

Postmodern Dance In Bakare, Ojo Rasaki's *Drums Of War* And *Rogbodiyan*

By

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Introduction

The process of writing a play is considered creative yet technical. It involves a whole lot of processes that are germane to the essence of playwriting. This is done through a thorough research into the culture intended and equally into the society in order to identify the problems and comfortably reflect such in the script. It is not unusual for playwrights to identify with dance in their plays perhaps because of the seriousness of their thematic preoccupation. Many have stayed glued to the use of music as a linkage of scenes and for setting the mood of the play. However, the African richness of culture and tradition and the strong influence of music and dance in it, canvass for a strong use of both in the processes of writing plays. African dance scholars have situated types of African dance to include ceremonial, invocation, war, social, acrobatic, elders, property, occupational, masquerade, maiden, and cult dances. It is almost impossible to write plays without one of these occurrence. This presupposes that identifying with dances in the process of playwriting is a matter of choice and convenience and not that of appropriacy. Abbe (2007, p10) believes that "Dance has always being with man. It has always been part of religion, ritual, drama, education and recreation. As an expression of the doings of man and his society, it documents man's tradition and the changes that occur in a society". Abbe's opinion means that dance should be part of a playwrights' weapon of presenting tradition and culture and the changes that occur within them. Bakare Ojo Rasaki is adept at this, as he creatively weaves music and dance into his plays and thereby creating the consciousness of the need for choreography. Over the years, several theories have been used to interrogate the functionality of dance within its performance mould. Postmodernism as one of such theories becomes the crux of analytical discourse in this work. In essence, this paper discusses

the use of postmodern dance in Bakare Ojo Rasaki's selected plays.

Literature Review

The term postmodern dance has come to mean the utilisation of the body parts in actualising movements that are basically fashioned out of every day activities. According to www.wikipedia.com (2012), "postmodern dance is a 20th century concert dance form. A reaction to the compositional and presentational constraints of modern dance, post modern dance hailed the use of everyday movements as valid performance art and advocated novel methods of dance composition claiming that any movement was dance and any person a dancer (with or without training". This perhaps emphasised the efficacy of pure movement as against heavily stylised and complicated movements which were considered bogous and ambiguous to suitably express some intended messages to the audience then. Stressing the notion of postmodern dance further, Banes (1983, p.113) avers that:

Perhaps even more important than the individual dances given at a Judson concert was the attitude that anything might be called a dance and hooked at as dance; the work of a visual artist, a film maker, a musician might be considered a dance just as activities done by a dancer, although not recognizable as theatrical dance, might be reexamined and 'made strange' because they were framed as art.

The above is considered true because postmodern dance entails envisioning and experimenting various visual components as artistically suitable to the artistic and choreographic intention and purpose. That is why Kaye (1994, p.23) believes that "postmodern moment is not the property of any particular discipline". It is a notion that cuts across disciplines and its usage is adaptably used as indices of communication across board.

Postmodern dance existed as a result of a reaction to modern dance. Many choreographers and dancers felt that dance ought not to be compulsorily stylised for it to be dance, and therefore

based their dances primarily on pure movement of the body which individual choreographer may explore or not. That is why Banes (2001, p.31) believes that,

In the theory of post modern dance, the choreographer does not apply visual standards to the work. The view is an interior one: movement is not preselected for its characteristics but results from certain decisions, goals, plans, schemes, rules, concepts, or problems. Whatever actual movement occurs during the performance is acceptable as long as the limiting and controlling principles are adhered to.

The above stresses that the component of postmodern dance is a result of plans and schemes which are guided by rules. This is why it is necessary to state the four categories of postmodern dance that were utilized by the Judson theatre choreographers:

- 1) Dances that are comprised entirely of ordinary movements and/or activities, including tasks.
- 2) Dances that incorporate ordinary movement and/or activities along with perceptibility dancerly movement.
- 3) Dances that employ movement that is neither straightforwardly ordinary nor dancerly, notably dances with game-like structures.
- 4) Dances whose movement is so category-defying that the only way to describe it is as movement simplicity. (Banes and Carrol, 2006, p 59-60).

While the above was the genesis of postmodern dance features, performance praxis over the years has enabled a wide range of practices, styles and structures of dance to develop. For instance, in Nigeria today, dance practices are geared towards experimentation. In fact, to be postmodern from an artistic and choreographic/dance purview, means to be experimental, and at some point deconstructive. This is because within the choreographic and dance creative process, the lacuna to be filled is the yearning to generate new artistic/choreographic concepts rather than continue to feed on the existing practices of dance and the hybridisation of a variety of dances to make them look new. Postmodern dance has been one of the vehicles of creativity.

Postmodern dance, therefore, is a veritable medium of practice that uniquely allows for an integration of simple yet creative dance movements with artistic embodiment.

Bakare Ojo Rasaki's Contribution to Traditional, Modern and Postmodern Dance in Nigeria.

Having headed numerous theatre companies and National Troupes of Nigeria and the Gambia, Bakare's wealth of theoretical and practical experiences are vast and unquantifiable. His book, *Rudiments of Choreography* is an important document and one of the few dance books in Nigeria. Equally, his choreographic experience has brought to fore, a number of new trends in dance and choreography. It is our concern here to point out some of such strides in dance and choreography.

First, to be comfortably involved in the teaching of dance theory in a Nigerian University and actively involved in the creation and choreographic process of different traditional, modern and postmodern dances is a great sacrifice and contribution to the development of dance in Nigeria. Also, his development of dancers and choreographers is a proof of his intense passion for dance practice in Nigeria, particularly from its sustenance point of view. For instance, Bakare (2006, p.74) believes that "the modern choreographer is trained to understand both the dynamics of the society and the nature of these dances. He is thus skilled enough for the task of adapting the dances for preservation and survival and makes them conform to the mechanisms of contemporary living". It means that Bakare's training and development of dancers and choreographers are to enrich them with a multi-varying perspective of theory and practice of dance specifically for functionality.

Again, because of his background in theatre practice, Bakare has been at the forefront of packaging, exhibiting, preserving, performing and showcasing the various cultural and traditional dances in Nigeria on the local, national and international stage. He is a passionate cultural exhibitor and this is evident in his elaborate organisation of the Abuja Carnival which is a

conglomerate of dance, costume parade, music, carnivalesque etc. In fact, he strongly believes that "for any culture to survive, it must be dynamic and integrative. For the dance culture of Nigerians to survive, therefore, the contemporary Nigerian choreographer, as a matter of reality must in the words of the Tanzanian social scientist, Mohiddin examine carefully his traditional heritage, and see how best it can be adapted to modern conditions" (2006, p.74). It then posits that Bakare's experiment with the different Art Councils across the nation, the National Troupes of Nigeria and Gambia has been solely for the purpose of adapting the age long traditional dances to modern conditions that would appeal and excite.

From the postmodern dance genre, Bakare's impact is also felt in the Nigerian dance scene. He is adept to choreographing medley of variety of dances as a performance for the contemporary audience. Most notable of this is the Unity Dance which is a medley of major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Bakare's choreographic endeavour also reflects the postmodern dance. Even in his writings, he has utilised the postmodern trends such that directors would require choreographer's expertise in creating the dances which are to enhance the message of the play.

Postmodern Dance in *Drums of War* and *Rogbodiyan*

It is no mean feat to combine the artistic prowess of playwriting, choreographing and dancing. Certainly, this artistic combination is an advantage to scholarship and creativity. Bakare, in the process of writing his plays has weaved postmodern dance into the fabrics of his plays. This intentionality may be borne out of his desire to allow for the blend of the total theatre aesthetics even as he disseminates his intended messages. What the dances do to this plays is that it gives it the needed variety, it helps intensify the culture attached, and in some cases, it is in itself the medium of actualising major aspects of the play.

For instance, *Drums of War* which is one of his most performed plays is a metaphor in its writing and performance. Analytically, it is evident that when drums roll, what accompanies it is dance.

The metaphor is, therefore, reflected in the fact that while the drum is lively and pleasant, war in its meaning is bad, evil and negative in approach. The play revolves around a war hungry king whose quest for war and dominance is far greater than the love of his people and even his family. His urge for wanton destruction of a village led to the collapse of his family and kingdom. From the dance interpretation, a considerable part of the play entails the use of simple basic movements to exemplify war movements and fighting. To make this effective, the choreographer must consider the four components of postmodern dance as practiced by Judson Theatre (see page 6). The reason for this is because war like movements is not to be highly technical movements, they should be simple yet stylised to conjure the feelings of a battle and to create the atmosphere of wanton destruction. In some cases, the choreographer may employ the use of slow motion in dance in order to capture the movements in its slowest form and, therefore impress more on the audience the effects of war. This confirms Cohen-Stratynner's (2001, p.122) opinion that, "The post modern choreographers also use social dance as a source for pedestrian movement, since it, like walking, can be done by anyone."

From another point of view, and particularly taking a cue from the 2005 dance adaptation of the play in the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, an artistic/choreographic ingenuity of the creation of another movement added more meaning and further contributed to the success of the dance production. In the dance theatre, the choreographer and other crew members added a movement of celebrating King Orighoye's third year on the throne where singing, dancing and marrying was prevalent. This movement was created to further deepen the futility in war by presenting the celebration after the King had unrelentingly sent his warriors to fight with the Ibuji town. The dances done were from different cultures in Nigeria to reflect more on the playwright's setting of contemporary Nigeria. From the angle of experimenting and deconstruction which are indices of postmodern art form, the playwright's utilisation of different tribes like Igala, Yoruba, Ebira, Hausa, Igbo, Edo etc is

...mentation in creativity. Equally, its easy adaptability to dance theatre is a huge reflection of it being postmodern in design.

In *Rogbodiyan*, the intrinsic design of post modern dance is evident. *Rogbodiyan* in translation means calamity. As the title suggests, its undertone is negative and calls for solution. In the prologue of the play, the playwright begins by writing that "a voice rings R-o-gb-o-d-i-y-a-n". This, from the choreographic perception could be interpreted in a way that captures the message of the play. For instance, a choreographer could create simple dances from running, hoping, jumping, and limping etc to showcase the effect of trouble and chaos. The movements will be rapid and fast but basic movements that are only designed to reflect the message. With the song *Rogbodiyan* being echoed by the orchestra in a fast tempo, the array of dancers, moving fast in their confused state would have a huge impact on the intended meaning of *Rogbodiyan*.

The playwright's stage instruction immediately after is another avenue for exhibiting dances. It reads:

Follow spot pick townspeople coming from the audience in different Directions. They are all deformed, carrying all sorts of physical deformities. e.g. Blindness, Paralysis of the arms, legs, hunchbacks, etc. Those who are blind are led by those who are lame or hunchbacked. The entire picture is nightmarish and horrible yet, somehow, it is grotesque funny. They sing to the accompaniment of music as they come on stage. Their movement is rhythmic though it cannot be said that they are dancing. (P. 6)

This writer disagrees with Bakare within the expanse of postmodern dance because Movements in its simplest form is one of the qualities that enrich postmodern dance. The physical deformities mentioned above clearly gives room for the exploration of movements, in any case, the instable nature of their bodies would require the choreographer to work more on

their movements to make it neater and in order. In Movement Six, Bakare's stage instruction reads "*Coronation scene. This is mostly enacted in dance. Towns people dance wearing colourful attires. They are apparently in a festive mood. They take their positions and form a big arc*". (P.28) The above is an open check to a choreographer to limitlessly explore the multi-dimensional aesthetics of dance. Being a celebration scene, the dances are fast and lively and therefore open an avenue for different choreographies.

Conclusion

The use of postmodern dance in these plays is of great value to the dissemination of the intended messages. It is certain that with the involvement of a choreographer, the work of the director would blossom. By design, the art of playwrighting is literal, yet it involves conceiving, generating and developing ideas that are completely geared toward performance of such plays on stage. Dance being a vibrant artistic tool is one of the elements needed. This opinion is vibrantly supported by Adeoye (2014, p.ix) who opines that "Dance has the trusted crown of honour because of its paradoxes and multidimensional complexities of flexibility to rigidity, seriousness to ribaldy, femininity to masculinity, grace to greif, absurdity to logicity, supplication to demonstration and joy to sadness in the celebration of the culture in man and the man in culture". His declaration above is a pointer to the need for playwrights to willingly subject themselves to the alluring nature of dance and its ability to positively enhance the meaning in their plays. Like the USB cord, dance can be a connecting channel between playwrights, their plays, actors and the audience.