African Performance Review
Vol. 3, Nos 2-3, 2009
pp 95-113

Femi Osofisan, Youth and Performance in Nigeria's Democracy: The Transformative Theatre Paradigm

Tor Iorapuu
Department of Theatre & Communication Arts
University of Jos, Nigeria

> *"No right is more precious in a free country than that of having a voice in the election of those who make the Laws … other rights, even the most basic, are illusory if the right to vote is undermined"* (Hugo L. Black; qtd in Frank, 2003: 38).

Abstract

Nigeria's history of political struggle cannot be written without the mention of the roles of the Nigerian youth. Even during worst military dictatorships the Nigerian youth made remarkable sacrifices, contributions to policies and decisions including protesting against insensitive government actions generally. Femi Osofisan and other dramaturges have recognised and demonstrated in their works the immense potential of young people to positively add value to the issues of social change, including leadership and governance in their immediate communities. Like Augusto Boal (1979), Osofisan recognises 'theatre as a weapon and also acknowledges that the people own the instrument'. However, this paper steps beyond the box of textual analysis to demonstrate in a pragmatic manner the views of Osofisan regarding the imperativeness of theatre for social change in a democratic setting. The persistent issues of social inequalities, deprivation, deliberate unemployment policies, corruption, which of course dehumanise mostly young people and women, authorise a change in strategy for the theatre. To achieve this, the paper examines the roles of young people in the 2007 general elections using the paradigm of transformative theatre as a voice for social action and mandate protection in some parts of North Central Nigeria.

Introduction

> Has the theatre medium we inherited really been altered, and truly radicalised, when our plays still operate within the same basic conceptions of theatrical space, and require the same production procedures, to fulfil themselves?
> (Osofisan, 2001:95)

This essay is structured in four parts: the first part, *Opening Conversations*, is an overview of significant perspectives and trends that authorise the import of the paper. The second part, *Femi Osofisan Speaks*, focuses on the thematic preoccupation in Femi Osofisan's works. The interest here is in the connection between drama, democracy and issues of social action. The aim is to explore the paradigm and praxis of Theatre for Transformative Change. This interest leads to the third part, *The Theatre for Transformative Change Paradigm: How Young People stood for Democracy in Nigeria.* Borrowing from the theories of Bertolt Brecht, Paulo Freire, Augusto Boal and Femi Osofisan, the paper demonstrates how young people stood for democracy in some parts of Nigeria using the concept of Theatre for Transformative Change. This paradigm is informed by Osofisan's fundamental question regarding the possibilities of 'charting out of novel routes of discovery' as noted in the epigraph above. Consequently, questions of audience involvement, the connection between performers and audience, and performers' social commitment are at the centre of this paper. The last part explores the contributions of artists and writers such as Osofisan in rearticulating history and demystifying hegemonic mythical configurations through collective social action. Thus the paper agrees with the views of Nguyen Dinh Thi and Chinua Achebe respectively that "… our literature is intended to be political, to have a practical application" (qtd in San Juan Jr.), and "the writer cannot expect to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front, for he is after all, the sensitive point of his community" (1973: 4).

Opening Conversations: African Writers and the Quest for Cultural and Political Freedom and Relevance

There are historical and theoretical imperatives that energised and animated the context in which literature and dramaturgy emerged in Africa. African writers wrote and are still writing to revise our distorted

history and of course suggest the direction a new Africa should take. In the past, issues of colonialism and freedom dominated African literature. However, in this postcolonial era, issues of political and economic hegemony, characterised by civilian dictatorship, corruption and the paradox of democracy and capitalism, have become the dominant themes in the works of such African writers as Leopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Lewis Nkosi, Joe de Graft, Sembene Ousmané and Camara Laye.

Eustace Palmer (1982), reacting to the context and content of the African novel with reference to Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, observes that,

> The African novel, generally speaking, is a reaction to the consequences of imperialist occupation and exploitation, a historical process which comprised three phases. First, there was the phase of imperialist conquest with consequent erosion of African values and disruption of traditional society; this was followed by the phase of anti-imperialist rebellion; finally there was the period of post-independence, largely one of readjustment in an attempt to rediscover lost values. (p. 153).

This perception is characteristic of the novels and plays of Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, Joe de Graft, Ola Rotimi and a host of other younger writers. Major themes in the works of African writers include "disruption of the traditional society caused by alien education and religion, liberation and of course the recurrent evils perpetrated in African society by black imperialists" (Palmer, 154). Therefore, the robust production in African literature and writing was aimed at correcting historical misrepresentations and issues of cultural inadequacy that were prevalent among Africans during the colonial era. In this regard, writers and historians like Achebe and Ali Mazrui immediately come to mind. Achebe, commenting on the role of the writer in post-independent Nigeria, argues that "historians everywhere are re-writing the stories of the new nations - replacing short, garbled, despised history with a more sympathetic account … It is necessary because we must begin to correct the prejudices which generations of detractors created about the Negro" (1973: 7-8). Achebe's treatise is a direct response to derogatory perceptions held by some so-called well intentioned Western commentators on Africans that held sway for long:

> Thomas Jefferson, the great theoretician of American freedom believed at least in his active years that "Negroes have a lower grade of talent

> than whites". The poet Kipling said something "about black men being half-devil and half-child". The famous humanitarian Albert Schweitzer sees no reason to doubt that he is the black man's brother; only he thinks of himself as the elder or the 'senior' brother.(p. 8)

Achebe writes that thoughts such as these present the African writer with a great challenge:

> It is inconceivable to me that a serious writer could stand aside from this debate or be indifferent to this argument, which calls his full humanity into question. For me, at any rate there is a clear duty for me to make a statement. This is my answer to those who say that a writer should be writing about contemporary issues - about politics in 1964, about city life, about the last *coup d'etat*. Of course, these are all legitimate themes for the writer but as far as I am concerned the fundamental theme must be disposed of. This theme put quite simply- is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they now must regain. (p. 8)

Ali Mazrui follows the pattern of convergence of nationalism and patriotism demonstrated by Achebe. Mazrui the historian affirms the need for "national assertion as a response to prior national humiliation" (1973: 73). He recognises that "among the factors which contributed to the relegation of the African to a back seat on the cultural train of human history was the absence of writing in the life-style of many African societies" (p. 73). Mazrui is obviously responding to imperial literature on Africa and re-assessing the prevalent stereotypes of African identity among which is the "simple point whether Africa had a history at all" (p. 74). One particular instance is the comment by a Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper. According to Mazrui, in 1963 Trevor-Roper said in a television broadcast in Britain:

> Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness … and darkness is not a subject of history. (p. 74)

Clearly, Trevor-Roper's conception of history is that which is literary: written evidence and records of past lives. The point here, however, is that such comments provoked African writers to write to re-educate,

challenge the imperialist misinterpretation of history and of course enhance cultural rejuvenation. For Mazrui, this was a significant cultural vindication and a huge step to "firmly placing the African on the map of global literary civilisation" (p. 75). These perspectives explain the theoretical imperatives that structured early discourses of African literary writings.

Femi Osofisan Speaks: The Dramatist in Postcolonial, Post Civil War and Military Terror Nigeria

The opening conversations clearly show that the historical trajectories of nationalism and cultural rejuvenation were central to the repositioning of postcolonial African societies. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced several historical epochs: the postcolonial, post civil war and, most recently, post-military eras. Events of these eras provide the context for the emergence of a new cohort of Nigerian radical dramatists. The promises inherent in colonial struggle were not kept; nationalist leaders wasted every opportunity, wasting resources on flashy self-serving projects as politics of animosity replaced that of national interest. The military took advantage, struck, and the journey to the different military dictatorial regimes steadily progressed for almost three decades. The military regimes attacked their own people while they protected the interests of their exploiters and squandered substantial wealth on armaments. A civil war followed these moments of military mishap. This debilitating state of affairs is fittingly described by Soyinka as a "wasted generation" (Osofisan, 2001:8). It is against this culture of waste, despair and seeming hopelessness that Osofisan and his generation react:

> For my generation then, one of the most vital goals was to beat back the growing tides of despair, and to restore our people to optimism and to struggle. We were, do not forget, the generation born into independence, without the complexes of colonialism, and were the beneficiaries of a better education that was more oriented towards our environment. Also, we had had the chance to go on to study in the Europe of the post-World War Two, in which the ideas of socialism and dialectical materialism were fecund. We could see history therefore in a different light from our predecessors, and interpret it as an arena of perpetual struggle and impermanent victories. Hence unlike our elders, we could not accept the tragic resolution prevalent in the works of our eminent predecessors. (pp. 2-3)

Osofisan and other dramatists of his generation, such as Bode Sowande and Kole Omotosho, are said to be the most promising of the post-war generation of Nigerian dramatists (Gbilekaa, 1997: 73) because their works are able to deconstruct mythology and interrogate the process of history. As Olu Obafemi rightly notes, "this development manifests itself in the young playwrights' commitment to the employment of the revolutionary potential of theatre to sharpen, adopt an alternative approach (socialist to be precise) to the obsolescence they find in the body politic of present-day Nigeria, and presenting recipes for social change" (1982:118). Obafemi's observation presupposes both a thematic and ideological departure by this generation from their predecessors. Obafemi argues that the ideological preoccupations in the works of Soyinka and J.P. Clark (Bekeredemo), for example, demonstrate individualistic heroism.

Osofisan is aware of Soyinka's criticism of the African ruling elites in such works as *The Interpreters*, *Kongi's Harvest* and *Opera Wonyosi*, where Soyinka angrily exposes the leaders' hypocrisy and lack of vision (Osofisan, 2001: 19). However, Osofisan feels that these are mere critical expressions of existing realities that do not show the way forward. Therefore, he demonstrates Soyinka's inability to transcend his anger by moving on to show in his own plays the active participation of the other classes of people in the society in the making of history. He states:

> In fact, it has been argued, with some justification I think, that one of the reasons why Soyinka's vision is so tragic is largely due to this area of relative muteness, the absence and the consequent disempowering of the lower classes, of those very elements indeed whom leftist teaching holds to be the actual shapers of history. (19-20)

By implication, Osofisan is responding to the ideological construct in Soyinka's works which was almost silent on the social conditions of the proletariat. In addition, he states, "We playwrights who come after the Soyinka generation aim, gradually, to change all that. We aim to give voice to the active forces of our community, to democratise history, and demonstrate how participation is not only possible, but vital, at every level of society" (21).

And so for Osofisan's generation, the interest was to shift away from the *wasted breed* to the ordinary breed: the majority of the people, "those whose struggles never cease, whose dreams never die and their fire never quench, and who in the end determine the course of history" (p. 23).

Correspondingly, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo had earlier expressed similar ideological positions in the following words:

> … Indeed all-African Literature and its writers is on trial. We cannot stand on the fence, we are either on the side of the people or on the side of imperialism ... We believe that a good theatre is that which is on the side of the people, that which, without masking mistakes and weaknesses, gives people courage and urges them to higher resolves in their struggle for total liberation. (Preface to *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi*, 1976)

Clearly Osofisan has chosen to be on the side of the people. This is evidenced by the choice of characters in his plays. As will be noticed in the next segment of this paper, he and some members of his generation changed the architecture of playwriting, especially for upcoming playwrights in Nigeria.

Transformative Signposts in Osofisan's Plays: Community Organising, Democracy and Participation

> [I]f the theatre must fulfil its vocation as an agent of progress, the dramatists who create it have no option but to pitch their camp on the side of the common people, and against the formidable agents of the ruling classes. (Osofisan, 2001: 88).

From the foregoing, the conscious ideological commitment of the second-generation of Nigerian playwrights, such as Osofisan, Sowande and Omotosho, remarkably championed a distinct sense of new consciousness in literary drama in Nigeria. Issues of corruption, oppression, injustice and tyranny predominantly occupy the plays of Osofisan, and as Gbilekaa notes, they "are about the first body of literary drama that devote their themes to the problems of the peasants and the working class" (1997: 74).

Osofisan has well over twenty published and unpublished plays. Some of his popular plays include: *A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975), *The Chattering and the Song* (1976), *Who is Afraid of Solarin* (1978), *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), *Morountodun* (1982), *No More the Wasted Breed* (1982), *Red is the Freedom Road* (1983), *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* (1986), *Midnight Hotel* (1986), *Altine's Wrath* (1986), *Another Raft* (1989), and *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1991). In these plays recurrent themes of social change, i.e. the radical overthrow of issues that promote social injustice,

dehumanisation, oppression and decay are profound. Equally evident in the plays is the desire to raise audiences' socio-political awareness and to induce interest in the organisation and building of grassroots social movements. Like Amiri Baraka, Osofisan uses cultural forms to fashion out new ways of helping those on the fringe of society to find new ways of knowing the world. Such symbolic cultural forms include "ritual chants, music, songs, gestures, physical action that all serve to convey and compel cultural affirmation and social action" (Elam, 2000: 73). Jean and John Comaroff write that "ritual in fashioning signs can make new meanings, new ways of knowing the world and its meaning" (in Elam, p, 73). The employment of transformative signposts that can persuade the audience to think that the human being is alterable and thus can be transformed, makes Osofisan's works subversive and perhaps intolerable to especially political and military dictatorships. Transformation is a function of knowing; transformation challenges individuals and groups to expand their existing frames so they can improve on their 'traditional' world views. Theatre therefore has that "transformative power" (Elam, 73).

To justify the transformative signposts in Osofisan's works, I examine three plays in order to identify the inherent transformative elements that can provide the kind of sustainable change that Osofisan advocates for (2001: 99).

In *Chattering and the Song* we find a courageous paradigm shift from individual to collective heroism. Firstly, the play deals with a social protest led by a group of informed radical youths challenging the forces of deprivation, corruption and dictatorship. Secondly, the play demonstrates Osofisan's zero-tolerance for autocracy, which is antithetical to democratic values and principles including freedom of expression and the right to choose. Thirdly, and very significantly, the friends Yanji, Mokan, Leje and Sontri constitute themselves into a Farmer's Movement that seeks to actualise social revolution and annihilate corrupt leadership. Here Osofisan speaks through his characters Leje and Funlola:

> Funlola: Why do you want me?
> Leje: The movement needs all capable people. The whole world, you see, is a farm, and all hands must toil both to cultivate it and to eat out of its fruit. (*The Chattering*, p.54).

This short dialogue clearly reinforces Osofisan's concept of collective organisation, mobilisation and heroism. The Farmer's Movement is

comparable to the present day civil society or social movement in Nigeria. The activities of social movements of this nature are critical to attaining rights-based issues everywhere. Social movements have invincible tendencies; they can be visible and invisible depending on the political circumstances of the moment. The events of the tragic annulment of 12 June 1993 elections in Nigeria are relevant to our appreciation of the tasks and roles social movements play in the society.

Morountodun (1982), based on the popular Agbekoya uprising of 1969 in the defunct Western State of Nigeria, is concerned with how:

> Ordinary farmers, in the west of the country, rose up and confronted the state. Maybe you remember? Illiterate farmers, whom we had all along thought to be docile, peace-loving, if not even stupid, suddenly took to arms and began to fight against the government! (p.6).

The protest was an outburst of suppressed anger against unfavourable government tax review policy that was totally unacceptable to the peasant farmers. Again, as in *The Chattering and the Song*, the issues that lead to the struggle are similar: exploitation, betrayal, oppression and of course denial of fundamental rights. As in *The Chattering and the Song*, the roles of young people represented by Titubi remain very instructive; and again, elements of community organising and collective action re-echo just as the dynamism of persuasion, self-sacrifice and brutality find expression in the interplay of opposing forces and ideas.

In *No More the Wasted Breed*, Osofisan demonstrates his anger regarding the waste of human and material resources, a theme seemingly reified by his predecessors. The most important lesson is the courage and quality of resistance that Saluga shows against the exploitative and cannibalistic gods. In very strong terms Saluga questions the capacity and sincerity of the gods to protect their own and passes judgement that since the gods are irresponsive they are responsible for the inaction of their followers.

> Saluga: Tell me, why is it always us who give our lives? Why is it always the poor who are called to sacrifice? Why is it always the wretched, never a wealthy man, never the son or a king, who is suddenly discovered to bear the mark of destiny at difficult moments, and pushed on to fulfil himself in the suicidal tasks? Why?
> Togun: You must ask the gods, who decide such things. Carriers are born.
> Saluga: Yes, born poor. (p. 105)

Saluga asks profound questions aimed at unearthing the root causes of their perpetual poverty, marginalisation and consignment to the status of sacrificial pawns. These fundamental questions hinge on the fundamental rights of the citizenry. Here the young people contest the rationality of offering sacrifices to gods who have abdicated their responsibility. Typical of oppressive structures, Saluga pays for his courage as the angry goddess strikes him dead, but Biokun whom he stood up for fights on. Eventually, there is a contextual change in the perspective of the oppressors as the gods begin to appreciate the thoughts and feelings of the oppressed.

Osofisan believes that by rewriting history he will help to "revise the prevailing historiography, to give voice to the voiceless, and make visible those who have been kept conspiratorially in the margins of history"(2001:21). In addition, he deliberately deconstructs the "extant repertory of mythologies and subjects them to new revisions" (22). Consequently, the symbolic elements such as songs, chants, music and gestures, which give energy to the performance text, in turn invoke participation, community organising and other participatory democratic actions that improve social cohesion. From the three plays discussed, the roles and responsibilities of mitigating social action are recurrent and Osofisan steadily promotes this through a thoughtful cultivation and exploration of ordinary events that require collective action.

It is important to mention that Osofisan's dramatic technique is influenced by the works of Brecht, Freire and Boal. Like Brecht, Osofisan uses the technique of Epic Theatre to subvert myth and history; he bridges the gap between the audience and the stage and demystifies the hierarchy of performers. Like Freire (2000), he uses the concept of "conscientisation" in his drama as an instrument for education. He expects that through the process of demystification of history his audiences and performers will interrogate their social existence and retrace their steps through appropriate actions. In addition, similar to Boal, Osofisan sees his plays as a "rehearsal for revolution," therefore he democratises his approach by empowering the spectator to participate actively in rewriting his reality and by questioning history and the instruments of misrepresentation of history.

Osofisan is gravely concerned that his generation might have also failed the people: "Have we failed then, we radical playwrights, in our

bid to provide popular and effective alternative?" (2001: 99). Even for him, the answers are not quite simple:

> The answer to this question is not clear. In the changing circumstances of our history as a people, it is time perhaps to take another look at the kind of theatre we have sought to manufacture for this audience, and answer the change that some critics are making, whether we have not ourselves become obsolete, precisely because we have not been explosive enough. Perhaps the time has come indeed to re-launch the search for new forms, in the continued quest for a real, revolutionary *transformation* of the medium itself, beyond the "renovations" we have so far carried out, and which some see as yet reformist. (98-99)

The Theatre for Transformative Change Paradigm: Responding to Osofisan's Call

It is partly in response to Osofisan's call for 'effective alternative' and in response to the weaknesses and gaps in the praxis of Theatre for Development (TfD), that the paradigm of Theatre for Transformative Change is emerging as a counter-revolution. Elsewhere I argued that TfD has fundamental loopholes (Iorapuu, 2004, 2008). I suggested that for TfD to enhance sustainable development and transformative action, certain preconditions such as community organising and transformative learning processes, must necessarily be put in place. This is one major step towards re-energising disenfranchised communities. Community organising provides democratic space for debating, negotiating meaning and taking acceptable decisions. Transformative learning empowers people's actions particularly when they are convinced that they, and not anyone else, can change their realities. In this way theatre becomes an instrument, a means for agitating cultural action for sustainable development and not an end in itself (Iorapuu, 2006: 117-118).

The concept of Theatre for Transformative Change (TfTC) is still in the progress of learning and doing. The idea is based on a combination of the pedagogies of Brecht, Freire, Boal and the theory of Jack Mezirow. However, Mezirow's theory of Transformative Learning (2000) is the main body from which the idea of TfTC is generated. Transformative learning takes place when individuals significantly reflect upon their environment and learning (Allen J. Scott, 1978:33). Through intense reflection, individuals transform their thinking and view of the world. Central to this theory is the notion that adults make new meanings of their cultural and contextual experiences. According to Mezirow, we

learn by: elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, or transforming habits of mind. In addition, learning occurs when meaning structures (also known as a "frame of reference") change (18). Scott also admits that "critical reflection assists learners in confronting their political, economic, social, cultural, and religious viewpoints; allowing individuals to become more aware of how these (and others) affect their view of the world" (33).

Using Osofisan's previous plays as examples of reference, we find that Titubi in *Morountodun* has a frame of reference (a fixed habit of mind) about the peasant farmers before her adventure. However, this frame of reference changes as a result of her contact with new realities and experiences. Olokun (god) and Biokun (carrier) in *No More the Wasted Breed* share a similar experience. In these plays, the gods are transformed while Biokun insists on justice. We note that both Titubi and Biokun changed when contextual experiences and perspectives shifted positively to accommodate new ways of thinking. Biokun attempts to resist Saluga's persuasion but the questions asked and the conflicting answers he receives help him to reflect critically. Their new perspective is a function of transformative learning. The characters move beyond conscientisation and the frame of awareness to take revolutionary actions.

Youth and Democracy in Nigeria: Transformative Theatre in Action

This section explores how the youth applied Osofisan's reflections to defend democracy in some parts of Nigeria during the 2007 general elections. In the three plays discussed earlier, Osofisan constructs challenging roles for the youths (see MAMSER *Political Education Manual: Towards a Free and Democratic Society*, 1989). Nigerian youth played significant and patriotic roles during colonial and postcolonial eras. During colonialism, many young Nigerian conscripts died defending British interests. In 1944/45, the students of King's College, Lagos went on strike to protest the attempt by the colonial government to convert the students' dormitories into a barrack for housing the colonial army. As punishment for their brave actions the leaders were enlisted into the army to die fighting British wars. Similarly, Nigerian youth played active roles during the anti-colonial struggle. Some formed the National Youth Movement (NYM), the Zikist Youth Movement. In 1962, the Nigerian university students prevented the Nigerian government from signing the unjust Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact. The agreement would have allowed the British government to leave their soldiers permanently in Nigeria

even after colonial rule. Many Nigerian youths died during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-70). Further, in 1988, Nigerian students in Italy reported the secret dumping of poisonous toxic waste in some parts of the Niger-Delta (see MAMSER Political Education Manual, 1989: 36-37). Therefore, Osofisan is right; the Nigerian youth must not relent. The question however is, who provides the leadership?

Since 1999, Nigeria has had two major elections, in 2003 and 2007. Following persistent education and support to social movements by international agencies to facilitate political education, the 2003 general elections witnessed a comparatively higher level of voter participation than the one of 1999. Notwithstanding, there were issues with the process. Subsequent actions by the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC) and the political class further weakened people's interest in the political process as a whole. As a result, there were fears of voter apathy in the 2007 general elections. Once again, international donor agencies such as the Joint Donor Basket Fund (JDBF) managed by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nigeria, Global Rights Partners for Justice intervened by supporting programmes aimed at public education on election process and the 2006 electoral act.

The views and feelings of the communities were generated through community organising strategies such as Town Hall meetings; listening to specific vulnerable groups, especially women and youth; identifying and meeting with key stakeholders, leaders of associations, community and religious leaders, security agencies. Informal settings such as taxis or even riding on the motor cycle popularly known in the different parts of North Central Nigeria as *achaba* or *okada* or *going* helped immensely with the thinking and feelings of the people about the 2007 general elections. Nevertheless, how did the animators deal with the looming behaviour of likely voter apathy, poor participation of marginalised groups or the possibilities of boycotting the elections in some parts of the region? This is where knowledge of transformative learning theory counts (Iorapuu, 2008:7-9).

- First, the visits to the identified communities in the different states were several rather than a one-off affair. The idea here was to allow the animators appraise the communities, i.e. their cultures, norms, values and other relevant narratives.
- Second, each visit was linked to specific popular education activity. To enable the animators contextualise the community narratives, social education activity based on either of these was

used: environmental issues, HIV/AIDS, and sometimes issues around the girl-child education. Centrally, issues that seem disturbing to the community as identified during the preliminary visits inform the nature of the social education activity that is used.

- Third, the animators recognised and respected the rights, knowledge and attitudes of the people. The activities stated above helped the animators to appreciate the thoughts of the different members of the community. For instance, the animators are able to listen, hear and learn from the community members' certain skills.
- Fourth, through various adult learning processes, the people put themselves on the edge: the learning activities challenged their feelings to reflect on their assumptions and perspectives. The recognitions described in the steps above are derived from a series of interactive activities. Through listening, sharing, dialogue and debates community members are led to question their existing assumptions and perspectives.
- Fifth, so as to understand why it is critical for them to participate in the elections and insist on their votes to be counted, participants were required to critically conduct self-reflection sessions and were challenged to open to alternative viewpoints. On the strength of the earlier steps, the issue of voter apathy and non-participation of women and youth during elections was introduced.
- Sixth, the activities in Step Five enhanced their understanding to see reason why they should revisit their assumptions and perspectives. For instance, many people do not see why they should vote because the people assume that the ruling party and the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) would always manipulate the results.
- Seventh, but with the new frame of mind, they began to act on the revisions: now that they are aware, it is time to carry out concrete and transformed decisions. At this stage the community members and the animators are in agreement. There is a shared understanding of the issues at stake. But to make this understanding more vivid, the pedagogy of theatre is applied. The community and the animators together draw a storyline that narrates the thoughts of the community regarding the issues at stake and this is performed for a larger audience where more

debates and inputs are generated. This action achieves several goals: (i) it helps to build social cohesion for the community; (ii) citizenship and civic education activities are carried out; (iii) in addition to knowledge acquired, it clarifies doubts and refocuses community members for collective and responsive actions.

These steps are still undergoing some critical review. Though several communities in the North Central States of Nigeria experienced the strategy of TfTC between 2006 and early 2007, only one experience is presented here. The Kurudu community, a semi-urban town in Karu near the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, is our learning site. The experience in Kurudu did not begin by invading the community as informed researchers. This would have amounted to an appropriation of their rights. The initial steps included those earlier stated. We clearly informed the community that we were in Kurudu to experience how they learn and practice democracy, and how they were preparing for the 2007 general elections.

In summary, this process opened the market space for deconstructing and constructing new ideas. It was quite an interesting site. Since the last election in 2003, they had not had the opportunity to creatively discuss common problems such as this and so it was a rare moment for many. Women, men and young people spoke strongly and did not mince words about the attitude of politicians generally, particularly those they elected to represent them in 2003. "Now another election is by the corner so as usual they are hovering around us like hawks," according to one embittered elderly woman. The outbursts from community members were enough lessons for the 'local politicians' to sense the anger of their people. However, the TfTC process provided the public space for community members to reflect on their current assumptions and perspectives; judge their actions and decide on whether they wanted to act to revise their assumptions and perspectives or not. This was evident in their contributions. The process of reflecting on assumptions and perspectives led to self-reflection of individual actions as well. The ideas generated were translated into a performance with the community members deciding the story, the characters and the dialogue.

The composition of the drama team was largely of the community members, but dominated by the youth. The process and results confirm Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory. The final performance attracted a huge crowd. Potential political contestants, government

officials, traditional rulers and other political elites were in attendance. The performance took place about three days to the gubernatorial elections and so it was at the peak of political campaigns. Political alliances had been formed. It attracted supporters of the two prominent parties in the community: the People's Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Nigerian Peoples' Party (ANPP). Meanwhile, the supporters defined their space at the arena based on parties they showed sympathy for and anxiously watched the performance. This was a worrying moment for the animators: the fear of the unexpected.

But one moment unified the supporters and the audience. In one of the scenes during the performance, the ballot box was snatched. Spontaneously some members of the audience, including the political supporters (mostly youth though), thinking this was real went after the young man that snatched the ballot box. They did not stop there but challenged the policeman present for dereliction of his duties. It took the intervention of the animators to regain the freedom of the actors (the police man and the ballot box snatcher). The action of the people created another dimension to the debates between the stage and the audience; the drama was temporally paused to interrogate the actions of the community members and the party supporters who by now were united by the performance. Just within a short moment the community members and party supporters assumed several roles: some became electoral managers who condemned the 'electoral officers' for not managing the voting process which led to the snatching of the ballot box; some assumed the judiciary and quickly slammed the police for a shoddy job and publicly took exception to the attitude of politicians who make elections a do or die affair. The young people were not spared in the condemnation. Though a theatrical legislative process, the idea sent a clear message that the electorates are prepared to protect their mandate.

The reality of the experience in Kurudu came to pass during the April 14 elections in Nasarawa State when young people stood up for democracy. The state witnessed very violent reactions from the people in almost all the communities this experiment was carried out. No wonder Boal acknowledges that every rehearsal is a potential for revolution. Similarly, Alinsky (1989) recognises this type of action as a major step in shaping the creative potentials of people as well as helping to define their historical realities. The difference in this approach is that it steadily allows the community to absorb the ideas, interrogate the process and see how it contests with their frames of reference, or supports it. The idea here is about ownership of the process and courageously stepping

beyond the box of awareness. Awareness singularly does not lead to change; translating awareness into action is what leads to transformative and sustainable change.

Femi Osofisan: the Dramatist has spoken

> I am not a liberator. Liberators do not exist. The people liberate themselves. (Che Guevara - Argentinian Revolutionary Leader, 1928-1967)

Theatre for Transformative Change is an instrument of power that provides the connection between drama and democracy where participants articulate and critically reflect on their assumptions and perspectives and act to revise those assumptions and perspectives individually and collectively. I must also add that sustainable development is a function of so many factors: equal opportunities, democratic and political freedom. At the last Conference of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) in Benin, the dominant theme centred on issues of injustice in the Niger-Delta. Osofisan has evidently proven in his works his zero-tolerance for mediocrity, injustice, tyranny and deliberate waste of lives, resources and property under any disguise. Indeed, Nigeria's democracy is in search of social actors that will ensure Nigeria gets a new operating system. Hubert Ogunde is an epitome and example of one social actor that used theatre to voice the dissatisfaction of Nigerians with colonial structures. Fela Anikulapo Kuti used Afro-Music to speak about the ills of military dictatorship in Nigeria and Africa. It is the same charge Osofisan's works bring to youth in particular. As demonstrated in his plays, young people must take up their messianic roles and help to change the existing frames of deliberate injustice and political rascality. This charge is very evident now because young people suffer so many trends that impede their smooth transition to responsive adulthood: HIV/AIDS, unemployment, poor education, migration, conflict and human trafficking; early marriage among teenage girls, failed infrastructures and bad governance are as evident, as creatively contained in Osofisan's works.

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