Application of Folkism Theory to Social Problems in University Communities in Nigeria: An insight to the Stage Performance of *Dr. Lecturer*

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Abstract

This paper examined the application of Folkism theory to social problems in university communities in Nigeria. The aim was to ensure that folkism theory was applied to address social problems within the university community and proffer solution to it using the stage performance of *Dr.* Lecturer as case study. Folktale which is the root of Folkism theory is a story originating in popular culture and is typically passed on by words of mouth. This paper therefore revealed some of the social problems as gross misconduct of students to include examination malpractices, sexual harassment and sorting of their lecturers which are folk stories in Nigerian university communities. The qualitative and quantitative research were used for this study. The ethnography of performance and descriptive survey research methods were adopted with the aid of performance, participant observation and questionnaire as instruments for data collection from the respondent. The information gotten and data collected were analyzed and presented using content analysis and simple percentages in table. The findings revealed that folkism style adopted

during the presentation of *Dr Lecturer* performance made the performance interesting, educating, communicating and entertaining. It encourages social learning as a medium or tool for individual and societal changes as it helps audience to recall their mistakes in the gross acts of misconduct to change for better that can enhanced the development and educate the members of the university communities in Nigeria.

Keywords: Folkism Theory, Social Problems, University Communities, "*Dr. Lecturer*"

Introduction

The period 1940 to 2011 portrayed Nigeria's literary theatre as being largely irrelevant to its audience, due to the compositional lapses of many English play texts and their stage productions. These loopholes mainly comprise inappropriate and alienating aesthetics of subject matter and language of the texts. Dating from the post-colonial era in 1960s, writers sought to correct these anomalies through decolonizing dramaturgical options and the employment of aesthetic elements that could relate to the African psychological, socio-cultural, political and historical realities. Unfortunately, a large percentage of these developments still ran short of fully authoritative and genuinely indigenous Nigerian performance idioms that would have accorded full relevance to the literary theatre. Currently, various theoretical propositions and alternative dramaturgical techniques have emerged as avenues for realizing full relevance, one of which is Sam Ukala's theory and practice of 'Folkism'. In this paper, Folkism is discussed with a view to demonstrating its potentials for ensuring the full relevance of Nigeria's literary theatre in addressing social problems within the university community and its solution to education and development as expressed in the play *Dr. Lecturer*.

The Concept/ Definition of Folkism theory

Folkism theory is derived from the word folktale which means telling the tales of people and was propounded by Sam Ukala in 1993. The aim is to base literary plays on indigenous history and culture and to compose and perform them in accordance with the aesthetics of African folktale composition and performance. According to Kirby in Na'allah (1994) there are seven categories of African folktale, namely: (1) simple enactment (2) ritual and ritualized enactment (3) story telling

performances (4) spirit cult enactment (5) masquerade and masquerade enactments (6) ceremonial performances (7) comedies. The above classification provides a clue that there are theatrical forms in traditional Africa. However, with these categories there are also, among others, the story telling and storytelling performances. The folktale is part of the oral performance art of the people. The *Dictionary* (2016) define the folktale as "a story originating in popular culture, typically passed on by word of mouth. Na'allah (1994) assert that the "folktales are stories told at moonlight. The older members of the community gather the children and teach them about various matters of life. The story, the Hausa call "*Tatsunoyi"* and the Yoruba "*Alo*are" folktales. He also calls these stories as "lie stories" since they are usually fictitious. Ukala (1999) definess the African folktale as "any traditional oral narrative that is purely fictional or is based on factual history which has however been so embellished and distorted that it cannot be fruitfully subjected to any empirical proof or verification". He argues that the folktales include the epic, the legend novella, marchen, saga, animal tale, fable, anecdote, among others. Again, this paper has talked about the folktale because it is the bedrock for the literary theatre created by Sam Ukala called *Folkism.*

The folktale as an oral performance

The folktale is identified as an oral performance that is based on the stories of the people. They could either be tales about ancestors, spirits, animals and inanimate objects which help to teach morals, values and the way of life of the community. The source of this theatre is not a script but the ability of the performers to remember the tales in the community's oral repertories or the performers' dexterity to weave out new stories from the environment. This is proven in the robust nature in which they present their tales to their audience who at times already know the tales or are conversant with the nuances of the technique of the storyteller so they are able to join in the performance. The modern African theatre, however, is based on the written script - drama. This is exactly what Folkism does. It presents the best way to create drama and the performing of it that will most suitably capture the real African mode of performing the folktale. Folkism according to its creator, Sam Ukala is an emergent aesthetic principle ... the tendency to base literary plays on the history, culture, and concerns of the folk …and to compose and perform them in accordance with African conventions for composing and performing the folktale noted for its clear communication and its

popularity among the folk, among the many reasons why it should provide a matrix for folkism (cited in Akpuda, 2008). The folktale is a means of communicating a message to an audience in a special way that the audience feels and becomes part of the story telling process. Sekoni (1990) using Broderick's view on oral narratives, opines that to communicate in this way, the narrative pattern is manipulated for the purpose of passing meaning and attaining aesthetic experience. To him then the aesthetics experience in oral performance is made up of three inseparable components: "captivation of audience, retention of audience and the transfer of cognitive experience to the audience. These elements are inseparable; they can only survive in their being together" (Sekoni, 1990). These three inseparable components are what make the folktale unique. The performer catches the attention of the audience from the beginning and sustains it till the end of the play. This, however, is not enough as it does not cover a very important aspect of African theatre - audience participation. This and other flaws informed the creation of Folkism.

Justifying his proposal for Folkism as a measure for aesthetic enhancement, Ukala (1993) further avers that there are three main reasons why the African folktale seems to provide the matrix for such an experiment:

i. the folktale and the conventional literary play are narratives which are ultimately realized in performance;
ii. in performance, the folktale and the play are temporal, mimetic, interpretive and synthetic; and
iii. unlike other traditional artistic performances in Africa, the folktale, like the play, entails much speech. It is now for the Nigerian literary playwright to study deeply the techniques of the African folktale and to, subsequently, test our hypothesis in his next play (Ukala, 1993).

The eight laws of folktale

Ukala (1993) did not just get up and promulgate a theory of theatre, he researched into the works of other writers before him. He found out that not all plays derived from the folktale are folkist plays. After studying several folktales and works by writers that have written drama from folktales, Sam Ukala came up with the eight laws of aesthetic response which if applied the folktale would do better as a literary text. The laws are:

1. the law of opening;
2. the law of joint performance;
3. the law of creativity, free enactment and responsibility;
4. the law of judgment;
5. the law of protest against suspense;
6. the law of expression of the emotions;
7. the law of ego projection; and
8. the law of closing (Ukala, 1993).

Ugwu and Orjinta (2013) explain that the folkist play usually starts with an arresting action and most times with song which gives the audience an incline of what the tale is all about, that law of opening leads to involving the audience in the unfolding tale. It should be noted that this is not a one man narrative folktale rendition but a drama of action with actors taking up roles in the story. The narrator weaves the tale and he or she is also part of the action on stage. The second law, joint performance is very important as this is what makes African theatre unique. In the folkist theatre the device that has been used to involve the audience is to create characters called MOA (Members of Audience). These are actors who have been rehearsed for their roles and put as part of the real audience. They interject from the audience into the conversation of the actors and also engage them in a questions and answers akin to the Greek chorus. The MOA after a while emboldens the real audience who today had been adulterated with western detached mode of seeing plays, to be involved in the on-going performance.

The third law is that of creativity, free enactment and responsibility, which allows the narrator and the actors to freely interpret the script the way they choose. They are, of course, held liable for their actions. The narrator or actor uses his or her voice to add colour to the action. This law from this writer's experience starts from the inputs of the director as his or her creativity in allowing several elements on to the stage as his or her responsibility. The actors themselves are free agents that add their own ingenuity to the performance and if they over act or do not say something correctly, they are punished instantly by the audience. The fourth, fifth and seventh laws deal with audience and their ability to get something out of the encounter with the play. The African audience is never silent, they give instant judgment if they like the play or not. Neither had they talked if the actors are not

performing well. If the play drags or the suspense is too long they would moan or sigh to show their displeasure. There is usually an open display of emotions when the play is liked or disliked. There is an instance when a member of the audience went on stage to *spray* money on an actor during the performance. The message of the folkist play is almost felt instantly as the element of immediacy and freedom to talk back is there though limited compared to that of the theatre for development. The audience supported by the MOAs sees themselves as part of the performance and they can sing along and even dance along with the actors on stage. This is the ultimate goal of folkism.

Research Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative nature of research were used for this study. The ethnography of performance and descriptive survey research methods were adopted with the aid of performance, participant observation and questionnaire which were used to collect data from the respondent; the information gotten and data collected were analyzed using content analysis and simple percentages presented in table as quantitative research methods while internet sources and textbooks were also used for the qualitative aspect.

Data Analysis

A Synopsis of Dr. Lecturer

Dr. Lecturer is an improvised class drama of G2015 Master's Degree students of the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Port-Harcourt. This play which was performed at the University of Port-Harcourt Arts Theatre, CRAB in July 2017 is based on university community folk story centered on gross misconduct of students. These students whose motifs were to gain higher grades use sexual harassment and financial inducement to seduce their lecturers. In this performance, the original tale is beyond a mere student's misconduct but also include lecturers. This transcends the domestic context of the play, to a very serious academic setting where the university authority handles such issues without fairness. The play begins with a group of students dancing in their classroom and waiting for their class. Dr. Lecturer meets the students in the class where they are discussing on ways of passing his exams. Having heard them murmuring, he ask them the problem and begins his lecture for the day. The students after his departure from the class leave for the day and come back for

another lecture. They start the discussion with some, dressing indecently. Whenever Dr. Lecturer enters, the students adjust themselves and one of the female students walks to him to seduce him with her indecent dressing. The action of lecturer during senate session where the vice chancellor is fired with the act of gross misappropriations of fund generates a lot of controversy. The dwindling state of the financial resources of the university to insecurity, hunger, squalor, disease, corruption, empty treasury and armory that have bedeviled the university community. This instigates a pandemonium in the audience who becomes part of the play by echoing the songs and dance steps of the artistes. The mascots are used to demonstrate the act of misconduct that is rampant among lecturers and students such as sorting, sexual harassment which are the major social problems within the university circle. Finally, Dr. Lecturer was indulging in the act of sorting and other acts of misconduct which the university authority frowns at. The play ends with dancing and singing.

Presentation

Table 1: Bio-Data of the Respondents

Bio-Data category of respondents	Age				Gender		Rank/Level						Total
	20	20-25	25-30	30-above	Male	Female	GA	AL	SL	Profs	Non-teaching staff	Others	
							100	200	300	400	500	P.G.	
Students	25	30	45	20	46	74	17	19	34	30	8	12	120
Lecturers	-	-	-	20	12	8	-	12	6	2	-	-	20
Non-teaching staff	-	6	10	18	20	14	-	-	-	-	34	-	34
Others	-	4	8	14	10	16	-	-	-	-	-	26	26
Total	200				200		200						200

Data in table 1 above revealed the age range of the respondents with students as 25 (20 years), 30 (20-25 years); 45 (25-30 years) and 20 (30-above). It revealed the lecturers' age with 20 (30-above). It also revealed non-teaching staff with 6(20-25 years), 10 (25-30 years); 18 (30-above) and others within the university community with 4 (20-25 years), 8 (25-30 years) and 14 (30-above) with the sum total of 200 respondents. From the table, we can see clearly that the gender for students was

revealed with 46 (male) and 74 (female) making the total of 120 students. 12 (male) and 8 (female) making total of 20 lecturers; 20(male) and 14 (female) making the total of 34 non-teaching staff and 10 (male) and 16 (female) making the total of 26 others within the university community. The total male was 88 while female was 112 forming the sum total of 200 respondents. The table also revealed levels of students with 17 (100 level), 19 (200 levels), 34 (300 levels), 30 (400 levels) 8 (500 levels) and 12 (Post Graduate) students making the total of 120. It revealed the ranks of lecturers with Graduate Assistant (Nil), Assistant Lecturers (12), Senior Lecturers (6) and Professors (2) making the total of 20 lecturers; the Non-teaching staff with (34) and others within the University Community with (26). The sum total of the respondents was 200 from 8 Faculties in University of Port Harcourt.

Table 2: Computation of Percentage Responses of Respondents on Effects of Performance Attributes (Dr. Lecturer)

S/No	Statement Questions	Total Responses/ Total Percentage	SA	%	A	%	U	%	D	%	SD	%
1.	The use of mascots in the performance highlights misconduct in students/lecturers interaction	N = 200 % = 100	100	50 %	50	25%	0	0%	29	14.5 %	21	10.5 %
2.	The exaggerated features and actions of the mascots are comical	N = 200 % = 100	75	37.5%	67	35.5 %	18	9%	24	12%	16	8%
3.	The use of mascots communicates clearly the message of the performance	N = 200 % = 100	50	25 %	94	47%	6	3%	28	14%	22	11%
4.	I am familiar with the songs used in the performance	N = 200 % = 100	50	25 %	67	33.5 %	12	6%	31	15.5 %	40	20%
5.	The songs helped to express the message of the performance	N = 200 % = 100	69	34.5%	70	35%	10	5%	21	10.5 %	30	15%
6.	The songs make the performance interesting and entertaining	N = 200 % = 100	100	50 %	66	33%	0	0%	10	5%	24	12%
7.	The performance made use of the arts of singing, dancing, acting, puppetry and drumming effectively	N = 200 % = 100	101	50.5%	61	30.5 %	0	0%	28	14%	10	5%
8.	There was a good blend of the arts of singing, dancing, acting, puppetry and drumming in the performance	N = 200 % = 100	94	47 %	67	33.5 %	9	4.5 %	21	10.5 %	9	4.5%
9.	The blend of the arts of singing, dancing, acting, puppetry and drumming made the performance interesting and entertaining	N = 200 % = 100	84	42 %	64	32%	15	7.5 %	27	13.5 %	10	5%
10.	Acting in the performance was both realistic and non-realistic	N = 200 % = 100	50	25 %	79	39.5 %	6	3%	25	12.5 %	40	20%
11.	The lighting of the performance did not set the mood of the play but only enhanced illumination	N = 200 % = 100	50	25 %	33	16.5 %	0	0%	67	33.5 %	50	25%

12.	The performance style mobilizes me for social change in the university community	N = 200 % = 100	57	28.5%	58	29%	0	0%	49	24.5 %	36	18%
13	The play makes me recall, and learn from past experiences for better interaction in the university community	N = 200 % = 100	48	24 %	91	45.5 %	10	5%	27	13.5 %	24	12%

Discussion and Summary of Findings

The table revealed item 1 with 50% out of 100% as strongly agreed representing 100 respondents out of the 200 respondents, 2.5% out of 100% representing 50 respondents out of 200, 0 representing 0% as undecided; 14.5% representing 29 respondents as disagreed and 10.5% representing 21 respondents indicating that the use of mascots in the performance highlights misconducts in students and lecturers' interaction in University of Port-Harcourt. From the table, item 2, we see clearly that 37.5% strongly agreed, 25% agreed that the exaggerated features and actions of the mascots are comical whereas 9% undecided; 12% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed proving that the mascots, expresses reliefs among the feeling of the audience; provoking them to facially laugh out their inner expression as the gestures are comical. Item 3 indicated 25% as strongly agreed, 47% as agreed, 3% as undecided; 14% and 11% as disagreed and strongly disagreed indicating that the use of mascots communicates clearly the message of the performance, the attitudes of lecturers and students in the acts of misconduct.

Again, item 4 in the table revealed 25% of the responses as strongly agreed and 33.5% as agreed; 6% as undecided while 15.5% and 20% as disagreed and strongly disagreed indicating that majority of the audience are familiar with the songs used in the performance while few are not familiar with the songs but enjoyed the songs as it flows alongside with the performance. In items 5, 6 and 7 it was revealed that 34.5%, 50% and 50.5% strongly agreed, 35%, 33% and 30% agreed that the songs helps to express the message of the performance, makes the performance interesting and entertaining and made use of the arts of singing, dancing, acting, puppetry and drumming effectively while 5%, 0% and 0% were undecided against 10.5%, 5% and 14% as disagreed and 15%, 12% and 5% as strongly disagreed. Furthermore, it revealed items 8 and 9 with 47% and 42% as strongly agreed, 33.5%

and 32% as agreed, 4.5% and 7.5% as undecided; 10.5% and 13.5% as disagreed and 4.5% and 5%| as strongly disagreed indicating that there was a good blend of the arts of singing, dancing, acting, puppetry and drumming in the performance that arouse the audience interest in watching the production and quite entertaining as well.

On the issue of determining whether the acting in the performance was both realistic and non-realistic, item 10 revealed 25% as strongly agreed, 39.5% as agreed, 3% as undecided, 12.5% as disagreed and 20% as strongly disagreed indicating that the acting was both realistic and non-realistic in the performance. In addition, it was revealed in item 11 that lighting in the performance set the mood of the play and enhanced illumination during the performance with 25% and 16.5% as strongly agreed and agreed. The item also indicates 0% as undecided, 33.5% and 25% as disagreed and strongly disagreed indicating that majority of the audience disagreed that lighting did not set the mood of the play but only enhanced illumination but proves that lighting does the both functions during the performance of the play. The findings revealed in item 12 that the performance style mobilizes the audience for a social change in the university community with majority of the audience responding with 28.5% and 29% as strongly agreed and agreed, 0% undecided; 24.5% and 18% as disagreed and strongly disagreed proving that the performance motivated the audience for a social change as expressive way of tackling the acts of misconduct in the society. Item 13 reveals the respondents responses with 24% as strongly agreed, 45.5% as agreed, 5% as undecided; 13.5% as disagreed and 12% as strongly disagreed indicating that the play makes majority of the audience to recall, and learn from their past experiences to correct their ills of misconduct as lecturers, students, non-teaching staff and others within the university community for better interactions in the university community.

Folkism in the Performance

Theatre is oral performance according to Sam Ukala (Ukala, 1996). It means that it goes beyond the script. The very essence of it lies in the performance before an audience. This is exactly what Brockett (2004) means when he says the three elements that make up theatre are: what is produced which is the script or drama, the performance or those 'ingredients' that are organized together to create the

show, and the audience the receiver of the final form called theatre. In oral performance what is produced is not a written script. That is what makes it very critical because the actors must have to do their utmost best to communicate to the audience their message and the style of the folktale performer is apt for that. This, as we have identified above, is the element that Folkism brings to literary drama. *Dr. Lecturer* though is a folk script deals with a real life story and its performance, it happens on a thrust stage with permanent sets of the university community, which later becomes classroom, senate hall and offices. This forms the sets where the action takes place but in actual performance the director is at liberty to alter the arrangement which is what he did when the play was performed.

Uwadima-Idemudia (2013) did an extensive study on the performance area of the folkist theatre and recommends a stage with two round sections joined by a walk way. This is very lofty as it will allow the actors to move freely within the audience from one round part to the other. However, my concern is that of the practicality of that type of stage. The ability of the audience to see all of the action is a problem and that type of stage may be difficult to build unless we say that the folkist theatre can only be an open air affair. The nature of the stage if built may be difficult for other types of plays to be performed in it. This paper posits that the folkist theatre is a flexible theatre that can be done anywhere provided the producers fulfilled the third law of Folkism: creativity, free enactment and responsibility. The stage provides the actors and the audience a better opportunity to engage one another. It also gives a better space for a free, flawless movement. This paper end with the eighth law: The law of closing. Whether in the performance or just being read, the folkist play leaves a note of caution or hope or a plain moral in the mind of the audience. In *Dr. Lecturer*, it ends with a note of caution and hope about the solution to curb the gross act of misconduct among students and lecturers within university community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concluded that the performers of Dr. *Lecturer* catches the attention of the audience from the beginning and sustains it till the end of the play. This, however, is not enough as it does not cover a very important aspect of African theatre - audience participation. This and other flaws informed the creation of Folkism. The findings proves the robust nature in which they present their tale to

their audience who at times already know the tales or are conversant with the nuances of the technique of the storyteller so they are able to join in the performance attributes in the play *Dr. Lecturer. Dr. Lecturer* as folkist play starts with an arresting action and most times with the blend of all the arts such as singing, dancing, acting, drumming, lighting and puppetry which gives the audience an incline of what the tale is all about, that law of opening leads to involving the audience in the unfolding tale. The mascots in the performance express the attitude of some lecturers and students in the acts of misconduct. Finally, the folkism style adopted in the presentation during the performance made the performance interesting, educating, communicating and entertaining, it also encourages social learning as a medium or tool for individual and societal changes as it helps audience to recall their mistakes in the gross acts of misconduct to change for better that can enhanced the development and educate the members of the university community.

The following recommendations are relevant to this study:

- This paper recommends that folkism theory should be applied in theatrical production to draw audience attention since it helps the audience to participate as part of the performer.
- The play *Dr. Lecturer* should be used as command performance since it spotlights the social problems that have bearing in the act of misconduct that bedeviled the university community.

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