

Motif and Technological Re-Imaging of African Legends in Dramatic Performances

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Abstract

African beliefs are deeply entrenched in religion and superstition that dates back to years of ancestral lineage. Oral tradition has also given impetus to various interpretations and perceptions of these legends to multifarious representations. The appearance of these legendary figures in performances receives wholesome approval from spectators and participants as manifestations of their ancestral archetypes. However, the images of these legends from design perspectives have received little interrogation. These artistic symbols are given further visual ambiguities by aesthetic lighting to intensify their aura for cultural appreciation and spiritual reverence. The study interrogates these legendary images; kings, gods; and masquerades in festival and dramatic performances. Emphasis would be on dwelling places, costumes and emblematic objects, graphic and pictographic representations in scenery. Findings reveal degrees of design contraction, and superfluous exaggeration of dramatic motifs in search of balance between myth and religious reality.

Key words: Motif, Ancestral, Scenery, Archetype, Masquerade

Introduction

Theatrically (other than metaphoric allusion), reference to motifs and technology are design functions for the realisation of scenery. Scenography is the final picture portraying the background and location for theatrical performance through procedural design considerations. Scenography and design are often used interchangeably with some level of interpretive complicity, which still defies a single definition for scenography. For me, design is a process in the rendition of graphics, and

technical delivery of conceptual vision while scenography is the final picture realized thereof.

We cannot talk of scenography unless it is available for visual and physical comprehension and appreciation, but we can discuss design. Aronson agrees that scenography:

Implies something more than creating scenery or costumes or lights. It carries a connotation of an all-encompassing visual spatial construct as well as the process of change and transformation that is an inherent part of the physical vocabulary of the stage (Aronson7).

Collins and Nisbet (2010) also share the complexity of the concept of scenography to bear the watermark of many visual and perceptive related studies in which “visual theory, fine art, philosophy, linguistics, cultural studies, art history, studies in geography, social science as well as theatre and performance studies” (1) feature.

The audience itself is a complex body of the above. However, it needs the deep perceptive, non-inhibitive faculty of an artist to fully give an acceptable definition of scenery by characteristic analysis of its dweller. Thus, Heffner, Seldon and Sellman’s “the living environment of the artist” (315-318) is apt. It recognizes the presence of every item of scenery, living and non-living, moving or static. Thus, summing the definition of design by modern theorists. In appreciating the imaginative foundation, artistic expression, origin of the cultural and ethnographical images that a background for performance confronts an audience with, the audience as a matter of commitment becomes inseparable with the contribution of members of its community.

The context of “seeing” becomes a contest between feeling, deciphering and believing, and only the “experience” of the one who sees bears the beneficial trademark of the world of the artist and the world of the engaged community. Again Collins and Nisbet (2008) in examining “representation of reality” call to question that tiny but powerful inclusion of technology whose assignment alter the view of the spectator, reshape held opinions and reestablish new paradigms (8). For instance, when the image of an African god theatrically goes through aesthetic lighting bath, the festival archetype quickly demands a reassessment. The view of the African regarding cultural re-imagining in this context of aesthetic lighting application can only be explained if

compared with a celebrity who suddenly underwent plastic surgery. Although it glitters from rebirth under theatrical lighting, ambivalence greets the new image until mental scanning is complete for recognition, reallocation and reassignment of its place among the gods before acceptance for continued worship.

Technology as a major determinant of the reconfiguration of scenic images quickly alters the originality of bodies and the traditional ways of seeing. Without doubt, the deployment of optically designed apparatuses is not merely deployed to enhance visual projection and appreciation, but rather goes deeper to alter, transfigure theatrical images in order to create fantasy and mystique in search of aesthetics rather than meaning. The result is awesome, colourful, exhilarating but alarmingly contestable within the context of cultural reading and interpretation.

Three bodies make up stage scenery. The first is the background that demarcates the playing area from the many activities behind, which the audience is not expected to see. The second is made up of the units that give character and identity to the playing area, and the third is the owner (s) of the playing environment, which the earlier two must complement for unity and artistic harmony.

The objective of scenery is to provide domiciliary information about dramatic characters. In so doing, furniture and decorative items known to befit such dramatic characters are required as set props to adorn the boundary walls, and the yawning empty spaces vertically and horizontally. Every item in the composition within visual reach of the audience intentionally or unintentionally is populated as a scenic member because each further complements the personalities in that dramatic environment at some point. The narrative in every dramatic discourse begins and ends in this ambience. In a situation where there is no solid boundary, other items such as trees, mountains, seaside and the ubiquitous sky are required to fill the emptiness arising from a lateral boundary created by the audience line of vision. This is the concept behind the various designs of Becket's *Waiting for Godot* receiving firmamental treatments. Becket's recommendation of a solitary withered tree could only make sense if other bodies of nature enjoy some level of kinetic action to make the tree's solitude visually, emotionally and psychologically desolate within its overbearing universe. It takes the technology of modern lighting to engage the magical effects of colour

matrix from its abundant hue to convert and complement Beckett's seeming wondrous nonsense into a thoughtful reality.

Once a boundary is established, a snapshot of the background and personality of the dramatic character receives further clarity. Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* offers another ambience to illustrate this. It is a beach. The designer may wish to play on concepts and aesthetics of location. The play takes its inspiration from the African white-garment church preference for watersides and mystique of immersion experienced at Christ's baptism, and the personality of biblical "Nazarites". Any pool or lake with exquisite shoreline, with view of coconut palms, fishing stakes and relaxation sheds realistically rendered would perfectly portray Soyinka's *Trials*... Even before Prophet Jeroboam says, "I am a prophet. A prophet by birth and by inclination... (Sc.1), his white garment and divining rod could easily describe him without a dialogue while his beard and suave physique exemplified his boisterous personality.

Dramatic characters receive deeper appreciation through professional or occupational affiliation or gender status. Dramatic character would lose appropriate identity placement without any of these appendages for social recognition. An actor may be a man or woman, king or queen, prince or princess, god or goddess, prophet or legendary figures of historical importance. They are also expected to wear and carry some accessories that not only enhance their personalities. Jeroboam in Soyinka's *The Trials*... is a prophet whose prayer ministry is located by a riverside. The character of Brother Jero is physically, socially and spiritually a religious personality by modern classification, and a sect among the many religious denominations in Nigeria. Therefore, the personality of Brother Jero will easily sandwich into the memory partition of a Nigerian audience for recognition and identification. These sociological characteristics determine the visual embellishment of performance environments for local appreciation. Sometimes, a performance environment maybe a painted background of trees, houses, mountains, sky, river, road or any other geographical attribute surrounding man. Inevitably, man (the actor) is at the centre of performance for which scenic considerations are made.

Motif in Orality and Performance

It is difficult to discuss motif without its medium of expression such as artworks, in them symbols manifest. Symbolism refers to objects or

images that signifies something to someone who understands them, but signifies absolutely nothing to someone who knows nothing about them. This could be personal or it could be cultural. However, it puts the ignorant observer at a loss of its origin, meaning, and significance other than wonder, curiosity, and or, mere admiration of artistry and aesthetics. Thus symbolic objects include artworks or images with the attributes of art. This aligns with Clive Bell's "significant form" (Art, 1914) showing that the "attraction" quality of art is meaningless to a sceptic. Thus, acceptability of "form" cannot be distanced from knowledge, belief and functionality.

Drama as history has no better contemporary example than watching plays like Rotimi's *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* because it was not trapped in the ambivalence of oral history claims and suppositions. It is not because the European punitive expedition to Benin happened much later than the legends of Sango and Oduduwa but because it has concrete evidences of specificity and actuality. Soon after it happened, Nigerians could read the pride in the account of the white man's punitive expedition. But as victims, it was patriotism for Nigerians to write about the bravery of resistance of that gruesome encounter. In this case, the recall of similar woes (motifs) of colonial power play of superiority triggers pains of psychological proportion in the African mind. It is a historical horror like many which occurred under similar circumstance.

Rokem describes history as an organisation of time. The sense in his definition is due to the separate events in-between, which nonetheless requires revisiting. One of the essential duties of drama is also to perform vital aspects of history by visually recalling the persons involved in flesh and blood. He believes that by "performing history" it is possible to confront this sense of separation and exclusion, enabling us to believe in the witnesses who have seen what in some way has to be told again" (vii). But in performing oral history, we often fall into evidential quagmire. Toeing Paul Celan's view, "No one can bear witness for the witnesses, no one but the survivors themselves" (cited in Rokem vii). Apparently for Africa, the witnesses are all dead, without written or pictorial evidence. But we believe their stories if only for cultural pride and spiritual peace. Sadly, unlike Egypt, as Banham observes, the rest of Africa could only "articulate its past significantly through oral narration, myth and legend, history cannot be one thing" (xvi).

In Africa, oral literature was the norm; legends found their way into people's hearts by words of mouth and not through the pages of books. Storytellers developed special skills and were gifted with technical manipulation of the voice from the guttural and croaky to thin and tweedy sounds. In the local language, they could arrest the child's attention with the deep and roaring voice of the lion and the bear or the mewing and chirping sounds of cats and birds. Beyond the fantasy adorning the tales of fairies and tricky tortoise, the fear of supernatural places, conjured pantheons of thousand gods of imaginable circumstances hovered within, venting nihilistic fangs of fire against doubting minds and stubborn children. Since adults told the stories, the children become adults in no time passing the torch of oral tradition.

On stage, the storyteller's voice withdraws while the legends play themselves out. The performer is not on stage for himself but for the audience. Therefore, the actor understands that a relationship exists between the performer and the audience. The performer exists on stage in one of three forms: as actor, sculpture or painted image. The actor is living imitator, and occupies a special status unlike the rest two because he reasons, exhibits initiatives with capabilities for emotional reactions. Each of these forms represents a familiar character, the archetype, which the audience wishes to identify with. Therefore, consideration for the appearance of these images is given either from the perspective of truth or abstraction. Abstraction in scenery is an artistic representation, which intentionally alters the visual appearance of a known subject for aesthetic reasons. Such creative attempts are not without controversies, but nevertheless intended to raise new levels of consciousness. Abstraction is not limited to sculptures or painted images, the actor can also be given abstract appearance. This is commonplace in films, a format with significant dependence on special effects, with also years of special effects capability and substantial budget to achieve it. Theatre employs this hyped ambience to uphold performance experience.

In the African cosmology, it is my view that the notion of theatrical truth depends on two believable knowledge standpoints. The first is from the oral tradition of who or what a person or god was and looked like, of which, the perceiver lacks the capacity to contradict. The more the sources of information, the more likelihood the discrepancies, the more conflict our perception of the character. The various creation stories can attest to this. The second originates from absolute ignorance and incapability of the first. It is a critical perspective, which cannot

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jettison the belief of the first because it shares in the efficacy of it. However, it has developed sufficient capacity to query the inconsistencies thereof. This is the position of the elite or educated perceiver. Theatre scenery has capitalized on both.

The ability of the audience to quickly decipher a dramatic character or image, the more perceptive and enjoyable the story of the performance would be. The degree of the audience's recognition of the dramatic character, the easier it is to appreciate the emotional and psychological predicament of the actor. The actor understands this tension as a relationship on which the empathy for his act delicately depends. This relationship is both emotional and interactive. It is a responsibility that combines imagination, inspiration and spontaneity to bring about efficacious function of shaping emotions on stage. According to Konijn:

The mutual influence of the actor and the audience member is perceptible in the tension a critical audience causes the actor to feel, while the actor directs or manipulates the attention or interest of the audience (53).

An actor playing Ghandi or Mandela will find himself in this position.

Artistically, there are two kinds of legends, the living one and its ancestral other. The living legend is a hero of an era which the current generation or recent past generations experienced and interacted with, and whose genuine physical personality remains incontrovertible. The images of Ghandi, Mandela, Balewa, Azikiwe or Awolowo are clear examples. These images still remain within the grips of scholars and so can endure abstractions as artistic expressions. The personalities of slave trade by any representation can stretch the imagination of the audience not in the range of doubt but in the region of awe for its historical significance. The reason is that the mention of the names evokes legends whose legacies have become intertwined with the images of their personalities. That is, symbols or incontrovertible motifs of struggle.

The second category is the legends of the ancestral realm called the gods or goddesses. They are almost uncountable if we go by ethnic nationalities, *ogun*, *sango*, *sopono*, *esu* etc., and the goddesses, *oya*, *yemoja* etc. of the Yoruba. The Igbo gods, *amadioha*, *ala*, *ofo*, *ogu* and their

corresponding goddesses like those of the Edo, Calabar, kalabari highly influence their attitudes, ways of life and our patronage of cultural arts.

The gods in our traditional religious belief enjoy respectable observance, and are revered for their supernatural status. Rituals for protection and guidance remain paramount and consistent. The Nigerian audience member as handmade of the gods carries this reverence as toga, even into the theatre. Theatrically as in public belief, the significance and personality traits of these gods are not in doubt. In whatever form they chose to manifest, they still control harvest, fruitfulness, heath, and decide victory in wars. This is almost universal for most belief systems of the world. In the words of Joseph Campbell:

Most rituals are related to one of three basic concerns: pleasure (food, shelter, sex, children); power (conquest, aggrandizement of self or tribe); and duty (to the gods, the tribe or the mores and values of society). Together, the concerns include sustenance, continuation of the family and tribe, prestige, defense against enemies, integration of the individual into society, and the goodwill of supernatural powers (Brockett 4).

However, the definite images of these gods and their perceived pantheons defy exactitude because photography was not a practice at the points of their origin. This existing inexactitude creates ambiguity, and gives theatre designers the artistic freedom for imaginative claims seen in stage representations. However, the same cannot be said of traditional rulers: oba, eze, emir etc. The reason is that these were incontrovertibly human who became kings, and whose heirs mounted the thrones. These royal offices endured with established processes for transition with living heirs supported by consistent oral historical culture. Classic examples exist in Nigeria from northern emirs, Yoruba obas, and Benin obas.

Some clarifications are required in the use of images, particularly images of black African origin. First. Can motif stand perceptively distinct from the actor's background to speak for itself, yet remain vocal and provocative as its function demands? The answer is yes. This was demonstrated in the 2016 performance of Ebrahim Hussein's *Oda Oak Oracle*¹ when the oracle emits smoke and fire as the priest speaks; the smoke and flame-animated the pot to voice the oracle's decision and mandate. Second. Can a sculptured motif known to be calm, lonely and

motionless change its form during performance? Again the answer is yes. The scenic demeanour animates the audience interpretive capacity to as the story unfolds. When it is in a living room or lobby, it assumes a hospitable function, as it would when it is placed in a reception hall. However, it will become sacred when it is in a shrine? In all there is a further imposition on motifs to a deeper and compelling function in a dramatic performance to penetrate the tragic, the humorous and the melancholy for a deeper socio-spiritual appreciation beyond the aesthetics of a pictorial representation of form. It is incontrovertible that the difference between a performing artwork (as prop on stage or public exhibition) and an orphaned art (as décor in a living room). That difference is patronage where it interacts with its visitors for different functional values. Artworks whether Traditional or contemporary project cultural values through instinctive approaches to narrative, ornament and detail specifically rooted in culture. Shastri could not be wrong that "design ethos in any society draws its identity from its culture, society and technology, its genealogy embedded within its localized and indigenous traditions. The perception of a unique worldview is rooted within the confines of its localized habitat" (Hannah & Mehzoud 4).

Technology and Treatment of Folkloric Legends in Nigerian Performances

The Nigerian audience sees the gods from mythical perspective. Therefore, religious characters whether human, sculpture or painting is also seen from the oral platform or folkloric orb from which the concept traditionally originates. The Nigerian audience of traditional play genre goes beyond Bell's aesthetic hypothesis of emotional expression for a work of art. He believes that, "To appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing but a sense of form and color and a knowledge of three-dimensional space" (92). This means that interrogating a piece of artwork with a view to uncovering truth beyond the visual image represented is crossing the boundary of artistic appreciation.

A balanced interpretation of Bell however identifies another category that eschews sentiments toward significant form. In his view, "You will notice that people who cannot feel pure aesthetic emotions remember pictures by their subjects; whereas people who can, as often as not, have no idea what the subject of picture is" (Hospers 93). Either way, the Nigeria audience presented with a cultural or ancestral image

of a god or patriarch of their existence is caught in the web of either or both. The conclusion is that one is so ignorant to question, the other interrogates with fear or caution for blasphemy.

In working with motifs, the designer selects an object for emphasis; it becomes the central theme uniting the concept. The platform is usually any image painting on canvass, architecture, ornamental wares and crafts, textile or sculpture. It would be authoritatively presented as a motif exuding dominance in total space through size rather than repetitive patterns common in a design art. The sum total of the single images by spatial distribution remains a motif by principle since it contains same patterns, varied for unity, with clear emphasis for dominance. The gods have their preferred colours, in which case the critical audience may have conflicting ideas or, express discomfort with colour treatment if a god with specific colour identity is misrepresented.

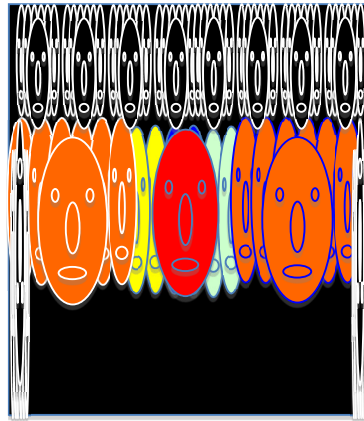


Figure 1. Shrine motifs in *Spellbound* showing constant colour changes signifying rage and chaos and cordiality during the contest of the gods. Even though two gods spoke, colour made the difference between both gods. Lighting and sound on the motif below was meant to introduce tension and sustain wonder.

The job of scenery is to present an acceptable ambience for performance, a platform in which the images and dramatic characters are contextualized for logical interpretation. Thus a motif in dramatic performance is of pivotal reference to and between scenic images against moving dramatic characters. In traditional Africa drama, it stands referential to the social and religious worldview of the people. Their symbolic presence agitates, provoke, and query the actions of dramatic characters for probity between conflicting ideologies tormenting a

character or sustaining it. Modern staging techniques make these possibilities achievable employing stage machinery, which works symbiotically with aesthetic lighting to achieve fluidity. In each composition, an overall identifiable picture is presented for appreciation.

Archetypal Figures and Performance Aesthetics

There is need to examine a few ways scenography approaches a subject in stage composition. Modern theatrical lighting presents opportunities for the distortion of image, and unlimited exploration of moods for the projection of telepathy from the actor to the audience for mutual psychological and emotional benefits. This no doubt quickly goes through a hypothetical enquiry for semiotic processing.



Plate 1. God creating Adam in *Noah Built the Ark*:

Photo: Courtesy of Molinta Enendu.

No spectator queried this form because it was “God”. Rather audience was empathically engrossed with God’s awesome ability and not what he looked like. The image of God is given and taken in his ability to create man from sands of the earth. The scene was carried out under scarlet colours of light thus making God’s face invisible because no man has seen God. Lit from backward projection with subdued blobbing fog, silhouettes of body movements wove through complex sculpting process that evolved into man. The audience enjoyed the mystery of the

Creator's presence. By the time Adam walked from the dark through misty frosts into bright light, God's work in man was complete.

A similar approach was adopted in Ojo Bakare's *This Land Must Sacrifice* where Aiyelala was the personality of Olodumare, creator of man and the universe. The situation was a corrupt society in need of cleansing. Suffering was already imminent as sign of evil and wrongdoing in the land. The people believed in the existence of a supreme deity that will manifest. At the appointed time, darkness of black light enveloped the scene, lamentation signaled the level of tension and regret while twilight at low intensity of light became slow moving cloud. The fearful and chastising voice of Aiyelala filled the void, suspended movement and wailing to a frozen tempo. The form of Aiyelala was never revealed physically but through sound and psychedelic lighting, the impact of mystery and astonishment created also ran through the audience. A transition occurred through a flurry of lighting and sound, and daylight revealed actor's feeble human nature, they were penitently and humbled to submission.

African performances reflect strong belief in dreams and superstitions, a medium in which the mystery of destiny could manifest. Thus dream encounters are taken seriously. However, image representations are muffled to magical fantasies and connotative allusions, such as the encountered life-changing dreams of Adesewa in Ayodele Jaiyesimi's *The Crystal Slipper*.

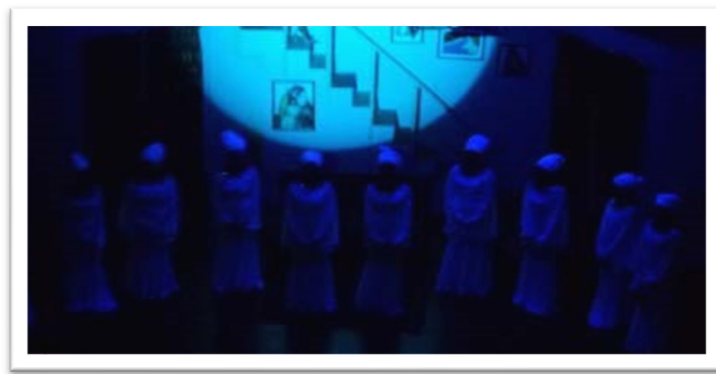


Plate 2. Adesewa's dream. Actors are without identity. Lighting: John Iwuh

Theatrical design adopts a different approach for African gods of established human origins (Esu, Sango, Ogun, Sopono etc.). Using the characteristics of their human nature, designers create their forms by imagination, which the audience embraces with relish. For instance, Yoruba mythology describes Esu as a trickster, and personality of dual character in words, ability and physical manifestation. Makeup design denies him the privilege of handsome physical attributes while costume clads him in the colour of evil and danger. In addition, lighting empowers him with appearing and disappearing capabilities between acts and among characters, to eavesdrop into discussions. Being a god that thrives in confusion amidst insatiable demands, this interfering ability puts Esu ahead of debilitating circumstance to use for raucous machinations. Yerima effectively explored this intriguing characteristic of Esu in *Yemoja* where Esu played intense mind game on Sango using Yemoja. For these unpredictable capabilities, Ogungbemi believes, Esu is “one who is constantly in need of appeasement and nurturing because of his insatiable wants and needs” (Falola 85).



2013 performance of Yerima's *Yemoja*. Timi Alaka as Esu and Victoria Oladipo as Yemoja at Redeemer's University. Set design and lighting: John Iwuh and Sarah Uwadiae

Masquerades are special in that they are seen as physical manifestation of ancestors. They possess a dual status as gods and as dead ancestors. Unlike Chukwu, Olodumare etc., they are seen as visitors who chose

appointed occasions of the year to celebrate and be celebrated by their children on earth. The appearance of a masquerade is greeted with honour and respect. Its costume is ethereal to depict unusual richness and flamboyancy or outright oddity.

Masquerades enjoy some of the most creative costume and makeup designs in African performance because it is in the forms of masquerades and spiritual existence that the full creative aperture of a designer gains wings to express the abstract and symbolic forms of these supernatural conceptions (Iwuh 8)



“I know who the Dead Ones are. They are the guests of the Human Community who are neighbours to us of the Forest. It is their feast, the Gathering of the Tribes. Their councillors met and said, our forefathers must be present at this feast” (Soyinka 5). Few of the masquerades featured in Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forest*, 2015.

Photo: Jahman Anikulapo. Set design and lighting: Zmirage

Naturally, masquerades combine colour, pride, power, sometimes aggression but yet charismatic. They gyrate with charisma and project undisputed psycho-spiritual authority. This is what aesthetic lighting brings together in space as a composition of unified spectacle.

Even in this kinetic state, the composition maintains a continuous mixture of colourful bodies, which as art remains unmistakable within David Prall's "aesthetic surface" allure. Most performances, especially in academic environments, only in rare scripts (performances) are masquerades addressed by their names and kinds. For this reason, the name "masquerade" suffices, and so critical views are shelved about their forms and specific characteristics in preference for their aesthetic and performative glamour. Under aesthetic lighting, their rich harmonious colours acquire extra value; abolish the blandness of ordinary colours of familiar fabrics associated with the mundane, to the unfamiliar, unsuspecting grandeur of the supernatural. Before now, masquerades are familiar by cultural knowledge, but spiritually, they remain metaphysically hypothetical, an imaginative realm that is possible by lighting transmutation. Motif is as it were, history actualized, dreams illuminated, demystification of figurative imaginations, activation and objectification of deified bodies for communal reflection and enquiry.

Assessment of Acceptance of Image Representations

The Nigerian audience seeks theatre experience for the enjoyment of it rather than for intellectual inquiry. We can conveniently say that interpretive freedom lies within the entertainment value of theatrical performances. This platitude calls for dedication on the part of practitioners to respect rather than exploit. However, presentational style provides that social, interactive and convivial experience while illusionistic performance mystifies, elevates and intensifies held spiritual reverence for these supernatural personalities. We can draw up three inferences based on background motifs for theatrical performances.

True Representation: Inability to question the artistic image of a given deity is a sign of a deep knowledge of the true image of that deity. This lack of questioning is a sign that the audience accepts the artistic image as true of the god being represented. The least controversial among the motifs created on the Nigerian stage are kings and their thrones, gods and their shrines. Even though disparity often exists between actual thrones and their stage representations, audience easily tolerates the existing difference due to observable differences between different classes of kings and their thrones. However, this does not excuse the levity, lack of vision and research for the scenery of most

traditional play performances in Nigerian universities. The same goes for the gods, emphasis is usually on their shrines because the gods are believed to have lost their human bodies meant for human shelter.

False Representation: This is when the artistic image lacks the qualities passed down from oral tradition by historical or religious inference. At the performance of Yerima's *Yemoja* in 2013, a question was posed to students. "Who is Yemoja?" only four students out of 20 interviewed before the performance were able to answer correctly, "Yemoja is a Yoruba Goddess". The four students were tagged for 50% discount as a means of identification. At the end of the performance, one of them asked, "why was Yemoja not like the figure in your poster?" The poster has given an impression of Yemoja as half human-half fish in a colourful deep-sea setting. In as much as the performance tried to depict that, the river lighting effect was disappointingly ineffective. The river effect, which underperformed, was programmed to reflect tilapia scale spikes threaded into Yemoja's lilac blue skirt to reflect under black light. She was to be immersed in water from the waist down, properly demarcated by the rippling movement of water.

Tolerance: Notable difference exists between our knowledge of the deity and this artistic representation. Thus appearance can be tolerated, because we have accepted that such a deity possesses and exhibits transformational personality. The audience suspends critical inquisition of the image for a liberal view. This is the notion of "suspension of the disbelief". This is true of Esu, and Horton is right in this respect:

The faiths of the Yoruba peoples of Western Nigeria vary significantly from one part of the region to another; the same deity may be male in one village and female in the next, or the characteristics of two gods may be embodied in a single deity in a neighbouring region; in the city of Ile Ife alone the trickster god is worshipped under three different names" (Horton).

Interpretive Freedom: This is the license given to the perceiver of an artistic image to express, interpret, and judge. The artist creates the image while the audience creates the narrative. By creating an image, interest is generated and thoughts are provoked. The artist thus sets in motion the process of questioning and the expansion of knowledge in that subject. This applies to both still and moving image or picture. When

such an image is created, the origin, value, reinvention and continuity of its benefit to humanity reawakens, and modalities for activation is explored and engaged. In the theatre, the technological remaking of these iconic, deified personalities is constantly animated through performance engagement of socio-cultural, socio-historical, socio-political or socio-religious issues involving their mortals.

An artistic image therefore is not an end; it is a mere icon of signification with intrinsic application of spiritual value. It could have cultural origin but often its signification could exceed intended cultural boundary. As a motif, it is an igniter of thoughts for retrospective or futuristic enquiry into the state of being and impact of the signified object (e.g. a god).

Repetition as an attribute of motif could be slightly confusing. What is meant by "repetition" being repeated throughout a piece in order to be considered a motif is flexible. In other words, a motif keeps a creative work constantly in perspective either as object or text. It transforms, and transits in a manner that artistically alters its appearance, and yet remains recognisable. Artistic vision and license permit every artist to exploit it. This constant artistic evolution also has its verbal alternatives. For example, "death" could be a motif in a literary work as do its image on stage. Playwrights do not have to use the word "death" to express the image of death. "Funeral," "grave," "dead," and so on easily communicate death.

Furthermore, death-like images like ruptured figures of icons and familiar deities or their artifacts are powerful motif portraiture. All of the language and imagery would contribute to the motif. The visual motif irrespective of medium of expression whether painted, sketched, carved or embossed animates the set and raises thematic awareness. For instance, a strong motif of financial debt by traditional technique is captured in Unoka's unrepentant debt record in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe's artfully captures an angle of his father craftiness and meanness with comical demeanor, using Unoka's personality as an ancient fox. Being a chronic debtor, Unoka diligently keeps his debt record to logically and psychologically disarm his debtors by carefully drawing vertical strokes of lines on the wall. Each creditor instantly locates his position in the hierarchy of creditors and sees the hopeless desire of repeating the visit. He technically assigns certain characteristics to each of the strokes, which alludes to specific individuals and the magnitude of debts owed. Each stroke is a symbol

while all the strokes are motifs of indebtedness. In essence, motifs repeat to reinforce while symbol represents. By this visual presence, Motifs minimise the thematic complexity of performance to an audience while design space serves as mediating platform between the playwright, director, designer and the audience.

Conclusion

The application of technological equipment has greatly increased the value of African legendary figures on stage. Aesthetic lighting particularly has brought out the powers and transformative abilities of these gods through dramatic effects. The spectator's cultural background, belief or exposure is no doubt a precondition for depth of appreciation of dramatic wonders. The depth of social, cultural or spiritual involvement of a spectator determines their preponderance to accept or question the transformative wonders of dramatic motifs.

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