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Children's Tele-Drama and the Fight against Insecurity in Nigeria

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Abstract

In recent time, Nigeria has become a haven of insecurity due to the rise in the spate of insurgency particularly, the Boko Haram phenomenon in the North East, cattle rustling in the North-West and North-Central, and the recurrence of kidnapping in the South-West, South-East and South-South. This sad situation continues to attract negative image for the country and breeds unemployment as investors are scared of investing in an unsafe environment. The citizens are also desperately migrating to safer countries resulting in brain drain and insufficient skilled manpower. However, Children theatre remains one of the viable media to help solve the various problems of insecurity bedeviling Nigeria. Inculcating the right values in children and educating them through theatrical performances can help guard against various vices so that the nation can become better and safer. The paper employs the 'moralist art propaganda and observational learning theories as premise for analysing the symbiotic relationship between children's tele-drama and nation building.

Introduction

The socializing power of drama cannot be overemphasized. In fact! drama according to Miller cited in McQuade (1987, p.1953), is one of the things that make possible a solution to the problem of socialising people. To him, significant dramatic conflict must .with the way people live together. Children are known to be future leaders, as such, tilting their mental capabilities toward living in peace is one of the ways to adapt theatre to national need| Nigerian children's drama should reflect the changing patterns the social, political and economic fabrics of the nation with a view to taming the challenges of internal insecurity. The postcolonial

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society of Nigeria is currently entangled in a perennial web of internal insecurity evidenced in the upsurge of kidnapping, cattle-rustling and terrorism and other violent crimes. The causes of these unwholesome criminalities are not far-fetched. Many youths have become social deviants as they struggle to acquire money at all cost. With the increasing proliferation of fire arms, drug addiction and political corruption, the state is becoming more and more incapable of containing violent crimes.

Since the 1960 when Nigeria attained political independence, the national ethos has suffered perennial degeneration. The old and traditional values have been hopelessly corrupted. The best cultural practices inevitably belonged to the past. Modern Nigerian society has failed woefully to provide the kind of intimate social discipline needed for effective social cohesion and sustainable nation building. The society has been invaded by a wide range of alien values which have destroyed the Social norms and ethics inculcated in the youth before colonialism, military incursion into politics, after the independence, through [coups and counter coups further aggravated the crisis of building ^sustainable moral ethics in Nigeria. The return of democratic rule in [1999 was accompanied with a hope that the new political structure f will stem the tide of crime and violent extremism. However, the ^country has continued to be visited with even more aggravated acts of terrorism with devastating consequences. Particularly disturbing is the extremist dimension which religious violence has [recently assumed, evidenced in the emergence of a radical Islamic | set called Boko-Haram that is seeking political and religious reforms in Nigeria. Many youths have enlisted into this radical religious i movement through financial inducement, indoctrination and drug addiction. Hence, this article examines how the children's tele-' drama can be utilized to restore the lost values.

Data for the essay are mainly from secondary sources such as textbooks, periodicals, internet resources and inferences from dramatic workshops. For a profound elucidation of how tele-drama can tame insecurity, the paper anchors discussions on r psychological based behavioural theory and persuasive (propaganda. The theory is suitable for examining the imitative tendency among the youths, which can promote harmonious

relationships. The Nigerian state obviously lacks the capacity to set the frameworks for action and even when it does, such move always appears to be inadequate.

Fayose (1995, p.5) posits that in the early 1960s, the growth of children's literature was a fallout of emerging literary awareness occasioned by national aspiration to inculcate right moral values. Children's literature provides important benefits. It gives pleasure and satisfies the emotional and psychological needs of children as they face challenges of living in a postcolonial society. Nigerian society is rife with widespread internal insecurity, external aggression and psychological trauma of terrorism, kidnapping, trafficking, raping and other unwholesome brutal experiences. Many children who are found to be uncooperative have been known to be those who are not properly cared for, severely neglected and abandoned on the street. However, the need to grow into a successful and responsible adult requires effective interaction with a strong motivating force in human behaviour. Today, not many Nigerian children are availed with this opportunity. One great challenge that many Nigerian children faces in growing up is absence of a congenial atmosphere for nurturing responsible and law abiding citizens. Never the less, remedies can be found in children's tele-drama. Children can be socialised through the medium of television production that promotes right values in the society. Unfortunately, no conscious effort has been made in recent time to promote children's psychological and emotional balance through theatre. In most institutions where children's literature is taught in Nigeria, the approach is uncommonly superficial. The television medium has equally not been efficiently deployed to promote children's theatre in a way that can ameliorate the social vices bedeviling our nation building effort. The objective of this paper is to canvass for a re-invigorating of children's drama as a panacea to recurring security challenge in Nigeria. The essay aimed at utilizing children theatre for the television medium to build the minds of the children towards the importance of living in harmony and embracing all forms of positive values. This approach remains the way to build

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responsible adult that Nigeria needs desperately in its transformational drive.

An Overview of Children's Literature and Theatre in Nigeria

Moonlight gathering remains one of the most important literary activities in many African societies. Performances under the moonlight were inherent parts of daily activities for children. The gathering may consist of members of the same family or a combination of children from different households. Fayose (1995, p.6) points out the fact that moonlight gatherings are generally made up of story-telling, riddle contests and games which are usually accompanied by songs and dances and occasional proverbs. Most of the performances deal with all types of social events and life in the community at large. Much of the songs for moonlight gatherings ridicule wayward teenagers, lazy mothers and undutiful fathers. These performances are expected to have some corrective measures in the society. There have been works on children's literature in different parts of the world over a period of time. The history of children theatre goes back to the so-called school theatre that arose in Russia in the 17th century. In the Soviet Union, the children's theatre represents one aspect of the children's amateur artistic activities, which are organized in schools and clubs. (www.dramaonlinelibrary.co, p.18). The Soviet example "shows the correlation between society and children's literature. The political and social system of the society influenced, to a large - extent, the content of children's literature. All Soviet literature ' portrayed social realism which is the doctrine of the Soviet Union. In the late 1940s, a number of specialist companies began to produce work for children as audience in both schools and theatres with a more serious intent. At the dawn of independence, Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwenz, Kola Onadipe, John Iroaganachi to mention but a few utilized individual stories to produce episodic narratives for children. The early narrative presented children in a beautiful idyllic society. Writers reflected the children at home and in school pleasantly. For instance. *The Ife Slave Boy* (1966), *Akpan and the Smugglers* (1965), *Ten in the Family* (1972), *Ade, Our Naughty Little Brother*. (1975) revealed that children are well brought up in happy, united families. Even

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where adversity is presented as can be seen in *Akpan and the Smugglers*, the family members stand together against a common enemy. Children and parents get on well and there is good inter personal relationship among siblings, in post 1978, children literature began to show disintegration in family set up. Parents began to lose control of their children. *Ngozi of Motherless Baby* (1980) shows how parents quarrel openly in front of their children. The family structure eventually broke down in Nigeria due to economic predicaments.

Adeboye, (2006, pp.52-55) in his review of the contributions of prominent scholars such as Osazee, Osayimwnse and Segun to the critical studies of children's literature maintains that Osazee's *Nigerian Children Literature in English* (1995) traces the evolution of Nigerian children's literature from the primordial era to the modern Nigerian society. The author posits that Nigerian children's literature is well indebted to the traditional folk stories. This opinion is anchored on the utilitarian value of the folk stories which have in turn been passed on to the written culture of modern Nigerian children's literature. The core of the author's critical argument is that the ability of any child to draw lessons from a story increases more if he or she is able to find familiar characters in the scene he or she watches or reads.

Osayimwnse's *African Children and Youth Literature* provides yet a valuable critical insight to the analysis of juvenile literature. The author places emphasis on the moral and didactic orientation needed in children's literature. She argues that the children's literature should be relevant to the lives of young Africans. Similarly, Mabel Segun (1991) in her major writings enjoins Nigerian children's literature writers to give cultural identity to their dramas so as to promote an awareness of their rich cultural heritage. Some other efforts aimed at promoting the corpus of children's literature included the 18th congress of the International Board on books for children and the young entitled "Modern Realistic Stories for the Children and the Young held in Wurzburg in October 1987. Many Nigerian writers and scholars of children's literature attended the workshop. Similarly, there was the ANA workshop in Kaduna in 1991 which created a forum to encourage children's literary activities in diverse forms.

With an overview of children's literature made so far, it is [clear that writers and scholars have different approaches to their [conceptions of children's literature. Their submissions grew out of 'their individual's target goals which revolve around the need to ^impact positive behaviour in children through literature.

Theoretical Framework.

This paper adopts moralist art propaganda and observational learning theories for its analysis. Propaganda is defined "as any Systematic attempt to influence opinion on a wide scale...to promote or discourage attitudes as a means of advancing or injuring an organisation, an individual or a cause" (De Fleur in MD Ogunleye, 2001, p. 72). Propaganda thus refers to a planned programme of action aimed at achieving a definite set of goals.

Ogunleye further observed that different forms of propaganda exist but those most readily amenable to tele-drama are Integration propaganda, Agitation Conformist propaganda. Rational propaganda and Religious propaganda. The premise which forms the cardinal principle of this theory is usually reflected in the thematic preoccupation of the play. According Achebe cited in Ogunleye (200, p. 71) "all art is propaganda though not all propaganda is art". The import of this maxim is that works of art fare aesthetically employed to express certain world view and ideology. The argument that television drama is- a too! Of propaganda is incontrovertible. Television has truly acquired a reputation as a means of influencing social behaviour. The role of tele-drama as a platform for altering behaviour has been described by Packard in Ogunleye (2001, p. 66) as 'the hidden persuader'. In a way, television is one of the persuasive and pervasive medium in modern society.

The observational learning and imitative behaviour jpeories, according to Folarin (1998 p.81), "assume that people, especially children tend to learn from mass media and mode! their behaviour after the dramatic personae. The process is similar to fet by which children imitate the behaviour of adults around them." For instance, in her study of *Yoruba Children Came as Oral Literary Form* (1990) Odekunle (p. 14) opines that children enjoy {games that imitate nature and gave them pleasure. It is not
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uncommon to find a young girl playing with a baby doll by bathing it, clothing it and caring for it just as mother cares for her. In a way, she imitates the reality of a mother caring. Sometimes again, a young boy who gathers small sticks and stones for the little girl is imitating his father's duties as a bread winner in the home. This is precisely what the observational learning and imitative behaviour theory points at. The imitative tendency of children goes a long way to prove William Wordsworth's assertion that the incidents in literature should be chosen from common life. Children imitate common practices in the home and even in this age of high technological advancement, the highly intellectual attempts are imitated by children.

The imitative theory is built also on the premise of the tendency that children usually identify with admired heroes and heroines who may be aggressive, subtle, and charismatic and so on. The formulation of the modeling theory which came from psychology as an adaptation of the social learning theory by Lowery and DeFleur (1998, p. 25) states that:

Every individual receives a form of behaviour described or portrayed by a character, judges this behaviour to be attractive and potentially useful for coping with some personal situation that has arisen or might arise, and reproduces the portrayed behaviour in a relevant personal situation bringing satisfaction to the individual.

This assertion establishes how a child can be attracted by a particular behaviour. With his level of intellect, he likes the behaviour, tends towards it and later behaves as such in his adult age. Children learn and imitate what they see around them. Their sense organs are active and sharp and they magnifies as they grow older. Children's theatre produced by adults also provides room for children to inculcate positive attitudes and behave responsibly[^] in the society. Folarin's "Observational theory" comes alive very importantly in this regard. Sidney also cited in Odekunle (p. 15); affirms that poetic justice should prevail in children's literature. In' other words, good deeds should be rewarded and bad punished;

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This poetic justice helps in condemning the bad behaviour and teaching the children the proper modes of behaviour. In many Yoruba communities, children are presented with negative and positive facets, actions, setting and language so that they can choose a useful moral code. The various aspects of Yoruba culture and tradition manifest in stories to cater for children's social needs. Therefore, to achieve the target objectives, scripts for children performance should be written with these underlying values as projection. Television provides dramatized stories to a mass audience and these stories can be used for diverse purposes -education, socialization and entertainment.

The aggregate importance of these theories is to establish a credible argument that to tame insecurity in Nigeria, children's tele-drama must take themes and performance mode from the social and cultural context of the society which uphold the structure as well as foster a healthy relationship. These themes are multifarious ranging from cultural to politics, from religion to love and even to peaceful coexistence.

Children's Theatre and the Television Medium in Nigeria

Children theatre can be defined as plays performed by children. It is a term employed to denote the performance of plays by professional actors for a children's audience. These plays are usually constructed along conventional lines using writers, directors, ¹ designers, and occasionally puppetry, music and dance. Children's theatre is also regarded as a form of child creativity that is organised in schools for extracurricular activity. It is also a cultural institution that fulfils the creative needs of the children for them to cultivate interest in the arts, develop their skills and also promotes attraction in the aesthetic of arts (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov).

The repertoires of children's theatre consist largely of works of children literature in keeping with the age and personality traits of the young performers. From the theoretical analysis, it is clear that security can be promoted through children's theatre. The realization of change can be achieved through children theatrical performances as they are caught young when their mind and brain are still evolving. The problem of social, political, religious, cultural and economic contradictions can be minimised if the children's

consciousness of the long term consequence of violence is brought to their fore knowledge. Ododo (2000, p.23) highlights the different approaches to children's theatre thus:

- Plays performed by children.
- Theatre for children or young people's theatre by adults.
- Theatre with children.
- Plays performed by children are seen as the soul of it all. All performances are done by the children. The idea of a story, the message, song, dance, costume, make-up, and properties are all done by the children;
- Theatre for children or young people's theatre by adults is created by adults before children;
- Theatre with children involves the participation of children and adults as children express themselves freely.

Children theatre for the television medium will help give its performances a wider reach. When the children know that they are exposed to cameras, it will galvanize their interest and enhance their self confidence. The popular "Tales by Moonlight" in NTA and "Alo lya Agba" (Story telling by Adults) by Tunde Kelani on African Magic Yoruba are examples of children's theatre for television medium. "Alo lya Agba" is a total theatre that combines music, dance, and drama. The aim of the piece is to popularize the Yoruba culture and to save it from extinction. The tradition of the Yoruba race, the values of the culture, having good relationships between one another, and the values of hard work are all taught in the programme. Tunde Kelani believes that the children learn better when music and dance are incorporated as they easily help sustain the tempo of the performance.

Gonzalez (1990, p.34) states that television sets are commonly found in every home due to its audio visual representation. Society vies for technological change and that each presentation produces something unique and different. The viewers of the television medium tend to be glued to the programmes that

have strong impact on them. Several studies have found that educational television is the second largest most popular mass media channels in the world and its growth is seen all over every day. Because of its transmission of speech and moving pictures, it has become a strong instrument for theatrical activities in the world. Television is therefore a means for political, economic, cultural outlet to inform, educate, entertain and influence the public. Television is also a channel of indirect and public communication among social actors. It plays a central role in all aspects of contemporary society, from arts, sports, politics, entertainment, education and marketing. Television can be a powerful teacher. Watching *Sesame Street* (r.v.vvv.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov, p.18) is an example of how children can learn valuable lessons about racial harmony, cooperation, kindness, simple arithmetic and the alphabet through an education-! Television format. Some public television programmes stimulate visits to the zoo, libraries, bookstores, museums and other diverse recreational settings, and children theatre videos carry, certainly, as powerful means of social teaching devices. The educational value of *Sesame Street*, has been known to have improved the right perception of its viewers.

Children's theatre in the television medium is important for providing an informed Knowledge about the country if the programmes capture national aspiration that the nation needs to foster peace and ameliorate insecurity. In Awoko newspaper (2011) it has been observed that people treat television with seriousness as the audience spends hours in watching than reading newspapers. It is significant to note that children are intelligent beings and exposing them to the television medium stimulates and it makes them learn better. As Nigerian society experiences security challenges, relevant didactic performance can tame youth restiveness. Stories that reflect the importance of peaceful coexistence should be developed. In developed countries, violence portrayed on television screen always has great consequences. Elizabeth Monk-Turner *A Content Analysis of Violence in America- War Movies* (2004) shows that war movies give room for more violence. Therefore, it is advised that violent content that is more damaging should be avoided at all cost.

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Script Writing Techniques in Children's Theatre

Scenes are the building blocks of narrative stories. Narratives are important for the success of children's theatre as it helps them to understand better. Each scene should be understandable to the children. In theatre for children, the playwright should write the story in a language that is simple and in way that elicits great enthusiasm. Ambiguous words should be avoided. Script writing is the foundation and bedrock of any production. Coordinated effort therefore is needed before quality production can be achieved. All aspects of productions are important and they should be incorporated in a children's theatre script for direction and focus. Gutkind (www.worldcat.org) explains that some important elements of a scene are Description, character, Dialogue, Action, Point of view and Narration. The description is what can be physically seen and this should be specific. The children should be able to say educative things about what is described to them, the story should be engaging. Character in the story should be clear and distinct. This will make the children be able to differentiate character A from character B. The Dialogue should have direct questioning infused in them. This will make the audience responsive to the activities going on.

Graham (2012, p.54) describes script writing as a fundamental element of production. He opines that scripts are badly written when they lack educative contents. Writing should have a clear focus as the conformity with rules and authenticity are important. Thesis should be drafted in a rough sketch and the story should be carefully written. Landrum (2007, p.72) posits that a clear language is most important in writing so as to ensure understanding of the content. Simplicity complements a good drama script. Children are very sensitive, as such, the best way is to inculcate positive attitudes in them in their formative years which in most cases the parents cannot do alone. The theme of children's theatre should state the importance of peaceful coexistence; it should be clearly distinct and there should be focus. Experts in script writing should be employed because of songs and dances. Songs are significant in children's theatre. . Enacting a production is quite expensive and again taking it for television production is another burden. Television is very important to human lives and it

is widely depended on for consumption of different activities. The strong force of the television in producing quality children's theatre will help the country to develop in a more vibrant way. The television media create powerful interactions especially through cultural and religious exchange of ideas; this will help the nation to outgrow the menace of insecurity.

Developing sound and firm mental abilities among children is a sign of developed societies. Countries like United States of America, Japan, and Brazil that are experiencing harmony can provide a model. The creative need for children is to always see that nations can only develop in an atmosphere of peace. It is important to harness the creative abilities of children to suit various aspects of production. He is of the opinion that those not too skilful in acting could be very outstanding in stage design-costumes, make-up, sound effects, lighting, props design and so on. Children should be all involving in all these aspects so that talents can be identified and developed. The purpose of any action should be stated so that its objectives can be achieved. Technical elements ¹ must be provided. The scene designer and the script writer should work together so that quality drama production can be achieved.

Conclusion

The work focuses on children's theatre for the television medium as means of taming insecurity. Television medium can be a viable instrument to curb insecurity in Nigeria. The submission aims at identifying possible solutions to the challenges of insecurity in Nigeria. The reflections over the current happenings in the country show the need for the children who are the leaders of tomorrow to understand the consequence of violence and embrace peace. Script writing techniques have to be properly understood in order to put quality contents together. The imitative tendency of the children should not be underplayed as they are exposed to dramatic productions that will give them direction and shape their future. The television medium remains an integral part of socializing process in modern society. The government should not only see the television as a medium for political campaign, but as an avenue for taming insecurity. Children's literature has a wide variety of themes and settings. It deals with issues concerning

obedience to parents, other adults and constituted authorities. The themes of this literature canvass honesty, hardwork, perseverance as well as the core value of friendship, allegiance to one's society, and consideration for others among other important issues considered necessary for the survival of the society. The existence of a large body of children's literature in the 1970s is usually a sign of general literary reawakening of which the theatre is one of the highest achievements. The phenomenon of television production drew attention to the fact that creative production could be a ready medium to tame insecurity in Nigeria. Nigerian children's literature should reflect the changing pattern of living. The themes need to be conditioned by national aspiration. Early writings for Nigerian children were mainly folk stories, Onitsha Market pamphlets and moonlight dramas which were no longer as numerous as they were in the period 1960 to 1978.

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