a minimalistic play that speaks for men, but the display of digital montage was underutilized. Instead of the montage to add to the strong theme of suicide and injustice, they were used to project mere locale taking away from the message but adding to the richness of theatre and its splendor, and just like Grotowski said, 'rich in flaws'. Through its theatre company iOpeneye, *Hear Word* continues to empower women by staging community engagements in marginalized areas, organizing workshops, and taking international tours to campaign for women's equal rights and visibility. A play as radical and rich in storytelling as *Hear Word* should not play to the audience with the last utterances made by the character in place of Odenike Odetola. Reports of Child rape show that 82.2% of the victims are families and friends (p. 182) and the coercive culture is perpetuated by psychologically transferring guilt from the predators to the prey that they are the ones to be blamed for the heinous act. *Hear Word* did not disarm the monstrous narrative. The aim to provoke, to show and tell, enact and communicate a "response" with the hope the audience would feel compelled to do more, to learn more, think more, and effect change about their society was achieved and just like Boal's terms, they were both 'the people's performance'; however dramaturgically misappropriated.

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