

**OLD STAND-UP COMEDY, ORALITY, SUBJECT MATTER
AND THE NEW MEDIA: A STUDY OF ALIBABA'S 2016
JANUARY 1ST CONCERT PERFORMANCE.**

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Abstract

Stand-up Comedy is sometimes regarded as a shallow and emerging performance genre in Nigerian Theatre practice. Therefore, the paper argues that Stand-up Comedy has been well represented in Nigerian theatre. Moreover, the origin of this genre can be traced back to the times of Oral Literature (Orature) and they are a regular part of virtually every function, where there is enough space for the solo performer to perform. Thus, the subject matter during the period of Orature is not different from what is obtainable in stand-up comedy performances today. This paper's objective is to reveal that the nature of Solo Performance (one-man show) illuminates the performer more and performances; it can be seamlessly recorded for transmission in especially the New Media platforms that connects the local sphere with the entire global community. This paper is anchored on the 'Avant-gardist theory' of the theatre that allows ample room for experimentation during performance; as well as the 'less is more' concept of the theatre, that gives little room for extraneous materials. The field study and descriptive approaches, of the qualitative research methodology are adopted for this research because it emphasises the importance of observations made rather than numerical data. Findings reveal that Orature is thriving in the performances of stand-up Comedians and as a popular art, when properly refined, stand-up comedy could be used to sell other performance arts and other rich elements of the Nigerian culture to the rest of the globe. The paper concludes that the stand-up comedian's art enjoys audience followership and serves the same purpose as the storyteller's art. Hence, it can fit into the New Media through the growing electronic performance culture.

Introduction

Historical facts indicate that stand-up comedy is an entertaining performance that metamorphosed from older Nigerian theatre genres like the wanderin minstrel and story-telling. However, the new Stand-up comedy genre in Nigeria is a product of socio-economic changes and change in taste and demand of contemporary Nigerian audience. Though, every stand-up comedian is a solo performer but not all solo performers are stand-up comedians. Solo performance is a broad umbrella that accommodates every one-person performer on stage but this paper focuses on the stand-up comedian whose origin can be traced to the origin of man and story teller, a major performer in almost every culture of the world. Globally, the stand-up comedian: a performer who could be described as a modern day version of the story-teller and the monodramatist; is known and remains part and parcel of theatre practice and contemporary entertainment. This genre of the theatre is very easy to market especially with the advent of the New Media because one camera can easily record one person on stage than five or six persons on the same stage as has been observed in the conventional stage. “Thus, African theatre in its paradigm shift has been antagonistic, responsive, and accommodating interplay of cultural, traditional, colonial, socio-economic and political forces, years of experimentation and cross-fertilization of intellectual and ideological conceptions” (Canice Chukwuma Nwosu, 150).

Conceptual Clarification

An illumination of the key concepts: ‘Performance,’ ‘oral literature (Orality),’ ‘stand-up comedy,’ ‘subject matter’ and the ‘new media’ is an appropriate starting point that will position this paper on a clear pedestal for better understanding. Richard Schechner believes, “**Performance** is an extremely difficult concept to define”; but Ervin Goffman, according to Schechner, believes “performing is a mode of behavior that may characterize any activity. Thus, performance is a “quality” that can occur in any situation rather than a fenced-off genre” (22). It is believed that traditional African theatre, which is the generality of original performing arts, brewed on African soil and untainted by European civilization over the years, may have started as solo; as history indicates the presence of the shaman, bard or storyteller. Akporobaro states that, “The written word today is only an outcome of the “**Oral Forms - Orality**” which are man’s earliest and original medium of self-expression and artistic creativity”. (1)

Oral forms are therefore the beginning of African theatre. And Ruth Finnegan in *Oral Literature in Africa* also posits that,

There is no mystery about the first and most basic characteristics of oral literature – even though it is constantly overlooked in collections and analyses. This is the significance of actual performance. Oral literature is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion. (4)

Whether it was the shaman or the storyteller, the occasion has a bearing on the performance. F. B. O. Akporobaro explains further, “an oral literary expression exists as a performance, as a speech act accentuated and rendered alive by various gestures, social conventions and the unique occasion in which it is performed.” (3) To Isidore Okpewho, Oral Literature is, “Literature delivered by word of mouth.” He continues: “And has turned out to be a very useful concept for those scholars interested in examining the cultural relationships between those who can read and write and those who cannot.”(3) ‘Word of mouth’ does not mean that body gestures and facial expression are absent, as the body even in a state of sleep is known to respond to that (sleeping) activity accordingly. Rather, it shows that even the words themselves are loaded with actions.

Oral Literature has been described variously as traditional literature, orature, folklore, verbal art and folk literature. They all point to the time when Africans, according to Finnegan in *The Oral And Beyond*, were experts at ‘doing things with words’. She claims: “It envisages words in the context of action. That is, it is more concerned with what people do with words than with language as an abstract, cognitive or somehow independent system.” (2) She says of her book, “The volume’s prime focus is on people doing things with words orally – spoken, vocalized, unwritten.”(3). It is worthy to state clearly here, that it is almost impossible to talk without moving; especially your hands and facial expressions definitely will confirm further the meaning of these words. In other words, gestures, body movements with facial expressions will always accompany voice/words. Finnegan argues further in *The Oral and Beyond* that, “Africa is celebrated above all for the treasure of her voiced and auditory arts, and as home of oral literature, orature and orality, and the genesis and inspiration of the voiced tradition of the great diaspora.”(1)

The above assertion indicates that a lot of the solo performers in the western world may have been influenced by the orality from Africa, perhaps as a result of the slave trade. Jan Vansina sees, “Oral tradition as

verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation. The definition specifies that the message must be oral statements spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only.”(27) Performances recorded in the memories of the performer and passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth are described as orature.

The **Solo Performer** therefore, in Traditional African Theatre, even though he was not recognized by that title, was the story-teller, bard, court fool, shaman, groit whose activity is inherent in the performance of the modern day solo performer. And Vansina captures their mode of performance succinctly when he opines, that “The best known situation of performance is the telling of tales. A performer sits, often in the evening, surrounded by listeners and spins a tale.” It is not a mere recitation, He adds:

The voice is raised or lowered, used as a means of dramatization. Nor does the story-teller just sit there. The tale is acted out with body gestures, even when the storyteller is sitting. Sometimes he or she may stand up, move around, and mime parts of the action narrated. In most cases the public is not just watching. The public is active. It interacts with the teller, and the teller provokes the interaction by asking questions, welcoming exclamations, and turning to a song sung by all at appropriate points of the action. The teller and the public are creating the tale together. The teller leads the event but responds readily to the public and leads his or her public to experience the tale. He or she tries to frighten, delight, worry, and put them on tenterhooks, in turn and skillfully builds on the passage which move the audience most, expanding the exciting parts and condensing or transforming the ones where the attention of the audience lags. (34-35),

Vansina’s postulation above is an appropriate summary of what the actions, whether then or now of what solo performance entails. They do not just recite, they perform. Then and now the standards remain the same, the performer must be creative enough to hold an audience and there is always some kind of interaction between the performer and the audience. He also claims that some storytellers are more creative than others and that they have better techniques for making their tales come alive more than others. Then he goes further to say some are better at ‘dramatization’ (monodramatist) while some are experts in the area of “comic relief” (stand-up comedians); and while describing some as ‘spellbinders’, others he says are good at “involving the public”. Vansina believes “performers

could be specialists or not.” (36) Okumba Miruka says, “The word ‘performance’ is generally understood to mean the delivery or rendition of an item” (57). Furthermore, he avers:

The idea of performance nominally implies a demarcation between the performer and his audience. The performance is even guided by certain tacit regulations to which every participant subscribes. There is an orderly sequence of events and the context of performance is defined. For instance, narratives are traditionally told in the evening; there is one performer at a time.” Usually the evening narratives take place in very informal settings where the narrator is even at liberty to suspend his tale to attend to domestic issues and come back to continue. (57)

Performances can take place anywhere including the home of the storyteller. Gichingiri Ndigirigi buttresses this point,

The narrator (usually the mother) of an ogre story for example, might break off in the middle of a story to attend to the pot cooking the family’s dinner, or to comment about the goat in the shed that never stops bleating. Or the neighbor might drop in to borrow salt, or snuff, as the children are left wondering what happened next. (4)

In Traditional African Theatre which has been described as oral literature or verbal art, performances come mainly as riddles, proverbs, oral poetry and narratives. The above exposition is aimed at revealing the stand-up comedian as a solo performer wearing the shoes of the storyteller. And **stand-up comedy** is defined as a performance by one person before an audience with the main intention of entertaining – evoking laughter. The stand-up comedian lives for laughs; he may have messages to communicate but his major medium is comedy, historically in Africa, he is also rooted in the storyteller. Tony Allen devoted the entire chapter two of his book *Attitude* to the “history of stand-up comedy.” Allen is also of the opinion that stand-up comedy is rooted in storytelling and he says, the story teller chooses “the right story for the occasion. The rest is in the telling”. He claims:

A good story teller will rarely repeat the same story word for word, and the same story from a different story teller can often be unrecognizable to the lay listener. The story teller/writer, as a general rule, selects the bare bone of an existing story and then customizes it to suit his own style. The process can involve describing and interpreting each scene and character through all five senses and in terms of a choice of passing or pervading moods. The whole text can

be enriched and decorated using a personal repertoire of mnemonics, schematic sequences and structural devices. In the actual telling, she can inhabit and personify just about anything she chooses, investing every detail, every phrase, and every word-verb, noun and adjective, every vowel and syllable, with energy or meaning. She could do sound effects, sing, snort, spit and gargle. Characters and their actions can be described in their own particular language, rhythm and sentence structure. (2)

The storyteller had and still possesses the skills and complete attributes of a present day stand-up act and could be seen or referred to as one of the first practitioners of the art of stand-up comedy. The village “idiot” or “fool” or “drunk” has been known to possess some useful skills in comedy. This accounted for why, in most royal courts or palaces, these ‘idiots’ or ‘fools’ were used to entertain guests and important guests at that. Most highly placed people or even great kings in history, used to keep ‘court fools’ for their own personal entertainment and more. To validate this point, Iyorwuese H. Hagher says the following about the court fool or Wawan Sarki in Hausa-land while talking on the functionality of comedy:

Theatre is also being used for child and adult education as well as mass literacy and mobilization campaigns. Conversely in Nigeria the feudalistic emirs have always used the principle of catharsis for suppression of the masses and maintenance of status quo. At annual sallah festivals the traditional performances are incorporated into secular expression for feudal rule. In fact without ever hearing of Aristotle each emir has perfected a cathartic device for robbing the subject-spectator, of action against oppression. This is done through the institution of the emir’s Court Theatre whose major actor the hero, Wawan Sarki enacts the frustration of the commoners against the Emir’s misrule, on these occasions, and he abuses the emir in satiric humour to the delight of the spectators. He dances and dashes forward pointing to the Emir and throwing sharp jokes and abuses at him but nothing happens to the Wawan Sarki. (6-7)

It was a perfect strategy, which kept the masses in check. They enjoy the Wawan Sarki’s performances because it speaks their hidden fears and they get relieved even though nothing changes after then. This is akin to what Alibaba does when performing for the President and other top government functionaries as would be revealed much later in the analysis of his performance.

The activities of this one-man performer today in Nigeria, is best represented in especially the performance of stand-up comedians who still have very little or no attention and appreciation from especially, the academic community, disregarding the words of Vera Mowry Roberts who posits that “*Any* theatre activity, I sometimes think, is better than *NO* theatre activity” (6) Mowry Roberts also adds: “The amount of learning that goes on as a result of experiencing comedies in the theatre is in many cases, if not all, implicit and not explicit; hardly anyone ever goes to theatre of any kind expecting to learn something anyway.”(178-179) This means that the average theatre audience goes to seek entertainment which does not say learning does not take place in stand-up comedy because according to Kyle Haenisch,

The **subject matter** in stand-up can range from the basic day-to-day activities of the comic to his views on current social issues. There is an atmosphere of anything goes in stand-up comedy today,...No subject is taboo. Drugs, sex, violence, and drinking are all common topics of discussion. No one is safe, anyone in public eye is fair game to the stand-up comedian. (2)

Louis Catron also supports the above assertion when he says, “there are many solo subjects as there are solo performers” (3). What the above signify is that a lot of learning takes place even if it is just laughter that is expected from the performance. No doubt, stand-up comedy is masses oriented and is concerned with social change. Therefore, the subject matter in Oral Literature is not different from what is obtainable in the performances of stand-up comedians and even conventional play performances.

The “**new media**” refers to the entire body of social network sites, the internet, blogs, chatrooms, podcasts, personal web pages, face-book, instagram, twitters, whatsapp etc. Just with any smart phone anybody can record a performance and in seconds it is uploaded into different international networks; for onward transmission worldwide. And with stand-up comedy which is a one-man show, with total emphasis on the actor, the camera or phone does not need to wonder away from the performer. Even in advertising the shows, the social media is employed to a great extent. And while events are still going on, members of the audience can record and stream live to their friends and associates, unless they are censored from doing so, which is what is obtainable because most of the stand-up comedy shows are packaged for sale or exclusive broadcast by supporting media houses.

Avant-gardism and Emerging Nigerian Performance Genres

This paper is anchored on the **Avant-gardist theory** of the theatre. Stand-up Comedy as solo performance has been described as an experimental and rebellious theatre; this is because comedians are individuals who create their own rules as they perform. They are not boxed in by any rule of the theatre, to them, they need change and there are no rules but the presence of the compulsory elements of actor, audience and space for the performance. Every other element is expendable. An 'avant-gardist' is a revolutionist whose main preoccupation is with the essentials for a performance. Vera Mowry Roberts buttresses this point when she states that, "the core of the theatre is the actor-audience relationship. With it there is theatre, without it there is none. This is the only absolute and always present factor." (283) Emeka Nwabueze also affirms, "the term **avant-garde**, was used to describe the concept of modernism, hence it became a rallying point for movements that rejected tradition and status-quo and hungered for radical change" (133). Historically speaking, theatre is rooted in the activities of one man – Thespis; and with modernism, a lot of experimentation or rule breaking is the rule. So, one-man shows or stand-up comedy is not a new phenomenon. Nwabueze writing on the 'origins of drama' avers:

In the middle of this presentational activity, one of the chorus members broke away from the choral group....This sole actor impersonated and imitated the hero instead of singing about him, or chanting his praises, thereby turning a purely storytelling and praise-chant activity into a dramatic form before the ecstatic spectators. The man who performed this historic act was Thespis, the Greek artist credited with the discovery of drama, and who eventually became known as the first actor. (11-12)

And John Cairney corroborates the above claim with his assertion that "Theatre is back where it started with one man telling the story to the group around the fire. In theater, as in life, there is nothing new under the sun." (198) Theatre started as Solo and Solo began with the theatre. Cairney also reiterates the fact that the only constant element that makes a theatre happen is the actor and the audience: "However one factor remains constant and that is the direct actor-to-audience relationship,...Everything else, lights, costume, sound, setting, are extra to this central action which is at the core of drama."(18)

Married to the above theory is the “**less is more**” **concept of performance** which has been elaborated in minimalism – poor theatre. One man can conjure fifteen or more characters as well as vehicles, trains, mountains, rivers, animals, trees during his performance and because of his dexterity, he prods the audience into participating through their imagination and they can actually visualize more images and props on stage than a stagnant and monotonous set would convey. This is exactly what the stand-up comedian does – conjuring different characters in one story; with the solo performer, less is indeed more. Catron elucidates on the ‘less is more’ concept. He opines that, “Typical monodramas observe the *less is more* artistic concept originated by Robert Browning.” Furthermore, he avers: “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 performance than on other extraneous materials introduced by way of multiple characterization, elaborate set and scenery, costumes, props, make-up, lighting and sound effects etc. Catron argues further that the simplicity of the monodrama’s production style is based on Jerzy Grotowski’s submission in *Towards a Poor Theatre* which portrays elaborate theatrical productions as “ornate and complicated” which makes it “distract from the key elements of actor and audience thereby inhibiting or even destroying theatre’s ability to communicate effectively with audiences.” Poor theatre production focuses on the core of theatre: actor and audience and avoids lavish staging techniques. Stand-up comedy is almost the same with monodrama the main difference being the depth of ‘acting’ that takes place in monodrama is much more dexterous and the expectations of the audience in stand-up comedy being mainly an endless chain of laughter. Otherwise, they are both solo performance; with one being skillful at ‘dramatization’ and the other skillful at ‘comedy.’

This is revealed in the researcher’s Field Study that facilitated information gathering. This is also combined with descriptive approach of the qualitative research method that illuminated the significance of observations made. Consequently, the observer could be present during the event or view the performance through a recorded video. Furthermore, the direct observation brings the researcher face-to-face with the subject and this is also very effective and “the qualitative approach’s objective”

according to Sola Fajana's "Collecting the Data" ed. By Imoisili C. Imonitie is,

To see the social world from the point of view of the actor....Close involvements with the subjects are emphasized....the emphasis is on discovery of novel or unanticipated findings and the possibility of changing the research plans as unanticipated events occur. (16)

This researcher was privileged to see face-to-face Alibaba's 2016 January 1st Concert performance and on request was given the unedited copy of the video recording.

Context Analysis of Aspects of Alibaba January 1ST Concert in Lagos, 2016.

Note: Alibaba's entire performance ran for about 25minutes but this analysis because of space captures only a few of the jokes he performed that night.

Alibaba: Happy New Year every one (3ce). Thank you 'Nigeria Army Steel Band'. Remain there; be still...the Nigerian army steel band represents a section of the Nigerian army that I need to celebrate tonight. My dad worked and retired as the 2IC of the Nigerian army education corps in Ojo Cantonment and I think today, no matter how much you give to him as allowance, my dad still goes to Asaba to collect his allowee. You tell him daddy, what they are paying you is just a hundred thousand naira. He said, "yes, I worked for it and they must pay me till I die". And so today, to all our officers who slave and die at the battle front even when people who should make them comfortable and pay their salaries don't pay their salaries...I'd like us to please rise and honour all our departed soldiers that are fighting our battles, all the people who have put their lives on the line...(loud applause, standing ovation) to serve this country, some of them don't even have uniforms like Adadevo...keep your applause together for them, men who put on the boots to make sure that our streets are safe even when they are not properly armed like my dad. And so please, with another round of applause can you celebrate the Nigerian steel band...Nigerian army steel band (the band commences another round of music). Alibaba (to audience), please be seated. (Audience sits and band plays on).

ANALYSIS: The first paragraph by Alibaba represents his introduction, greetings (bonding with the audience) as well as explanation for his costume. The army uniform, the army steel band, his retired army-officer father and later on the jokes on military are all connected. They foreground

the fact that presently in Nigeria, there is a new government which is like a dictatorship because of Mohammadu Buhari. Also trending is the very distinct reference to the topical issue (subject matter) of the former NSA (Sambo Dasuki- aka, Dasuki-gate), who supposedly diverted moneys meant for procurement of military hard-wares and officers' upkeep towards politics. Alibaba uses Nigerians' disaffection with Dasuki to buy over the audience and win them to his side for the rest of his performance. Lines 7 – 11 captures this effort to use present revelation in the 'Dasuki-gate scandal' to his advantage, where people who put their lives on line for this country do not even have uniforms and are not paid what is due them by people like Sambo Dasuki. It is the 'kill' that sold the 'thrill' and very aptly employed by Alibaba, preparing the audience for a very fruitful relationship for the rest of his performance.

Alibaba: And that's my name that they are playing...'Alleluya'...thank you (2ce). (Alibaba moves down stage centre – like a run way for models – and repositions the microphone stand. He has a cordless microphone in his hand with which he performs...the band continues playing...people are still streaming in and one of them walks by the front of the stage and actually shakes Alibaba furtively (the ordinary eyes would not have noticed it but for the camera that caught the action...the band continues playing).

Alibaba: that's eh...that's the problem when you ask army band to play, if you tell them to stop, they'll stop only when they want (pockets of laughter)...if its Police band now, I'll say stop now...but army band...they can play anything they want and stop any time they want (laughter). Thank you. Now, RMD told you something about how I walked into his office in 1989, he was publishing a magazine called the "MR" magazine..."MR" magazine (left hand up like a school teacher soliciting answers from his students, with the right hand firmly clutching to the cordless microphone in his mouth...from a member of the audience – MOA – we hear "MR & MRS" obviously in response to Alibaba's question. But that was the name of another entirely different magazine).

Alibaba: Alright, then RMD was a publisher, big boy, Warri boy wey don hammer, so we had to relate with him. But em, we also remember that e be like say the hammer never too strong that time...because one time I was with RMD in the car and Police stopped us by that bend by Sheraton, we were driving to Okpebi...they said, "park, come down, open your booth." RMD said,

“I’m not opening my booth.” But the car was not too strong (laughter). RMD came out of the car very upset...”I’m not opening the booth”...and closed the door, gbam...the booth opened...(loud audience laughter).

ANALYSIS: The second paragraph is a continuation of his ‘intro’; more stage description. Firstly, it is obvious the show was still in its infancy as some MOA were still streaming in, and then we observe that one MOA passes very close to the stage and shakes Alibaba’s hand. This action can take place in a stand-up comedy event as well as storytelling events because of the closeness of the performer with the audience. Alibaba cleverly reveals one of the very bad features in a dictatorship or what has been described as milito-crazy – military in democracy – Buhari. The problem of having an ex-soldier as President who does things when he wants without regards to those who voted him there. This is gleaned from the army steel band that refused to stop when Alibaba asked them to as revealed in lines 1 – 3 of this second paragraph. Then the connection with RMD - a Nollywood star, whom Alibaba uses as the butt of his first joke; this attracts a lot of laughter, because if Alibaba can make jest of RMD, then any other person is fair game, the bigger the name, the greater the laughter. Knowing RMD’s status presently as a Nollywood star, it is difficult to believe that he once drove a ‘scrap’ or jalopy as his own car. This is another plus for Alibaba who positions himself appropriately to gain more audience confidence. Note also, the response from the MOA when Alibaba asked a question in lines 5-8 and got a wrong answer from the audience in line 7. Alibaba did not respond to the man because that was not the expected answer or maybe he did not hear him, but we heard him from watching the video repeatedly. Nonetheless, it shows a very active audience - like in every stand-up comedy show.

Alibaba: Now, now...you may not...I just talked about RMD’s own, let me tell you about my car...I had a Jetta...not the ‘executive’, not the ‘champion’...Jetta, ‘personal assistant’, it was the one before all the...this Jetta, I bought it off a mechanic...many people are going ah-ah...never buy a car from a mechanic...because if the mechanic is selling it, it means that he couldn’t fix it (audience laughter). And then, when you are buying a car, never buy a car that has ‘gerican’ on it...it means that you will die of fuel (audience laughter) because you will buy fuel continuously...(laughter). Now, I had this Jetta and sometimes I’ll take Larry Isamoje...now Larry Ichejele. Then, we would drive to Ogun state, to produce his ‘Bournvita programme’. So one time, the car broke down and so he left...I was trying to fix

the tire and the shaft. You know that shaft that comes off...you have to hit it back in and use something to tie it and hold it in tact, till you get to the next place...one woman slowed down and saw me. She said, "ah, sorry-o...was the accident serious? (loud audience laughter), I said, which accident? She said, "did the car somersault or something?" (more audience laughter) I said, madam why are you insulting me...she said, "sorry" and then drove off. When she left, I walked back (walks up centre stage [amidst lots of audience laughter] and turns), took a look at the car...and drove from there to the mechanic and dashed him...(audience laughter). Know what the mechanic told me..."oga, we nor get space-o!" (very loud audience laughter).

ANALYSIS: Here, Alibaba makes himself the butt of this joke; this makes it easier for him to take on anybody. Once you have gotten the laughter from ridiculing yourself then the audience is ready to also enjoy the hammer that will drop on virtually anybody that is in the public domain and it does not matter their status. In fact, in stand-up comedy, the higher they are the bigger the fall and the greater the laughter. According to Frank Catalano: "The subject matter of most stand-up monologues is contemporary topics including current events, politics, famous personalities and generic situations such as family, friends, marriage, dating and work." (13)

The message from the first two jokes portrays many big shots today as people who actually started small, they paid their dues. This is to encourage indigent Nigerians not to give up, especially with the recession. The APC government does not seem to have answers to most of the problems facing the nation despite all the promise of overnight 'change' and after several months on the saddle, there is now so much suffering in the nation and things are going awry. But this comedy concert is here to feed the people with laughter as well as put food on the table of the entertainers.

Alibaba: I need to say this...we are in such very tight corners right now, moneys are drying up... you know...before now, when you walk into a store...when dollar was still like one twenty-one thirty...you walk into a store...this is how you pick...have that...that 46...and this one...you have a blue...yes, and this other one...that one on top there...yes the green one...okay yes, all of them...how much? Now (presently)...ehn...is that one on discount? (loud laughter)...is it on sale?...no...so, leave that one...what of this other

one...okay when are you people doing sales? (very loud audience laughter). I don't know whether it has happened to you...if you walk into a store, let's say the store is like here...let me use this microphone (stand) and show you something (goes to take the microphone stand)...let's say what you want to pick in the store is here and you walk into the store...pa,pa,pa,pa,pa,pa...that's six steps...how much is this? And they say three thousand pounds. Do you know the distance between here and the door now becomes very far? (very loud audience laughter)...I don't know if it has happened to you. That's when you now turn away (turns to demonstrate) and then the first thing that comes to your mind is...what even brought me to this store eh? I would have gone into another shop (loud laughter)...this people with their prices!

ANALYSIS: This joke is about state of the economy – the fallen crude oil price, the fluctuating state of the dollar and the naira and the inflation it has engendered. He hits the hammer directly on the nail in line one “moneys are drying up”. Then he takes the audience through the ‘set-up’ of how people used to buy and how they now buy. Rich people’s pride has been humbled by the harsh realities orchestrated by a government that promised to turn one naira to one dollar and alleviate poverty. Most have turned out to be empty promises. This joke focuses on the bourgeoisie, who patronise only expensive supermarkets. And they are many in the audience. Perfect delivery and very impactful, evoking the right dose of laughter.

Alibaba: Ladies and gentlemen in honour of the Nigerian army and in honour of the Nigerian Police that is why we are out here in this uniform...I will go and take it off...I would have worn some dark shades because I've had some relationship with some military men lately. Especially the one that was given a letter to become Minister in this new regime. Buhari sent him the letter, the man was very happy...did thanksgiving... everything... thanksgiving. We had a party in Lagos, I MCEED, he paid... then showed up on Tuesday in Abuja because they wanted to meet on Tuesday before the Federal Executive Council (FEC) meeting. And when he got there they said... “sir...” “I'm very happy to serve the country”. So they said, “you will bring your tax clearance for the last ten years (laughter)...we heard that you used to be a military administrator, so you'd give us your declaration of asset before you became military administrator and after military administrator and we'd take it from there”. He said, “yes sir, yes sir” and came to Lagos. He did a medical

report and sent back and said because of his health (loud laughter)...he can't take the office...it will be too much work for...(loud audience laughter). He is my friend...it will be too much work for him...he can't....

ANALYSIS: The comic reiterates the reason he is in military attire because with Buhari's tyrannical administration, nobody could tell their reaction against a comedian who appear on stage, in military garb. Buhari's body language is the subject matter in this joke. APC came on board on the platform of fighting corruption and so, even a retired military officer nominated for a Ministerial position quickly tenders a medical report that he had health challenges, when he heard the terms of engagement. This joke got very loud audience laughter because this story was widely reported in the Nigerian dailies and the audience could easily identify with it. Very current, purposeful and very entertaining joke.

Alibaba closed with a joke on 'excreta'. Ordinarily, one would think such things should not be discussed in public but the loud laughter the joke received from the audience speaks volumes of its acceptability. The pressure to excrete is natural; especially when you have to use the 'Nigerian public toilet' if you are lucky to be in a place with public toilet. It is a very ridiculous experience to the observer of the victim. A very hilarious performance because of the subject matter; people hardly talk about excreta in public and Alibaba's boldness to delve into an area where angels fear to tread is what evokes the best of laughter and takes his performance to the peak. He realizes this and like every good stand-up, he bows out when the ovation was loudest. The message is very clear – when nature calls, gentility or nobility is thrown to the winds. Alibaba's performance generally, portrays daily issues in the lives of Nigerians, it also obvious that 'anything can go' in stand-up comedy and they deal with current social issues and no issue is a taboo and anybody in public office is fit news for use by any comedian.

The large attendance portrays Nigerians' as lovers of stand-up comedy. The topicality and functionality in these jokes cannot be over-emphasised even if it is only laughter. But the less is more concept where total attention is on the performer although we have occasional capturing of the audience because they are the dialogue in the monologue and therefore a very relevant part of the performance.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Stand-up Comedy is one of the forms for the continuation of oral literature or orature and the performers have license to experiment a lot on stage in order to satisfy their audience. As a performance art, it is individualistic and this makes a lot of stand-up comedians depend on their raw talent, not wanting to hone their talents. Alibaba's performance is not different from that of AY, Basket Mouth, Bovi, Oma Oma, I Go Die, Gandoki, Seyi Law, Gbenga Adeyinka, Akpororo, Holy Mallam, Onome Da Saint, MC Amana, Mandy, Helen Paul and so on. And they are all reminiscent of the performers in the time when Africans were experts at doing things with words.

The very nature of total attention on the performer makes it easy for exploitation by the new media proponents, who are in search for easy and fast ways to sell their products. Furthermore, that, stand-up comedy is a very popular art and highly loved and accepted by the mass majority of the people because of the topicality and functionality of the form - they deal with subject matters that are just happening, it does not need long rehearsals, the ability to be spontaneous and deal with current event stands the performers out and makes this sub-genre of the theatre very relevant to a vast majority of the people. Jokes are shared online, subscribers of mobile companies sell jokes of stand-up comedians and a lot of people subscribe to daily jokes from the comedian of their choice. And unlike the time of orality where performances are handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, the performances of today's stand-up comedians are now being handed down, from generation to generation, indirectly from phone to phone, facebook to whatsapp, You-tube to Instagram, TV stations to Radio Stations and VCDs to DVDs, and flash drives, through hard drives to computers. Stand-up comedy is tailor made for the new media.

It is therefore our recommendation that all the above, is enough reasons for theatre scholars and critics, to begin to look for ways of not just recognizing and acknowledging the contributions of stand-up comedians to the theatre as well as furthering the age long tradition of orature, but to seek urgent ways of synergizing with these stand-up comedians in order to use it to help put live conventional theatre back on track.

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