

AMA:

JOURNAL OF THEATRE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

Volume 15 No.1, 2021

A Publication of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

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Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

Volume 15 No.1, 2021

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ISSN: 2221 – 3330

**Printed in Nigeria by
Zubic Infinity Concept**
#6b Oparanozie Street,
Off Old Nekede Road, Owerri
Imo State, Nigeria

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AMA ... is a journal of Theatre, Film, Humanities, and Cultural Studies. It is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The journal affords Academics opportunity to publish scholarly articles in the areas of Theatre, Film, Culture, other media and Humanities. Articles on Performance, Critical- theories, Literature, Culture, Film and Cinematic Art, Music, Religion Fine and Applied Arts, Book Reviews, Interviews and other areas are accepted for review and publication by the Editorial Board of *Ama ...* Manuscripts not more than twenty-five (25) pages, typed double line spacing in twelve points Times New Roman should be submitted electronically to: amajournalunizik@gmail.com or amajournalnau@gmail.com. No dead line for submission, articles are considered in order of submission

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS

With emerging trends in theatre research and scholarship, *AMA: Journal of Theatre and Cultural Studies* has maintained its stand as a dependable and reliable resource material in inter-disciplinary scholarship.

This Volume: Vol.15, No. 1, of 2021 is an eloquent testimonial to the resilience of the editorial team in ensuring a continued history of astute research and scholarship in order to guarantee adequate learning and pedagogy.

Although the articles in this volume have individual trusts, they are inadvertently related in a collective call for the revitalization of the dramatic, performing and media arts. It is actually what can be termed an "awareness" volume as the essays bother on advocacy.

Awaritoma Agoma's discourse on Solo performance titled "Solo Performances and the Restructuring of the Theatre Curriculum: A Study of Tunji Sotimiri's Performance in Solo Africa" makes a case encouraging teachers and students of Theatre Arts to pay special attention to Solo acts. He traces that evolution of Solo performance and outlines the benefits to the individual actor, the institution and the society. Similarly, Emmanuel Iroh advocates for the use of dramatic techniques in the pedagogy of prose in secondary schools. His work, "Adaptation of Novel to Dramatic Drama for Classroom Teaching: The Efficient Secondary Commercial School, Uyo Experiment" explores the use of drama as an alternative way of teaching prose and as a means of ensuring better understanding.

Martina Omorodion in her essay "Good Governance in Nigeria: The Place of Women" equally calls on women to rise up to their responsibilities as co-equals with their male counterparts in the society. She advocates for the active participation of women in politics. As Martina recognizes the fact that women are beginning to make little impact in politics, Kelechi Ogbonna and Chisimdi Ihentuge call for the utilization of the ethnic identity as a unifying factor for the political and economic growth of the nation. In their essay, "Exploring Positivity in Ethnic Identity for National Re-Integration in Nigeria: A Multimedia

Perspective" is a call for policy makers to cash in on our seeming 'unity in diversity to galvanize a united nation.

Canice Nwosu takes the role of teachers of drama further in his "The Teacher of Teachers as Developer of Human Resources: A Re-appraisal of Dan Uwandu's 'Child Development through Drama'". Here he extols the virtues of a teacher and submits that teachers are nation builders because they are character molders as well as nation builders through the formation of persons they instruct. Likewise, Felix Gbenoba, shows how the medium of drama is an effective way for the interpretation of poetry in "Drama as Style for Enhanced Patronage of Modern Nigerian Poetry: A Reading of Selected Poems in Hope Eghagha's *The Governor's Lodge*". He draws semblances of drama in the poetry of Hope Eghagha and explores how these dramatic elements have helped in a better comprehension of the poems. Equally, in "Nigeria's Female Dramatic Creativity: An Analysis of Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Salami's *Sweet Revenge*", Rosemary Asen calls for an end to negative cultural practices against women. These practices, the author contends, hinder the growth and development of the womenfolk. It calls for the assertion of female rights and better collaboration amongst themselves. And Chibuike Abunike calls for a reduction in violent movies in his work "Examining Domestic Violence through the Film Medium in Nigeria: An Analysis of Selected Films". This lessening of violence in movies he believes can be achieved through proper censorship.

In another wake-up call, Josephine Odunze proffers solutions towards the revitalization of the Abuja carnival. Her essay, "The Defunct Abuja National Carnival: Towards a Rekindling of the Dying Embers" seeks avenues towards the renaissance of the Abuja Carnival. She contends that the carnival is a veritable source of revenue and great tourism potential. As Josephine is calling on cultural administrators to bring forth resources towards the rebirth of the Abuja carnival, Onyeka Ebekue and Somtoo Arinze-Umobi in "Between the Nollywood Classroom and Nollywood Practice: Absence of Synergy or Synergy of Absence" are advocating that there should be a synergy between the Nollywood film practitioners and the Nollywood academia for quality assurance in Nollywood video films.

The use of signs and symbols in dances as expressed in some war dances is explored in Tochukwu Okeke and Judith Ume's

discourse in “The Significance of Cultural Symbols in *Ogbo* traditional War Dance”. The authors use this work to underscore the importance of symbols in traditional dances and explain how such signs aid the audience’s understanding of the performance. Charles Nwadiuwe and Ebuka Ilukwe make a call for an overhaul of the Nigerian Creative Industry in order to create a level playing ground for performers through a review of the Copyright law. The article "Copyright Law and the Challenge of Piracy in Nollywood Business" advocates for stricter penalties for defaulters in the creative business. And, Ver-Or Kachii sums up these calls for a better society in his article "Theatre and Revolution in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*". Here the author calls for continued use of the theatre as means of sensitization and mass orientation. It is believed that through revolutionary plays like *Hangmen Also Die* that the cries of the masses will be heard and a better society will emerge from the ashes of the old.

We look forward to receiving more articles on this advocacy for the revitalization of the performing arts and similar discourses especially works that encourage interdisciplinary research.

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SOLO PERFORMANCE AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE THEATRE CURRICULUM: A STUDY OF TUNJI SOTIMIRIN'S PERFORMANCE IN SOLO AFRICA.

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Abstract

Over seventy percent of Theatre Arts students and other members of the audience that watched the Maiden Edition of Solo Africa confessed to seeing a monodrama for the first time. This paper illuminates the power and attraction of solo performance and the need for charity (restructuring) to begin in our homes as thespians; and that for 400 level theatre students to confess to seeing a solo actor for the first time reveals the neglect and poor attention given to solo performance by scholars and critics. This paper adopts the 'less is more' artistic theory of the theatre as well as the Avant-gardist theory that allows ample room for experimentation during performance. It also employs the Field Study Method of information gathering which is descriptive emphasizing the importance of observations made rather than numerical data. Findings in this paper reveal that solo performance holds one of the keys to resuscitating the otherwise sleeping theatre industry and any student or artiste that can perform solo is better positioned to sustain and grow the Industry. It therefore concludes that solo performance should be introduced as a matter of urgency in theatre arts curriculum in our higher institutions; as well-trained solo performers would produce artistic works that would help reposition the theatre and mobilize the entire citizenry, not only theatre artistes, towards positive national development. It also recommends that theatre arts lecturers should be rewarded for their performance ability on stage along sides their literary skills the same way theatre students are scored.

Introduction

Solo performance is a performance by one person before an audience; it could be dance, music, or drama. It could be a recitation of a poem or a spoken word piece; a storytelling session; what is germane is that it is a performance done by one person. There are other kinds of performances

that are not exactly music, dance, or drama but are done by one person. This paper's focus is on that one person that is performing a monodrama (one-man improvised or memorized/scripted play). Amazingly, solo performance as a sub-genre of the theatre has received very little attention from academics and theatre critics, which has led to the dearth of scholarly materials in this area of the theatre. Regardless of the fact that theatre seems to have originated as solo in the storyteller, court fool, groit, shaman, or praise-singer in almost every culture in Africa and even globally, or in Thespis (the father of drama), who stepped out of the chorus in Greek theatre and acted solo. Furthermore, every human being is a solo actor, right from when we were born; even the little baby knows the act to put up to get the attention of his mother, and children are known to feign ill-health when they do not want to go to school. Individuals tend to behave differently as they move from place to place carrying out their daily assignments. The character a man puts up at home with his wife is different from his character in the office before his boss, or before his Pastor. If that same man has to appear before his state Governor it will be a different behavior and a completely different attitude when he comes before the President of his country. But we are concerned with people who have taken solo acting as a means to an end; whether for fame, name or gain. To a lot of people, this kind of theatre is unusual but it is also very clear that what is unusual is not necessarily bad. As the theatre continues to evolve, actors, directors, and theatre managers continue to look for new and very innovative ways to please their audience, solo performance; especially the innovation and contribution of mono dramatists, performance poets/spoken word artistes, and stand-up comedians are definitely part of this evolution.

The choice of *Molue* as the central focus for this paper is mainly because it is very captivating, the maverick performer is adept at involving his audience, carrying them along from the beginning to the end; and it was also the only monologue directed and performed by its playwright. Sadly, however, even after thirty years, not many people, including theatre art students, have heard of Tunji Sotimirin as a monologist or his classic solo play – *Molue*. It is a huge contrast with what scholars, students, or critics have heard, read, or written about *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* by Femi Osofisan, *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi, *Iredi War* by Sam Ukala or *Prized Chickens Are Not Tasty* by Saint Gbilekaa. Solo performance is a performance art and performers still in the field, regardless of their age should be encouraged. Lecturers

gain promotion when they write papers or critique even *Molue*. But there is no known record, at least to this researcher, where the same Lecturer who performed the play gets rewarded in the academic world, knowing that theatre is more of performance art than literary art.

The issues talked about in conventional plays are not different from those talked about in solo plays. As engaging, electrifying, entertaining, and topical as *Molue*, *The Prime Minister's Son*, and *Karena's Cross* are; scholarly works about them are difficult to come by. Theatre serves the same functions in solo performances as in any conventional/regular drama production: entertaining, educating, enlightening, and informing the audience and one-man performing alone on stage can be more arresting and scintillating than fifteen men as one man juggling twelve balls are more pulsating to any audience than twelve men juggling one ball.

Definition of Terms

Solo Performance

Any performance by one person in front of an audience is described as a solo performance. 'Solo performance' could be defined as that improvised or memorized/scripted performance by a single individual without the aid or help of another in the presence of an active audience: an audience that knows when to clap, laugh, scream, and interject with words and also know when to be silent. *Webster's Reference Library Concise Edition Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines 'performance' as "the act of performing; a dramatic production; an act or action." (241) *Roget's 11 The New Thesaurus Expanded Edition* defines the word 'Solo' (adverb) as "without the presence or aid of another" (927). While 'Performance' is seen as "one's artistic conception as shown by the rendering of a dramatic role." (723). Richard Schechner however believes, "performance is an extremely difficult concept to define"; but from the perspective of Ervin Goffman according to Schechner, "performing is a mode of behaviour that may characterize any activity. Thus, performance is a "quality" that can occur in any situation rather than a fenced-off genre." (22) According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* the word 'Solo' is variously defined as, "A job or performance,...done by one person alone" (1064) "without a companion" (adj. adv), "to perform alone" (verb). And 'Performance' is defined as, "the action or an act of PERFORMING (2) a (character in a)

play, a piece of music, tricks, etc., esp. before the public” Louis Catron avers:

Solo production illustrates the power of one – a solitary performer presenting a theatrical experience as richly vibrant and varied as multi-character plays. It has a carefully honed script with a beginning, middle, and an end and an actor impersonating a character; it may bring to life a historical or totally fictional character or even an autobiographical story; it may be drama or comedy and it may be a story of one person or it may involve a number of other characters that the actor evokes in the audience's imagination – but there is only one actor. (1-2)

It is pertinent to add here that not all solo performances or solo productions as Catron describes it, have “a carefully honed script with a beginning, middle and an end” as a lot of solo plays are recorded to have been improvised, while some are episodic like *Molue*. Unlike conventional drama, most solo productions enjoy going from the stage to the page instead of from the page to the stage.

Restructuring

To ‘restructure’ is to put something or a system together in a different way. The *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* says ‘restructure’ is “to arrange (a system or organization) in a new way; give a new structure” (945). This means, Nigeria as an entity, needs to be arranged in a new way as a lot of voices have proclaimed. And this, from all indications, is because of a defect or fault in the present structure. The call for ‘restructuring’ in Nigeria is because a lot of Nigerians are convinced that the present state of things needs to be rearranged or restructured and it cannot be done in one day. It will be a continuous process until perfection is attained or until a new structure that suits all the parties involved in this nation, is put on the ground. The dearth of solo performance materials and poor attention to solo performance receives calls for restructuring in the theatre and this is the focus of this paper.

Curriculum

According to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, ‘Curriculum’ refers to “a course of study offered in a school, college.” (272) Or as *Webster’s Reference Library Concise Edition Dictionary and Thesaurus* says, Curriculum is “a prescribed course of study.” (82) Thus,

the curriculum for theatre arts refers to the prescribed course of study of theatre arts in our higher institutions of learning.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper utilizes the Field Study Method of information gathering; it is descriptive and therefore qualitative. With this method, the observer must either be present during the event or he must watch or view the event from a recorded video because they need to take notes or ask questions as the case may be. However, the direct observation which brings the researcher face-to-face with the subject is very effective and the objective the qualitative approach according to Sola Fajana is, “To see the social world from the point of view of the actor[....]the emphasis is on the discovery of novel or unanticipated findings[....]” (75) As a participant in the audience, researchers have the opportunity of being first-hand observers of live events that cannot be re-enacted the same way. As no two performances even from the same script display exactly the same experience.

It is noteworthy to add here that as the Lecturer of the students and part of the organizers of Solo Africa (a festival of solo performance; see page 8 for details), this researcher also used the privilege to interact with all the students and most of the invited members of the audience from where he was able to ascertain the fact that almost all of them were seeing a solo actor for the first time. Most of them had seen stand-up comedians and even spoken word artists but a solo actor/mono dramatist was completely novel to them. And most of the students in 300 Level became the first set of students in the theatre arts department of the University of Abuja to undergo training in their theatre workshop class in solo performance, where they were made to write and perform a solo play of 10 minutes with not less than five (5) characters.

The **Less is More Concept** of the Theatre focuses all attention on the actor and sees every other thing as a distraction from the main action of the actor. Louis Catron expatiates on the ‘less is more’ concept. He opines that “Typical monodramas observe the *less is more* artistic concept originated by Robert Browning.” He adds that “the goal is restraint, removing excesses to leave an elemental beauty of form that matches purpose. In theatre, ‘less is more’ means tightly restrained productions, discarding nonessentials to focus attention on the character

and story.” (33). This actually allows the audience to focus more on the actor and the acting than on other extraneous materials that may come in by way of costumes, elaborate sets, multiple characterization, props, make-up, exotic lighting, and sound effects. Catron affirms further that; the simplicity of the monodrama’s production style is based on Jerzy Grotowski’s submission in *Towards a Poor Theatre* where elaborate theatrical productions are revealed as “ornate and complicated” engendering a distraction “from the key elements of actor and audience thereby inhibiting or even destroying theatre’s ability to communicate effectively with audiences.” He concludes, “Grotowski says that “poor” theatre productions, in contrast, avoid lavish staging techniques and thereby focus on the core of theatre: actor and audience.” Catron also supports this view:

At its best, the monodrama is theatre in its basic fundamentals. Eliminating excess baggage makes it a brilliant single ray of light instead of a diffused shadowy event. It is a private sharing, a direct theatrical one-to-one communication with the audience, a close-up lens that demands naked truth from all participants. (48)

It must therefore be stated clearly that theatre did not begin with elaborate costumes, lighting, exotic scenery/set design, sound effects, make-up, and props. All these embellishments may have been added during years of its growth, advancement, and endless evolution.

The **Avant-gardist Theory of the theatre** is also very relevant to every solo performer and it reached its peak in the period of *modernism*. Solo performance is an avant-gardist and unique form of theatre, as performers are inspired to set new rules as they perform because they realize that the two most important and compulsory elements in the theatre are the performer and the audience. Richard Schechner postulates that the avant-garde is a rule-breaking activity. But actually, experimentation in the arts has its own set of rules (13). Michael Kearns says to “Keep in mind that one of the realities of solo is that you are a bit of a renegade. You break rules. Defy the so-called standards of success. Create and commit to your own standards and do not depend on the validation of others.”(108) And Jo Bonny tells Alterman Glenn that, “Solo shows are a personality-driven form. It’s difficult to mention rules because it’s so individual.” (176) And Christopher Ashley also informs Alterman that, “The thrill of writing a one-person show is that you get to invent a new kind of theatre for yourself. It’s a great form for breaking

the rules.” (181) And Logan Murray concludes thus, “There are no rules where creativity is concerned”. (xxvii) And in Jordan R. Young’s *Acting Solo*, the following exchange illuminates the above issue,

“Someone said to me once, ‘You’re breaking new ground [...] you’re creating a new theatrical form here.’ I said, ‘That’s not true at all.’ What we’re really doing is going back to a very primitive form of theatre. Theatre started with someone saying to a group of people, ‘I’m going to tell you a story.’

“We’re also going back to – and this is what I find exciting – the power of the actor, to create just with words, and with his ability as an actor.” (187-188)

This is what we extrapolate from Frances Harding’s statement, “the new themes or styles of performance arose from a combination of inspiration, regeneration of existing forms, intellectual decision and direct influences felt from a new source,” Harding continues: “New forms eschew elaborate sets, locations, and costumes. Training resources too are scarce, so new performance relies heavily on innate personal skills: comic, acrobatic, and musical. Flexibility and adaptability are essential attributes in this kind of performance.” (17). John Cairney elaborates more on the fact that this art form of the theatre reduces cost as against what is obtainable in conventional theatre. He states clearly that, “it might seem obvious that the solo is done to save money – or more to the point, to make money.”(1) Thespis, who was a rule-breaker, has been described as the father of modern theatre and his achievements are why the world has very many Solo Performers today, as John Cairney avers:

When Thespis stepped forward from the chorus in 534 BC, he not only “stepped out of line” in the histrionic sense, but in doing so, he invented the actor, the single protagonist, the first soloist. Therefore, it can be said that in the widest sense, the poet-player, Thespis, was the original one man show” (3-4).

Performances are enacted to bring out the aesthetics, which enhance the message delivery. With the financial challenges faced in producing conventional plays in present day Nigeria, the ‘power of one’ economically, technically, and aesthetically is obviously a very welcome development. Frances Harding makes it clear that performance is about doing:

Eventually however, devising plays which were not designed to end up as published literature and whose avowed aim was to engage directly with spectators, was to become a widespread practice as more and more people realized that performance was about doing.

Solo Africa indeed is all about doing; it is the first festival of solo performance, (maiden edition-21st April 2019 in Abuja, Nigeria, and maybe Africa). It featured music solo – singing soloist, drum soloist, dance soloist, keyboard soloist, saxophone soloist; spoken word, stand-up comedy, monodrama/monologues and the Award for Solo in Africa – ASA – African Solo Awards, which was given to pioneers of monodrama and stand-up comedy in Nigeria: Tunji Sotimirin, Greg Mbajiorgu, Benedict Binebai, and Alibaba; including posthumous awards to Funso Alabi and Mohammed Danjuma. The major performances at the event were *Molue* - written and first performed by Tunji Sotimirin in 1989, performed during the festival by Tunji Sotimirin himself (a lecturer at the University of Lagos); *The Prime Minister's Daughter*, an adaptation of *The Prime Minister's Son*, written and performed by Greg Mbajiorgu in 1991. But the adaptation directed by Mbajiorgu himself (a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsuka) was performed by Grace Okonkwo, a student of the University of Nigeria, Nsuka. *Karena's Cross* written by Benedict Binebai, a lecturer at the Niger Delta University, Bayelsa. His play was performed by Rachel Oyinkepreye Tuodonye (the first known female solo performer of monodrama in Nigeria), a graduate of the Department of Theatre Arts, Niger Delta University and Directed by Rudolph Kansese also a lecturer at Niger Delta University, and finally, a classic stand-up comedy performance by De Don, who represented Alibaba at the event. Indeed, for the first time in theatre history in Nigeria, the major proponents of monodrama were acknowledged, appreciated, and celebrated in Nigeria. This paper is an analysis of Tunji's *Molue* as a study of the beauty that solo performance is and the need to exploit and project it further especially by academia.

Analysis of *Molue* as performed by Tunji Sotimirin in Solo Africa.

Synopsis and Plot: *Molue* is an episodic solo piece or monodrama, a satire about the larger Nigerian nation with all sorts of characters, all trying to make a living, some trying to out-wit others and somehow, people fall; maybe because humans are naturally susceptible. The play opens with the entrance from the audience of a typical Lagos Conductor

of a Molue (a typical transport vehicle mostly seen on Lagos roads moving from one place to place in Lagos, ferrying commuters to their various destinations). The Conductor enters dancing to a popular Yoruba music, issuing from the bus, under the control of the bus-driver. He pleads with the driver whom he calls 'Bugati' to stop the music, otherwise, they "nor go comot from here today" according to him. He wishes the other passengers (audience) a happy Easter and begins calling for passengers. After a few minutes, he informs the driver that it looks like they have more passengers wanting to go to Oshodi as against Palmgroove/Onikpan that was their original route. So, he changes his call to Anthony/Oshodi. After a few seconds, he requests the driver to play more music to celebrate Easter. He then proceeds to dance 'shaku-shaku' and 'Zanku', some of the very latest dance steps in vogue amongst young people in Nigeria. And the audience (mostly university students) exploded with huge applause and excitement because they could identify and relate with the music and the dance steps. It was like giving fish to a cat. They clapped, sang, and danced along. After a session of enervating dancing, the conductor again pleads with the driver to stop so they could go to work. But not before buying the early morning mixtures (kparaga) that drivers and conductors use to buy from some women who sell them especially around motor-parks early in the morning. He takes 'a short' of what is his own wn mixture, drinks it in one swallow and asks the seller to come back later in the day to collect her money saying, "I don owe you before? Abeg come back later come collect your money." He enters the Molue with "make I collect my money". As they proceed on the journey, inside the bus, the conductor encounters passengers of all sorts. Beginning with those who deliberately disregard his plea that, everybody should enter with their change. There are also very cunning characters and ogbologbos - vagabonds who try to outsmart drivers and conductors by not wanting to pay the required fee for the trip, they cash-in on the large size of the bus and overcrowded passengers. Beginning with the man who says "I am a staff" and so he has license not to pay, to the woman who feigns being deaf and dumb, to the ogbologbo who claimed to have paid for himself and two other companions "the both of us" and even claimed that the conductor was owing him change instead. The conductor refuses to allow the vagabond or ogbologbo in this Molue to get away with his ploy – not wanting to pay. But to everyone's amazement, the ogbologbo picks up a bottle, breaks it and decides to threaten the conductor and everybody in the bus.

The driver pleads in a cowardly manner with the conductor to cooperate with the ogbologbo because he does not want trouble, the Conductor is adamant and confronts the ogbologbo because his own madness seems to be more than that of the ogbologbo. The driver stops the bus and the ogbologbo and his companions exit the bus and the journey continues. The Conductor boasts that it is because of the driver otherwise he would have dealt with the ogbologbo. The Conductor retires backstage which is centre-stage (three chairs backing the audience containing his props and costumes: two caps, three different but very colourful short-sleeve shirts, two bags and a book, representing a bible; only the shirts were however visible to the audience) and puts on one of the short-sleeve shirts, a Yoruba cap made from the same material and a paper-bag with the bold inscription 'pago-pago'. Then he stopped, paused and after the silence, he switched to Yoruba and became a typical 'medicine seller' inside a Molue, in Lagos; that sells any and every kind of medicine that cures any and every kind of sickness and diseases. He introduces himself and begins to market aggressively his cure-all elixir called 'pago-pago' with lots of humour and the other passengers (audience) patronize him. He introduces a song and asks the other passengers (audience) to clap and sing along with him. He plays his part and exits the stage. He goes back to the dressing room centre-stage, where he has his costumes and props, in the full view of the audience. He transforms himself into 'another medicine seller' with a red papa's cap and a different short sleeve shirt. Again we notice the pause and silence, a transitional device from one character to another; this time, his voice is that of an Ibo man selling 'miraculous miracles' that can cure mouth odour (MO), body odour and even prevent people from speaking bad grammar. With a very outstanding use of voice inflection, he convinces his fellow passengers to patronize his products. He also sang a song to which he dances. He exits the stage, the same way the first medicine seller left, changing only his top again, this time he did not add a cap but he had a book (bible); he is now a Preacher, after the usual pause and silence. His voice has also changed, speaking very fluent and polished English. He prays and preaches but does not collect offerings as is typical with such characters in our buses; which might be a pointer to the fact that he may be there to genuinely lead souls to heaven and not the hungry and suspicious preachers we see around. The audience participates fully as they did with the medicine sellers, they are carried along in his prayers and praise songs to God. In the end he invites his fellow passenger to worship with

him in his church by sharing tracts/handbills to the audience (bus); when he exits, through the audience, the play ends with singing, clapping and dancing.

Message: *Molue* is a fast moving satire, commenting on the Nigerian state and its numerous challenges. The passengers, the bus conductor and the driver are all complaining about the problems facing the country: over-congestion in the bus (Lagos-nation). Also, there is lack of accommodation, there is intolerance, fear and there is unnecessary tension because of lack of employment. All cunning and corrupt people want everything to be free, not wanting to pay for services, others come into the bus and they step on the toes of others, maybe because of overcrowding “*Molue* is symbolic of a mini Nigeria and events are satirized with lots of humour to say”, in the words of the Playwright-Director-Actor (Sotimirin in a personal interview) that, “politically we are not doing well, socially we are still decadent, economically we are down and we find ourselves in that kind of rickety bus, where people cannot breathe properly, where people step (on one another’s) toes, you have nowhere to express your human right, all of your rights have been trampled upon to start with to even find yourself in that kind of unwholesome, uncomfortable environment. That is the message for *molue*.” (personal interview with Tunji)

Characters: In *Molue*, there is the brave and bold **Bus Conductor** who enters dancing to a popular Yoruba music blaring from the bus; he leads the others and plays the characters of the cowardly **Bus Driver**, the passenger who say he is a **Staff and the Deaf and Dumb** passengers who refuse to pay) and the **been-to Americana (Newspaper Reader)** who cannot concentrate or even breathe in the bus because of the noise and overcrowding and the crafty and criminal minded **Vagabond (Ogbologbo)** through role-switching and perfect vocal variation and these were electrifying moments for the audience who responded with loud claps, shouts and applause. The Conductor (Small Pepper) opens the play but did not close it because he did not narrate, as we have in the storytelling mode. There was no narrator which foregrounds the episodic nature of the performance. After dealing with the Ogbologbo (Vagabond) in the bus, the Conductor could only be heard calling for passengers during the costume transition from one character to another; the audience however gets the impression that he was conducting his affairs quietly elsewhere inside the bus. Perhaps, he should be made to respond once in a while to the other characters but that is not the case

with this conductor, he just simply played his part and disappeared. Worthy of note is the professional use of costume and the ease and speed of changing right before the audience as well as the deliberate use of pause and or silence as a transitional tool from one character to another and this was very obvious during the transition from Conductor to the Yoruba medicine seller, then from him briefly into the conductor calling for passengers, then exchange of costume, sudden silence, deliberate pause then the Ibo medicine seller and finally, the vocal inflection, varying the voice to that of the incoming character. This same performance technique was applied for the last three major characters: Yoruba and Ibo medicine, then the Pastor in the bus.

Then, the **First Medicine-Seller (a Yoruba man)** brought a lot of colour, wit, and humour to the stage and involved the audience in his singing and dancing, masterfully. And the call and response performative elements of the storytelling tradition were employed to involve the audience and make the play more entertaining.

The **Second Medicine-Seller (an Ibo man)** was even more electrifying to the audience with his use of voice and choice of Broken-English. The artist's dexterous use of vocal variation became more pronounced in this second medicine seller of Ibo origin. The very loud response of shouts, claps, and applause from the audience confirms their excitement. The **Preacher** is more or less like the Medicine Sellers in a lot of ways, this is because he is also there “looking for wetin im go chop”. In other wo

rds, he is in the Bus to sell Jesus Christ and he got the full response from a very active audience because it is common knowledge that religion, in a very problematic society like Nigeria, according to a very popular saying, “is the opium of the people”.

The **Audience (Passengers)** is the icing on the cake inside the Molue. Their prompt and appropriate response brought out the best in all the other characters. Apart from Tunji playing the other characters listed above, the other visible character that spoke for and by themselves is the audience; they indeed are the dialogue in the monologue – Molue. They sang along every time the performer needed them to and some even rose to give a standing ovation and dance along when Tunji displayed his dancing skills and his audience-bonding technique by dancing one of the latest dance steps (shaku-shaku) while dancing to very popular music among young people – ‘Zanku’ by Zlatan. Right from the very

beginning, the artist was able to bond very well with his audience which made the performance outstanding and a total success.

It is pertinent to note that most of the characters are stereotypes; they are stock characters, not well-rounded obviously because of the ephemeral nature of the setting – a bus. In a bus, nobody can say for sure who is who. People meet to part and may never chance upon one another again, nobody truly knows anybody. It may be the performer's way of referring to the transient state of being/life. But most people in Lagos know a typical Lagos *Molue* (bus) Conductor, *Molue* Medicine-Sellers and *Molue* Preachers. In a sense, everybody goes out every day to look for what to eat and they get it by hook or crook and then retire to their crevice to continue the vicious circle the following day. From the beginning of the play to the end is laced with serious humour, undeniably *Molue* is a full comedic solo play, from loads of laughter recorded in the audience. The physical flexibility and physical fitness displayed in the buoyant energy exuding from Tunji Sotimirin even at sixty years of age is amazing and it confirms the artist's personality and absolute control of his chosen art form.

Language: Most of the characters communicate in Yoruba mixed with broken and Pidgin English, except the Second Medicine-Seller who is portrayed as a typical Ibo businessman and the Preacher. It is a deliberate attempt by the performer to use vocal inflection in order to differentiate each character and he succeeds. Furthermore, the use of Yoruba also situated the play properly in Lagos, where Yoruba is now spoken even to those and by those who are not original speakers (*indigenes*). There is a lot of singing and dancing which is a strong influence in most of Sotimirin's performances: the conductor sings and dances a lot; the Medicine Sellers did the same even the Preacher sings and dances before exiting the stage.

Setting: *Molue* is set in a bus in Lagos – the then Capital of Nigeria; which is symbolic of a Mini-Nigeria.

Molue is a classic one-man drama that can be staged continuously in Nigeria until the restructuring that is being clamored for takes place. This is because the same problems experienced when Tunji first performed in 1989 and recently on Easter day (April 21st, 2019) are still prevalent today – over 30years after; in fact, one could say, things have grown from bad to worse, especially concerning the Nigerian state. From beginning to the end the performance is improvised and it reveals the

dexterity of the actor. The dynamic and energetic use of stage space is pulsating. In the interpretation and portrayal of characters, Tunji utilized masterfully, voice inflection to differentiate one character from another and role switching for the first six characters: Conductor, Driver and Ogbologbo, the Staff, the Americana, and the Deaf and Dumb. With the Medicine Sellers and Preacher, he added mild costumes, props, and language to differentiate them because they are the major characters in the play. The music was however played by the DJ in the house but the audience gets the impression the sound is issuing from inside the bus, as some of them are known to play very noisy music inside their buses in Lagos. Quite brilliant and ingenious, there is yet to be another like Molue or Tunji Sotimirin in the business of monodrama. This is one total theatre performance that should be touring the nation; and studied in our universities like any of Soyinka's, Rotimi's, Osofisan's, or Gbilekaa's popular plays. So much display of dexterity in the performance, very energetic and pulsating, Tunji Sotimirin does not have an equal in his brand of solo performance, simply exquisite and ingenious. Indeed, the actor's (Tunji's) vocal range, the ingenuity of characterization, stamina, versatility, and pace (timing) were truly tested and confirmed in *Molue*, especially at his present age of sixty. The published edition of *Molue* can never compare to the performance and academia has put theory ahead of practice in a supposedly practical course. For *Molue*, as a performance by Tunji Sotimirin and a literary piece to get to its rightful place, this trajectory has to be restructured.

The audiences' reaction to Sotimirin's performance could be summed up in some of the questions and comments of most of the audience: "Who is that Yoruba man? How old is he?" because Sotimirin was sporting a completely white beard running down from his jaw to his chin with a completely shaved and shining head (see attached picture below). And most outstanding is a comment from an invited friend (a popular Nigerian gospel artiste – Elijah Oyelade): "Wao...you have very good content here" for a TV/internet program



Sotimirin as Conductor displaying a latest dance step in *Molue* during Solo Africa, 2019

Conclusion and Recommendations

The other plays that featured during the festival of solo performance – solo Africa, were also sublime. But *Molue*, apart from being a masterpiece, stands out because the playwright acted by himself and the performance meets all recognized standards for performance by any conventional theatre production. And the performance is part of what this researcher employs to teach his students solo performance. Audience satisfaction, which is the result, was at its peak and the message was delivered with panache, very topical and very memorable. Most importantly is the fact that a truly gifted performer will perform with passion as we have noticed in some playwrights who write conventional drama but some have retired into just playwriting and perhaps directing plays. Those who can write and perform, well into old age, should be recognized, celebrated, and accorded more reward. This is the very crux of the matter in this paper; solo performance as a form, despite its ability to deliver the goods, has been neglected almost completely by theatre experts because scholars tend to pay more attention to theories than practice. To know that even thirty years after the first performance of solo in Nigeria, students of theatre art do not know or have not been deliberately taught about this very significant sub-genre of the theatre.

Furthermore, it is common knowledge that if you can perform solo, you can perform anywhere: television, radio, film or stage; solo performance builds and strengthens the confidence of the actor more than acting only in conventional plays where the actor depends on other actors to cue him. That solo is done to save money or to raise money cannot be overemphasized. It is the most economical form of the theatre – costume, props, make-up, exotic lighting, set design, and scene changes, and the burden of multi-character plays have been reduced to the barest minimum if not expunged. The challenges of waiting for other actors to come for rehearsals is not there at all because as a solo actor, your success or failures rest on your shoulders alone. Even the stress of a dictatorial director can be circumvented. The challenge of acting only on a designated stage has been demystified as solo actors can act anywhere even inside the sitting room of a big man, which means performances can truly take place anywhere. In times of economic recession, we have noticed that stand-up comedy shows have kept the flag of the theatre flying in almost every nook and cranny of this nation. Virtually, everything that conventional drama productions can achieve can be achieved in solo productions, the only major difference being the appearance of more people, physically on stage. But this is the essence of solo, the difference that sets it apart, the reason it should be given more attention by academics and theatre critics. It makes the individual actor better prepared to face life's challenges, to take up responsibilities for his actions or inactions as a man or woman, before looking for others to help or blame. The same issues discussed in conventional plays can also be portrayed in solo plays. They perform absolutely the same functions: entertaining, educating, enlightening, and informing the audience.

In addition, Lecturers are promoted when they write scholarly papers but it is not on record that Theatre Arts lecturers have been promoted when they perform in plays that engender scholarly discourse/papers. Benedict Binebai has received scores for his published solo plays as his profile that was read during ASA – African Solo Award revealed but Tunji Sotimirin whose profile was also read during the Award for the solo in Africa – ASA, has more than four solo plays to his credit and other conventional stage plays and television soaps and movies that he has featured in, yet, there is no record that he has been scored for promotion because of these stage performances. And the world knows that theatre arts is more a doing/performing art than a literary art but more attention is paid to theory than the practice. This paradigm needs to be

recalibrated. When you perform in a play whether published or not, scores should be awarded that should count during a promotion. When a lecturer of theatre arts writes songs and an album is produced and released by him, he should be scored. When the same theatre arts lecturer writes poems and performs them, he should be scored for the writing and the performance, especially towards promotion.

Furthermore, in the academic world, there are 'inaugural lectures' and it has to do more with the writing prowess of the scholar. In the same way, this paper recommends that 'inaugural performances' should be organized to celebrate the performance prowess of a theatre artiste, especially performance inclined lecturers. A popular adage says you cannot give what you do not have. Theatre arts lecturers, maybe, should be also made to practice what they preach; let there be a period in the life of the lecturer when he has to practice before or during teaching. That is to say, as doctors practice doctoring throughout their lifetime, theatre arts lecturers should climb the stage from time to time or act in movies, television soaps, and radio dramas; so that they will be seen to be giving what they have, therefore, leading by example. There may be lecturers of theatre arts that have never acted on stage, just like we have students graduating from the theatre without ever climbing the stage to act in their four years of training. There are no doctors of medicine that cannot treat illness.

This paper, therefore, recommends that the most important restructuring in the theatre is that which begins inside our own house as thespians; beginning with our curriculum. Solo performance, as a matter of urgency, must be included. Auditions and improvisation used for casting in regular plays, should not be mistaken for solo performance as some play directors believe; the end result from most of such auditions and improvisation rehearsals is a conventional drama and not a solo performance.

Also, every student of theatre arts should be made to write and perform a solo piece inside his/her four years of training to better fortify and prepare him/her for the business and the market out there. Furthermore, as students are made to write long essays, they should be encouraged to write and perform their solo pieces. The implication of introducing solo to students is that more talented students will be exposed and we would experience positive activities in the industry with talents that have been deliberately groomed or refined to do theatre business the educated way,

not as is observed with many uncouth stand-up comedians today in the industry. Furthermore, proponents of the form should be encouraged to publish their works for global distribution and general impact.

Society of Nigeria Theatre Artiste - SONTA is a congregation of Theatre Artistes and for the number of years this researcher has attended the annual meetings, no lecturer/artist has performed. Artists should be more of performers than writers or better still, perform alongside writing. The same way papers are presented and reviewed, Performance Inclined lecturers should be allowed to present their performance and then a postmortem should be done in keeping with the theatre tradition and then scores awarded at the end of the day. If we as lecturers award marks to students for written and practical examinations, then, we should lead by examples. The reward system should be restructured. Let scores be awarded for both written papers and practical performances, after all, Theatre is music, drama, and dance. And such performances should be recorded and local and global contents could result for Television stations who are in dire need of indigenous programme contents. Nigeria is called the giant of Africa, a very bogus claim which has been punctured severally, especially by the present realities in the country as it is very clear to all that a lot has gone awry and a house divided against itself cannot stand. The call for restructuring from almost every nook and cranny of the nation is therefore very appropriate. It is common knowledge that if I keep my corner clean and you keep your corner clean very soon, there will be a connection of clean houses that can engender a completely clean nation. The first step to restructuring is to begin at home: SONTA, then the curriculum of all theatre arts departments nationwide; this is the beginning of genuine restructuring. The Theatre Arts Curriculum is incomplete without a deliberate inclusion of Solo Performance.

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