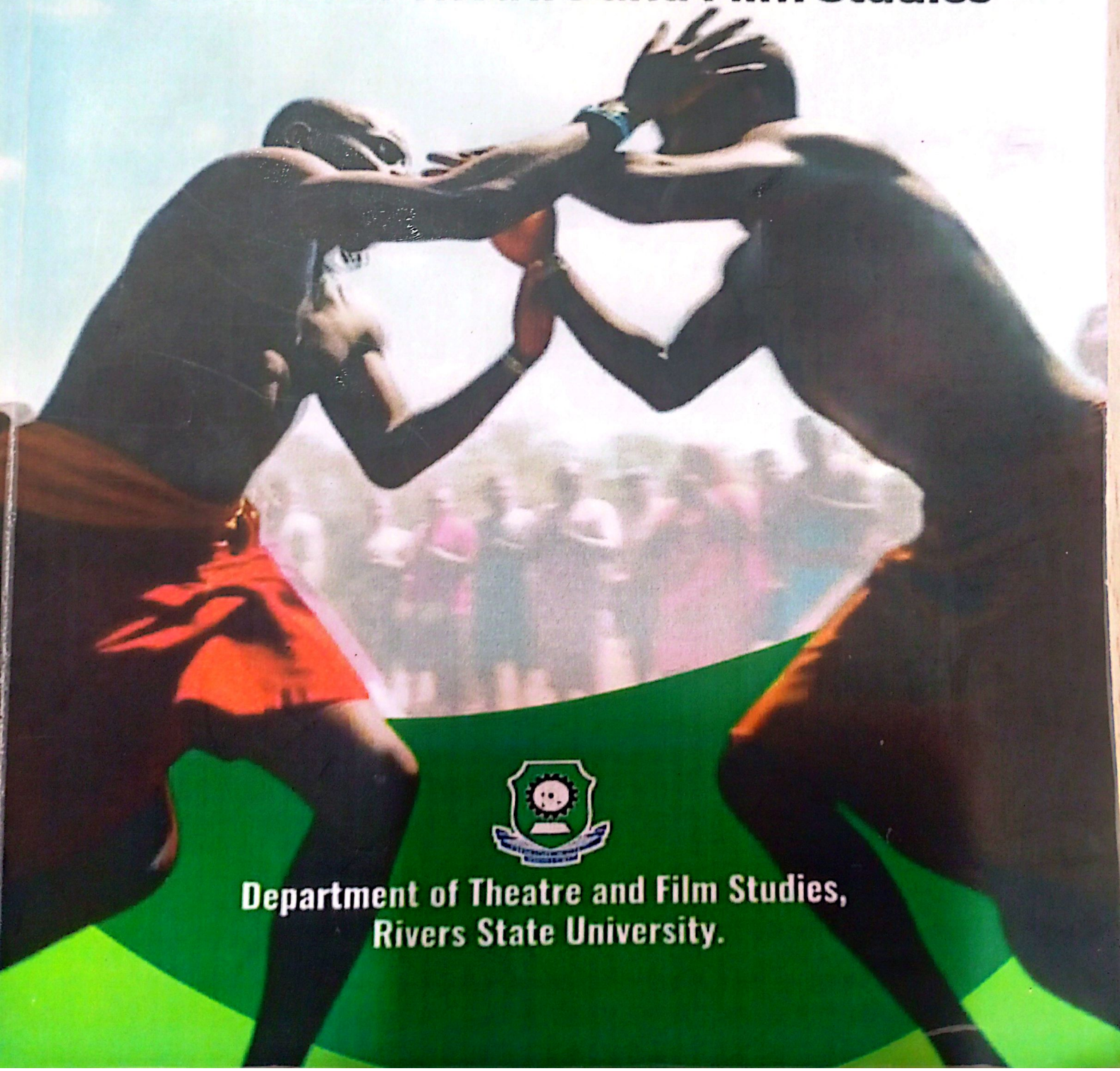
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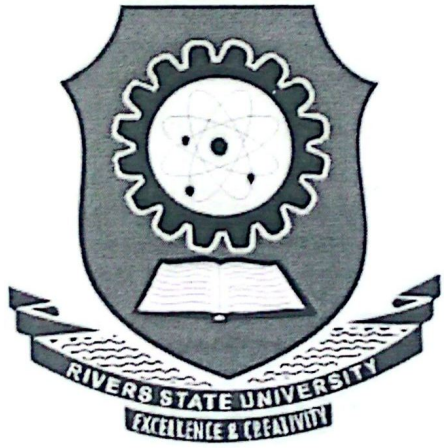
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MOLESTATION STUDY OF JULIE OKOH'S *FACELESS* AND *CRY FOR DEMOCRACY*
- ***Eziwho Emenike AZUNWO, PhD.*** 1

DRAMA THERAPY FOR REHABILITATION IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY IN NIGERIA
- ***Abimbola Adetola Stephen-Adesina and Lateef Sulaiman*** 26

A MORPHOSYNTACTIC ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF GRAMMATICAL NUMBER IN ENGLISH AND IGBO LANGUAGES
- ***DIKE, Chioma Vivian, Florence Nne Agwu (Ph.D.)*** 40

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SPEECHES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERS: IMPACT AND INFLUENCE
- ***Naomi C. Chimene-Wali PhD, Ataisi E. Gladday*** 59

UNRAVELING THE THREADS OF CHANGE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ONE LEGEND, MANY SEASONS*
- ***Abdulmalik Adakole Amali & Victor Akogwu Omeje*** 72

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF OMONI OBOLI'S *WIVES ON STRIKE* (2016) AND *BEING MRS. ELLIOT1&2* (2014), AS AUTUER MOVIES
- ***Nnadi Collins Sunday, Prof. F.O. Shaka & Dr. O.C. Ihunwo*** 83

A PLAY DIRECTOR'S RE-MODELLING OF ALTERNATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SHARE/TSARAGI COMMUNAL FEUD IN NIGERIA
- ***ARINDE, Tayo Simeon, Ph.D., OJEDIRAN, Oludolapo, Ph.D., AKINSIPE, Felix, Ph.D*** 110

AFROBEATS, IDENTITY, AND GLOBALIZATION: THE INTERSECTION OF NIGERIAN MUSIC AND GLOBAL POPULAR CULTURE
- ***Ibe, Ogbobuike Ibe, PhD, And Finikama-Ade, Donatus Ledisi,*** 125

INFLUENCE OF I-WITNESS REPORTS IN THE CHANGING FACE OF BROADCASTING IN INDEPENDENT TELEVISION, BENIN
- ***Ogbemudia Mari JAMES, Prof. Bifatife Olufemi ADESEYE,*** 135

PERFORMANCE OF MORALITY IN ISLAMIC SONG: A STUDY OF ABDULAZEEZ ABIODUN (SAOTY AREWA)'S *KINI AKOKO*
- ***Basiru Adeyemi ADEBISI & Shukurat GANIYU*** 147

RETHINKING ELIZABETHAN ORDER IN AFRICAN DRAMATURGY: A STUDY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE* AND FEMI OSOFISAN'S *LOVE'S UNLIKE LADING.*
-JOHN SUOFE (PhD) 159

TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF ARNOLD UDOKA'S *INYENE*
- Abiola Olubunmi Adumati 174

REINFORCING PEDAGOGY THROUGH DIGITAL GAMING: THE CASE OF IKWERE ORTHOGRAPHY
- Grant Woruka Ogurinka _& Jones G. I. Ayuwo, PhD 189

SEXUALISATION AND OBJECTIFICATION OF THE FEMALE BODY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN MUSIC VIDEOS: AN ANALYSIS OF *BOUNCE* BY REMA
- Tayo Joan ADENUGA 202

URBANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN RIVERS STATE: THE RUKPOKWU EXPEREINCE
- Chinda, C. Izeoma & WOKOMA, Jennifer Nwoma. 215

NAIRACRAZE AND OTHER POEMS
- Daniel Henacho Eluke 230

A PLAY DIRECTOR'S RE-MODELLING OF ALTERNATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN SHARE/TSARAGI COMMUNAL FEUD IN NIGERIA

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A Play Director's Re-modelling of Alternative Conflict Resolution in Share/Tsaragi Communal Feud in Nigeria

Abstract

Conflict is pre-historic and in reality, it is equally universal. In essence, the mechanism of the theatre as an alternative method in resolving communal conflict was tested during the Share/Tsaragi's communal fend in Nigeria. This Directorial approach celebrates the ubiquitous dynamics of the director and theatre as tool for alternative conflict resolution mechanism. Through the qualitative method, complimented with the participant observation tool and Don Elger's The Theory of Performance (ToP) (2023), this paper examines the essence of a play director's re-modelling of the alternative conflict resolution mechanism in the Share/Tsaragi communal feud in Nigeria. Findings in this study show that conflicts in many communities are exasperated by personal interest, test of strength, popularity and ignorance. The study concludes that to continue to witness peace in any environment; the need to consider religion, social interaction, dialogue and engagement epitomised in theatrical performances are channel to positive mutual benefit. It is recommended in the study that using the theatre to engage restless youths and agitating adults will be a stimulating, rewarding and educating approach that would give birth to a harmonious and long lasting relationship experience.
Keywords: Conflicts, Theatre, Play Directing and Resolution

Introduction

The universality of conflict is a fact that is incontrovertible globally. This underscores the fact that man's daily interaction with one another cannot be obliterated of pockets of disagreements hence, the imminence of conflicts that permeate the co-

existence of inhabitants on this planet. Nevertheless, as conflicts arise, efforts are made to resolve them but interestingly, most of the approaches that have been tried which ranges from traditional, cultural to legal measures have proved, many at times, ineffective. Consequently, the approach of the theatre, using drama as an alternative conflict resolution approach, through a Theatre Director's re-modelling approach in the resolution of the Share Tsaragi communal clashes in Kwara State, Nigeria suffices. Consequently, this study expounds the medium of drama as an effective method for exciting warm resolution of crises. In underscoring the effectiveness of drama performances as a tool for conflict resolution, Osofisan (2001, p.114) affirms that: "drama production has sometimes been used to end the conflict among warring communities and bring together fiercely antagonistic parties." Osofisan's contention below also further confirms the dynamics of the theatre in his affirmation that: "incredible as it may sound, a drama competition can sometimes silence the booming of guns between homicide rivals." This unconscious prophesy came into pass when a group of researchers from the University of Ilorin, Nigeria meddled into an age long crises over a piece of land between Share, a community in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State and Tsaragi, another community in Edu Local Government Area also of Kwara State, Nigeria.

To denigrate the theatre is to undermine the potency of its multidimensional powers. To them, the above submissions would sound like a nursery recitation in a state of weird imagination or better still a fiery tale to entertain kiddies by the moonlight. To further underscore the potency of theatre, Osofisan impresses his argument, citing Wole Soyinka's live experience in Kingston where the production of Soyinka's play, *Beatification of an Area Boy* did the magic of putting an end to an age long friction in the city. The performance brought the town's restless youths together and peace reigned. Soyinka's (1993) submission cited in Osofisan (2001, p.115) cannot be over-emphasised. He identifies that:

> Kingston is a violent city. The nature of violence in Kingston differs, however, from that of Lagos. Here the area boys are the product of garrisons - as they are known locally -created and often maintained by politicians. The youths grow up in an atmosphere of mutual, predatory neighbourhood hostility. You do not stray from your own turf to another- the result can be fatal...

Osofisan (2001, p.115) confirms that Soyinka, through the instrumentation of drama, the "garrison mentality" was deflated from their ego soaked minds of Kingston youths. They subsequently see their age-mates who hitherto were their arc enemies as reliable and progressive play-mates from who mutual benefits could be derived. This is an experience from a western shore. Whether this could also work for us in Africa was the experimentation approach that this researcher, a theatre Director, tries to use in the case of an age-long communal clash between Share community in Ifelodun Local Government Area of Kwara State and Tsaragi community in Edu Local Government Area of Kwara State. Both communities are in Kwara State sharing the same, if not an almost inseparable environment in Kwara State, Nigeria.

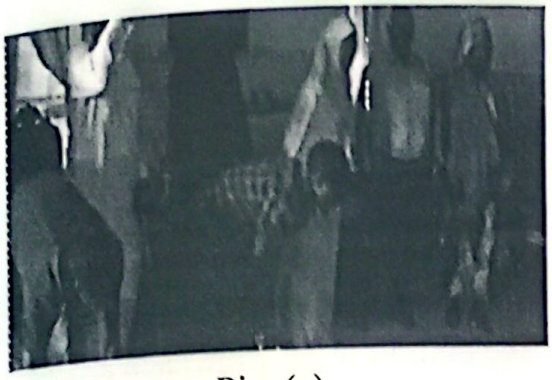
Yerima(2003, p.237) also underscores the potency of the art of the theatre when he submits that:

> What we are talking here is the art of the dialectics- one which presents the crisis in question, that is, the people and the event, and asked the audience to partake in the conciousness of decision-making; one that presents the didatic art of instruction and a subconscious fusiion of knowledge and aesthetics.

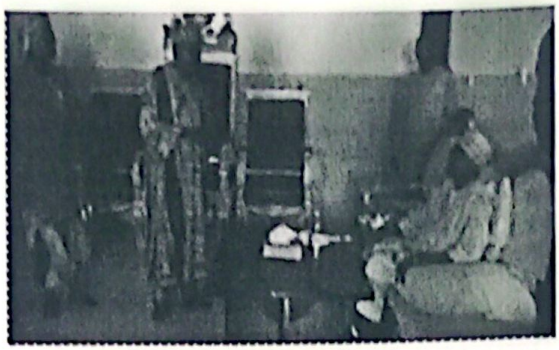
Obafemi(2009, p.16) in his eloquent submission about the unbiquitous nature of theatre enthuses that: "theatre covers a wide range of human experience". This was the major reason why we chose to use the theatre medium to navigate our crises resolution approach.

The cause of Share/Tsaragi communal clashes, which span for about 38 years (1978-2016) cannot be pinned down on specific issue but, issues that bother on ethnic superiority, land dispute, language barrier and cultural differences among others were insinuated to be the cause of the imbroglio. Raji and Abdulkadir-Imam (2018) and Olademo, Omotoye, Ikibe, Ibraheem, Tijani, Adebisi, Aboyeji, Fahm and Adimula (2021) in their various research efforts capture what they could gather as the cause of the disputes. Salman and Abdulrasaq (2016, p.2) reports captured that the feud was occasioned by a disagreement over a piece of farmland called *Fiangiawa* (over 200 hectares of land), which the two communities lay claim to. The disagreement resulted into wanton killing and destruction of property that worth millions of Naira. It was also recorded that more than fifty people had lost their lives in the crises in 2015 where 4 (four) people died, in 2016, 40 people died (*ilorin.info*, 2016) while 5 (five) people died in 2018 and in 2021 3 people were claimed to have lost their lives (*Daily Trust*, 2021)

These were the unpleasant situations that was captured and many more that were too gory to be pictorially illustrated. It was in the midst of these chaos that in an attempt at finding an alternative but a lasting solution to the impasse that a team of researchers led by Prof Oyeronke Olademo of the Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin excite a friendly interaction. That research efforts was complimented by the theatrical performance presentation directed by this researcher on the final day of the peace process, which then became a cynosure and epicentre of the peace process. The research team at different occasions had earlier initiated interactions with the two warring communities through visits, phone calls, and exchanges. So as not to generate any suspicion, pictures were not taken at the preliminary stages of the peace process. However, on the last day, when the two communities agreed to sheath their swards by coming together, there were free taking of pictures some of which we displaced in Pictures IV and V (a), (b) and (c), (e) and (f) below:



Pic. (a)



Pic. (b)



Pic. (c)

Courtesy Call on His Royal Highness, Olupako of Share and exit from his palace on 3rd September, 2019 as contained in pictures; a, b and c above. (Pictures: Courtesy of the Researcher)

Picture V



Pic. (d)



Pic. (e)



Pic. (f)

The arrival of the research team and courtesy call on His Royal Highness, Etsu of Tsaragi on 3rd September, 2019 as contained in figures II pictures; d, e and f above. (Pictures: Courtesy of the Researcher)

After the courtesy visits to the two traditional rulers, the research team moved to the venue where the two communities were brought together, to seal an unconditional peace agreement. It was interesting to note that at the point where the two communities agreed to meet was a tarred road that separates the two communities from each another, showing the closeness of the two communities. The choice of the venue was a cue from the position of William Shakespeare in his play, *As you Like It,* in the dialogue of Jaques who states that "All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players..." This is also buttressed in the submission of Anapereu 2013 on Peter Brooks *Empty Space* who postulated that: "*empty space can become a stage for a performative act.*" *Consequently, the choice of the venue of the performance was also predicated on Elger (2023)'s The Theory of Performance (ToP) which stressed on "performance improvement, which involve "performer's mindset, immersion in an enriching environment and engagement in reflective practice." These phenomenal* ingredients, *this study explored in applying the director's re-modelling of alternative approach in conflict resolution. The director worked on the performers' mindset and immersed them in the environment by working on their psych, immerse them 'as if 'they were directly affected in an environment that was agreeable to both parties. Hence, the choice of the venue for the presentation of the* theatrical menu, an improvised play "**Give and Take**" which was put together and directed by this researcher. The short play was conceived, performed and presented with deep emphasis on the fact that life is about 'give and take' warming the theatre mechanism into their hearts to re-echo that truly theatre is a conduit for exciting peace in a crises ridden society.

Research Methodology

Qualitative method of research, which is non-numerical data gathering approach that seeks to understand concepts, through amplification of insight and understanding about individual perception of events and circumstances is adopted for this study. The method, which underpins the subjectivity, contextualisation, flexibility, interpretation and inductive reasoning approach is complimented with the participant observation tool targeted at a focus group. Consequently, Don Elger's The Theory of Performance (ToP) (2023), is adopted as the theoretical framework to underscore the play director's re-modelling of the alternative conflict resolution mechanism in the communal feud under interrogation.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Performance (ToP) by Don Elger (2023) underscores that 'Humans are capable of extraordinary accomplishments' which can be found in performances both at

the traditional and non-traditional contexts. Elger (2023, p.1) in emphasising the principles of his theory (ToP), submits that: "The Theory of Performance (ToP) develops and relates six foundational concepts to form a framework that can be used to explain performance as well as performance improvements" the six concepts he enumerated as follow that:

i. To *Perform* is to produce results, taking series of complex actions that integrate skills and knowledge to produce a valuable result;
ii. A *performer* can be an individual or a group of people engaging in a collective effort;
iii. Developing performance is a journey;
iv. Level of performance describes location in the journey;
v. The current level of performance depends holistically on; context, level of knowledge, levels of skills, level of identity, personal factors and fixed factors; and
vi. Performance improvements, which involve a performer's mindset, immersion in an enriching environment and engagement in reflective practice.

These features are what this study explores to excite the needed peace and peaceful co-existence among the warring Share and Tsaragi communities.

Conceptual Framework

Conflicts occur not necessarily because of sour inter-relationship between two or more communities, in many cases they are intra; as in, internal, within the same culture and ethnic diversity. Nlewem (2018, p.28) captures it succinctly that: "ethnic conflict as disagreement (often) arising from claims and contestations over competitive stakes, interests, and values among ethnic groups left unmediated by the state and political actors who use ethnicity as a lever to access power, resources, and wealth." This affirms that conflict is part of man's existence. Expounding on who and who have tasted the bitter pills of conflicts, Gluhbegovic (2016, p. 3) in a paper she presented at *Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa* (EISA) submits that:

> Almost all African countries have experienced some form of conflict. The fragile circumstances and transitions they have experienced, from independence struggles to post-independence conflict, to the search for stability and state- building processes, have left scars and unaddressed issues that have created the sources of conflict.

This above points to the fact that conflicts abound in every development-prone environment. However, one fact remains that they are empirically different in relation and degree. Some arises from exogenous shocks while some arise from effect of maginalisation or breakdown in the institution of governance, arising from uneven distribution of resource, such as the one Eck (2014) cited in Doring and Mustasilta (2023, p.3) describes as that which at times arise from protest against indifference, inequality in treatment as a period when "the presence of parallel judicial institutions

induces resolution system."

In view of the fact that there are multifarious dimensions of conflicts, this paper having taken a deductive pry on different approaches, adopts this alternative re-modelling alternative conceptualisation in director's theatrical dispensation, as a tested method that can excite a lasting conflict resolution.

Theatre on the other hand has been identified as an instrument that has played dynamic roles to diffuse different kinds of crises in our society. Role that range from enlightenment to education, information and mediation roles. Its ubiquitous disposition made theatre to be referred to as a tool that has consciously and concretely been used to excite peaceful co-existence in our society at different fora. Undoubtedly, theatre, as scholar describes it, has been a well-developed art that has added values to the society. Cameron and Gillespie (2004, p.26) succinctly conclude that: "theatre can offer important insights into people and cultures, so long as inferences are drawn carefully, cautiously and tentatively." The dynamic role of the theatre is what we can describe as a catalytic mirror that x-rays and provides the needed impetus to making the African society and world at large a better place to live, giving its nature as 'life'. The dynamism of theatre, therefore, is what this study explores, using it as an alternative mechanism for conflict resolution as it was pragmatically demonstrated in the case of Share/Tsaragi communal feud.

Since theatre has functioned in different fora as medium for education, enlightenment, entertainment and information dissemination, this paper considers it apt to elucidate on its other tools and arts that underscore its effectiveness. One of it is the arts of play directing. Play directing as an art of the theatre has showcases the leadership dynamism that the theatre projects. Looking at it from other artistic perspective, it will not be economical to describe it as the conduit through which theatrical menu are served to the audience devoid of ambiguity. It is an art that orchestrates its creative prowess by putting the bits and pieces of all theatrical elements together for the purpose of achieving an aesthetically rewarding performance. Little wonder why Caird (2010, p.230) describes directing as: "a creative and collaborative craft - working with other arts and crafts to create a theatrical event…" Be that as it may, the art of directing as important as it is, is also a tool in the hands of a theatre personality known as the play director. The play director is that theatre personality who Brooks (1968, p.38) describes as "master of all arts of the theatre", who Kernodles and Kernodles (1985, p.341) describe as "chief translator" and which Taylor (1996, p.23) describes as "one who is responsible for all arts of the theatre" Importantly, Wills (1976) cited in Mark 2023, p.79) describes directing as" the act of changing a director's individual idea into a public performance", which means exploring the creative input of an individual director, transmuted into a performance through a process that one can describe as artistic interpretative and integrative aesthetic experience. A theatre personality who is at the helm of this interpretative process, the charge de affairs and the primus-inter-pares in explorations is the play director. The entwined relationship between the art (directing) and the ingenuity of the interpreter (Play Director) is what this study explores in

presenting a pragmatic peace-achieving resolution in the case of Share/Tsaragi communal feud under examination.

There have been different approaches to directing, which have been tool that directors have used to foreground their performances. Some of the approaches dated back to the traditional theatre era. These include: story-telling approach, festival presentational approach, ritual approach, masque performance approach. All these approaches have since been deconstructed to meet the contemporary demand of making theatre performances more acceptable to its audiences. Arising from this, new directing approaches emerged which were foregrounded by theatre scholars like David Garrick, who was nicknamed the father of transubstantiation, Bertolt Brecht, the originator of alienation to mention just a few among western Directors. Cameron and Gillespie (2004) who identified two types of Director's approaches to include "the Worshipful" and "Heretical Directors approach". The two approaches they conclude "can create productions that thrill audiences" (Cameron and Gillespie 2004, p.156). Subsequently, some African theatre directors have also domesticated directing styles that have been used in play performances presented to African audiences. The Sam Ukala's Folkism, the Akinwale's Straight take, the Adeoye's Neo-alienation approach to mention just a few. The directorial approach used in this study is the 're-modelling approach', which was a departure from the TfD theatre for, with or by the people. Neither was it the conventional Eurocentric, authoritative, confrontational, negotiative nor slavish directorial approach but a syncretism approach that underpins the amalgamated but a seamless Afrocentric presentational style that employs the tool of African theatrical menu without infringing on the issues that bother on ethical values of the targeted focus groups.

Synopsis of play, 'Give and Take'

The short play "Give and Take' is weaved around two imaginary communities that were hitherto co-existing mutually but suddenly become arch enemies over a frivolous issue to the extent that the two communities no longer see eye-to-eye and as such denied themselves of natural endowment from which the two communities benefit. In one of the villages is a river from where the two communities drink and wash and in the other is a market where the two communities jointly trade. Aside from the market being a common trading place, there is a healing tree, that heals different kinds of ailments. No sooner the crisis breaks out, there is scarcity of water in one of the villages and all efforts to dig wells from where they could be drawing water is futile. In the second village too, there is outbreak of diseases that defiled orthodox treatment unless they pluck leaves from the tree that is in the centre of the market. The two communities later realised that they need each other to exist hence, telepathically, the two communities take bold steps to broker peace by eschewing the bitterness that exists between them and relate as of the old. With the bold steps they both take, they realised that life is about 'Give and Take'. that no community is an Island. The two communities sheath their swords and live thereafter happily.

Theatre Dynamics in exciting peace in Share/Tsaragi Feud: A Play Director's Re-Modelling Approach

When crisis ensued between the Share and Tsaragi's communities sometimes in 1978, like a child play it started that anyone who was very close to the two communities would not believe that communities that have co-existed for many decades could suddenly turn enemies and find the peace that had existed among them a mirage. Many efforts have been directed at resolving the imbroglio but to no avail. After the first experience in 1978, in the years 2000, 2008, the crises again erupted while that of 2008 was described as the bloodiest. The crises again erupted in 2015 and 2016. Olademo, et al (2021, p.2) who capture these bad historical periods also confirm that: "Both the Federal and State Governments have at different times constituted panels of enquiry to find the immediate and remote causes of the Share-Tsaragi boundary dispute". Unfortunately, these panels of enquiry that were saddled with responsibility of finding lasting solution to the impasse could not achieve expected result. Alao (2014) cited in Olademo et.al. (2021, p.4) lays the blame of inability to resolve the crises on the doorstep of the government when he indicts that the government lacks the political will thus: "the government as lacking the political will to solve the Share and Tsaragi conflict." Aside from the government lack of strong will, some stake holders, many of who are benefiting from crises are always unwilling to end crisis.

Be that as it may, on the day that peace was to be brokered, a play was birth and performed by the students of the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria. The short but purposive play that was directed by this researcher, enumerated the danger that are inherent in having a protracted crises and the negative effects on the warring communities. The play explores the thematic concept of 'give and take', using two symbolic objects; 'Water' and 'healing leaves' to press home the play director's re-modelling proposition as the new theatrical direction. The approach explores both traditional and non-traditional contexts of Theory of Performance (ToP), where venue that are traditionally associated with learning, academic advising, academic committees and professional research group approach were adopted to adumbrate peace in the lands of Share and Tsaragi.

The choice of the objects; water and healing leaves that were selected as symbolic objects to press home our peace mission was predicated upon the fact that the two objects are traditional objects. The study underscores the importance of water as one object that no one in life can do without. In fact, From the scientific and natural point of view, *Byjus.com* (2023), describes water as: "One of the most important resources on the planet. Without water, life cannot exist." It is stemming from this that the play employs the symbolic object; water as one of the objects of peace that was emphasised in the play. In pictures VI; a, b and c below. Picture (a), women in one of the communities come to complain to their traditional ruler that they are driven from the only river that is their source of water supply by the rival community.

The King in picture (b) is seen issuing directive to his Chiefs to go and find out why the women were chased from the only stream, from where the community draws

water. When it seems that there is no headway, the rival community is adamant in not allowing their rival community to draw water the only source and they are badly hit with the problem of water, the King and two of his chief in a heart-to-heart discussion in picture (c) are brooding on how to solve the water problem confronting the community Apparently, the community had made frantic efforts to either sink borehole or dig well from which they could draw water but to no avail , their land could not produce water.



(a)



(b)



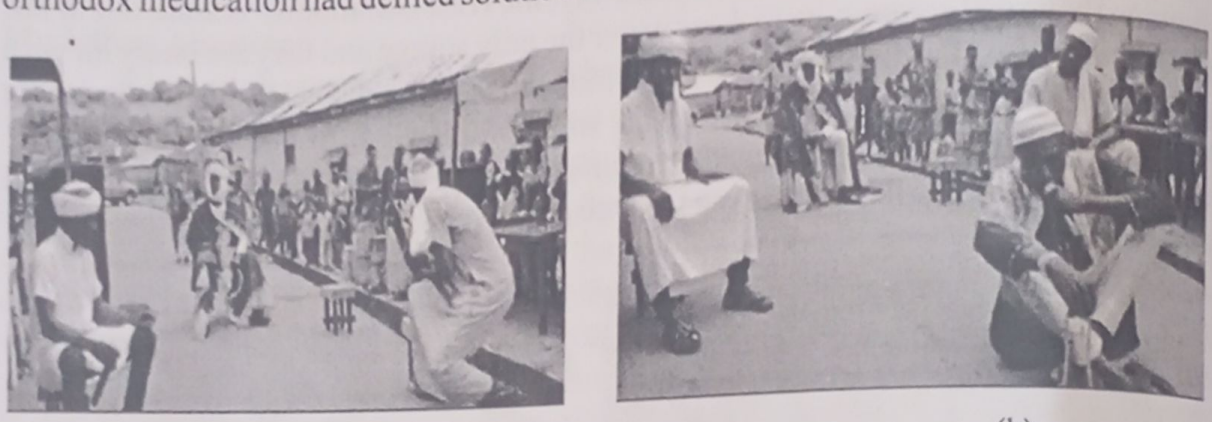
(c)

Fig. vi: The King and his Chiefs in the pictures (b) and (c) above are in a pensive mood. (Pictures: Courtesy of the Researcher)

In the same vein, the other symbolic object deployed is a herbal leave, a tree is said to be in the middle of the only market that the two warring communities patronise, again *google.com* (2022), in discussing the importance of leaves to humans submits that leaves: "provides your body with essential nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, fibre, antioxidants, etc. The antioxidants present in leaves can make a strong immune system."

In picture VII below, the Emir and Chiefs of the other community who are also hit by outbreak of unknown diseases are also seen discussing the problem of ill-health and pandemic that has hit the community. The chiefs in picture (a) below are briefing the Emir about the situation in the community that had many of the citizens suffering one ailment or the other while all efforts to treat the ailing citizens, using both traditional and

orthodox medication had defiled solution.



(a) (b)

Consequently, a diviner is invited as seen in picture (b) above to find out from the gods why the pandemic and what could be the possible solution. The god reveals that unless they make peace with the other community, the diseases carried by the people in their community will continue unabated.

As shown in the picture in figure VIII below, the two communities realised that that they cannot exist without one another, having tried all methods of self-soul survival, they decide to swallow their prides and agreed to come together for the mutual benefit of the two communities



(a) (b)

Picture VIII: *The two warring communities come together on the realisation that they cannot do without each other as shown in picture (a) and in picture (b), the two traditional rulers are hand-in-hand, pledging to sheath their swords for the benefit of their people*

A director re-modelling directorial approach, which takes the people down to nature, underscores how germane nature is to man's existence. Consequently, this re-modelling approach made the director to works on the mindsets of the performers with view to drawing positive emotions and immersion that makes the people feel the

empathy that attracted the people to listen and ruminate on the experiences of the past. This was underscored in Elger's ToP which states inter alia that: "Performance improvements, which involve a performer's mindset, immersion in an enriching environment and engagement in reflective practice".

This was the approach that instantaneously elicited emotion as the two communities reminisce on the lost love of the past. The two communities, which spoke through their leaders and other spokespersons at the event, were full of emotions when they recall how they have gone astray, wasted both human and material resources through needless conflicts. They confessed that their eyes were now open to the fact that the concept of live is in 'give and take'. In other not to make it all professional affairs, community participation was granted hence, members of the two warring communities were allow to freely interact with the players, demonstrating their acceptance of the peace approach recommended in the play. This, they demonstrated by mounting currency notes on the faces of the performers as a way of showing their joy as contained in the pic(tures IX (a) (b) and (c) below:



(a) A prominent person from Share



(b) a prominent woman from Share



(c)Two prominent people from Tsaragi community, the Makama and the Youth Leader

Picture ix: *Members of the two communities in a free display of joy during the presentation of the play, spraying currencies on the performers during the play performance in picture (a) (b) and © above.*

Again in further emphasising on the director's re-modelling approach used in this research work, which earlier in this work we submitted was a departure from the hitherto community theatre approach; which are theatre with the people, theatre by the people, forum theatre, interactive or participatory theatre approach as encapsulated in the works of Bretch and Boal rather, the directorial re-modelling approach employed in the play presentation was a total theatre approach where music and dance were synthetically woven to embellish the performance noting that Africans are usually warmed into aesthetics of their cultures through traditional music and songs. Consequently, dance, music and drama permeate the performance. Songs in local dialects, Yoruba and Nupe were sang. A Yoruba song like: "*Oore lao ma se, awa o ja mo o,*" which literally means "*we shall continue to be friends, we shall not fight again.*"and the Nupe song: "Si bobo, yi yio o 2x e*yagwa, eyagwa*", was sang by the maidens. The song literally translated to means: "We are civilised, we swing our arms, open to embrace one another". Also, in consideration of other tribal groups who live in the two communities, who may not understand the two local dialects; Yoruba and Nupe languages, a song, rendered in English took care of them, the song goes thus: "There is nothing like peace o, only the peaceful can enjoy life. There can be no development, where peace does not stand. "

The director-researcher also explores costume to communicate the cultural aesthetics and the traditional cultural landscape in the performance. Costumes that communicate the local the traditional aesthetics are those worn by the king, Etsu and the chiefs.this is with a view to domesticate the costume for aesthetic value.

Conclusion

The study discovers that different dynamics of conflicts have rear up its head in Africa. It also noted that what had protracted the crisis to the extent that all hitherto traditional peace approaches that had worked in the past no longer suffice calls for a directorial re-modelling approach. Like succour came the application of the theatrical and dramatic concept of a director re-modelling approach, which positively changed the narratives of a hitherto problematic peace process. Unarguably, the role of theatre and the approach of a director to warm peace into the heart of warring people as experimented in the case of Share/Tsaragi imbroglio present a workable model that is worth utilising. This is what this paper concludes, as it underpins the potency, vivacity, homily of the theatre as an acceptable approach to excite peace as seen in the directorial ingenuity that was experimented in the case of Share/Tsaragi's conflict. Drawing from this, it is recommended that the approach of the theatre, using different directorial re-modelling approach should be explored to accentuate peace in a crises ridden environment and also as an approach to fix other societal challenges just as the approach of community theatre had been used in the past to solve many knotty communal problems. Theatre is life, it is therefore capable of addressing socio-cultural, political and economic problems that may rear its head in our society.

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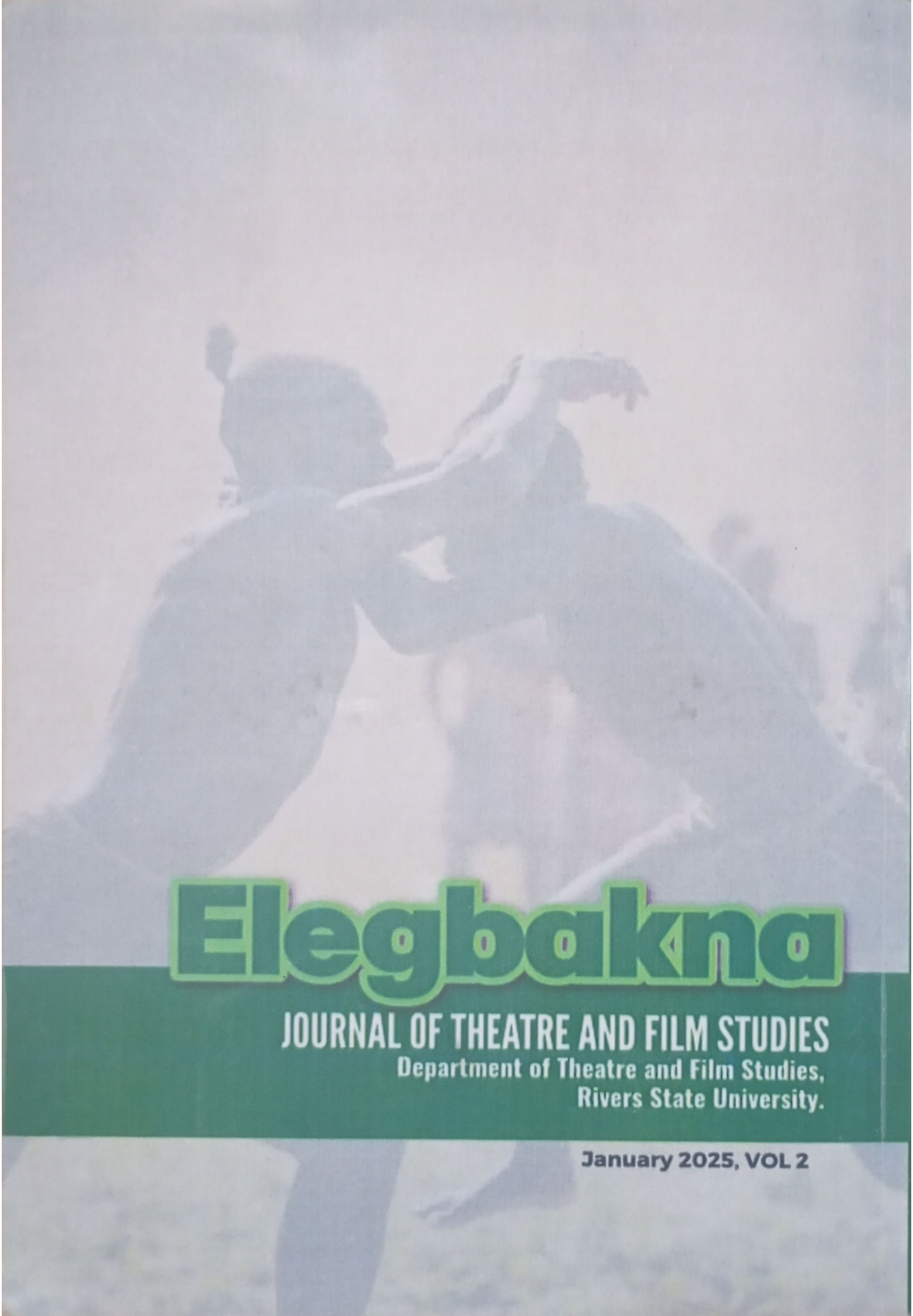
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