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Chapter 4

**Conclusion: Making a Case for the
Practitioners' Strategic Positionality**

This dissertation set out with a two-pronged aim: to determine the extent of the involvement of Nigerian theatre practitioners in participatory democratic process in Nigeria through the interrogation of laws from the era of British colonial rule to the end of military dictatorship and the (re)installation of democratic rule in 1999. Also, looking ahead, to propose what form the participation of Nigerian theatre practitioners in Nigeria's democracy might take in the future. Based on the qualitative analyses of both primary and secondary texts applied in addressing the first part of the research question, *the dissertation determined that Nigerian theatre practitioners and playwrights played a significant role in Nigeria's participatory democratic process within the period under study.* The application of the methodology made evident the use of the theatre as a tool for stirring up social and political change. With specific focus on the interplay between theatre and law, the dissertation established a vital connection between the practice of theatre and the interrogation of unjust laws and policies from the period of British domination over Nigeria to the end of military dictatorship in 1999. *The dissertation found that during the period represented by the first arm of the research question (that is, from the 1940s to 1999), Nigerian theatre practitioners employed their theatrical expertise in critiquing the impact of repressive laws on citizens.* The practitioners apprehended the impact of laws on the lived realities of the citizens and playfully deployed their art in agitating against laws which they deemed repressive. By doing so, the practitioners established themselves both as the citizens' voice of protest against the oppressive tendencies of the Establishment and as political activists engaged in the fight for the return of democratic governance in Nigeria.

In order to make necessary connection between the historical period studied under the first arm of the main research question and the role of the theatre practitioners in the future of Nigeria's democracy envisaged by the second arm of the research question, the dissertation found it expedient to further study Nigerian theatre in the post-1999 period. The study of the post-1999 Nigerian theatre displayed an observable detachment from Nigeria's contemporary political happenings. *The dissertation noted that instead of a robust engagement with participatory democratic process in Nigeria, Tfd has been used as an apparatus of governance thereby robbing it of the ability to substantially adhere to core objectives and values upon which it was founded.* The ideology upon which Tfd was established gives it credit as a form which engenders development and which is committed to democratic fair-dealing thus capable of aiding the enculturation of democracy in host communities. In this regard, the dissertation probed, essentially, how the tenets of democracy are reflected in the practice of Tfd in Nigeria. Through an in-depth analysis of documented Tfd interventions, *the dissertation noted an incongruence between the advertised objectives of Tfd and observable results as reflected in its practice in Nigeria.* The

dissertation noted the theoretical unity between development and democracy, on the one hand, and TfD, on the other hand, against their practical split.

The second arm of the main research question represents a decisive attempt to instigate the citizens' political agency and build democratic values thereby ameliorating the gaps inherent in the implementation of the TfD methodology. To this end, the dissertation deemed it appropriate to propose the adoption of Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre methodology by TfD practitioners already steeped in participatory theatre and other practitioners who might be interested in exploring the methodology. The choice of this methodology was based on the qualitative analysis of relevant scholarly literature. This was further tested through the practice-informed research which I conducted. Through the adoption of the stated methodological steps, I hypothesised that the application of the Legislative Theatre methodology could serve as a veritable means of lessening the deficiencies in TfD praxis. This is hinged on the fundamental correlation between democracy and development, on the one hand, and, democracy and law, on the other hand. Laws are at the core of any democratic union and the level of input made into it by members of the democratic body is a fair indication of the health of the democracy. Also, it is hard to imagine any meaningful development without the committed participation of members of a given community. Therefore, I advocate, fundamentally, that irrespective of the mode of theatrical output Nigerian theatre practitioners should realign themselves appreciably with the socio-political and democratic cause of the citizens. Furthermore, my proposition for the adoption of the Legislative Theatre methodology by TfD practitioners is premised on the recognition of the correlation which fundamentally connects democracy, law and development. Legislative Theatre which is being recommended in this dissertation for adoption by Nigerian practitioners of TfD, in particular, is, *inter alia*, a potential theatrical valve through which citizens could express their innermost yearnings about the laws under which they live. The practice-informed research showed a noteworthy indication of the benefits of the Legislative Theatre methodology in galvanising civic participation in policy matters. Also, personal stories of participants upon which Legislative Theatre drama sketches are built make the methodology more presentational than representational. This is capable of engendering more positively impactful legislations. Such deliberate and decisive civic participation, as I have observed, is fundamental to development.

At the core of this research is the notion that although the place of theatre in enhancing democratic values has been well recognised, theatre, as a concept, cannot fulfil this role without the deliberate positionality of theatre practitioners. The study was therefore intended to situate the role Nigerian theatre practitioners could play in strengthening Nigeria's democracy. For proper contextualisation of my proposal

on the role of theatre practitioners in Nigeria's democracy, I found it expedient to commence by conducting a historical survey of the previous role of Nigerian theatre practitioners in Nigeria's political evolution. I conducted the survey through the lens of political theatre. I adopted this approach given that I deemed it a veritable means of ascertaining the involvement of Nigerian theatre practitioners in Nigeria's participatory democracy with particular reference to how theatre practitioners interrogated Nigerian laws on the stage. I reasoned that determining the nature of the past role of the practitioners in participatory democratic practices, regardless of its tangentiality, would serve as a useful departure point in proposing what their role should be under Nigeria's current democratic enterprise.

I sought to discover the nexus between laws and policies, on the one hand, and the existential realities of Nigerian citizens as reflected on the Nigerian stage, on the other hand. I approached this with the hypothetical assumption that Nigerian theatre practitioners, through the application of the genre of political theatre, often deployed their art in protesting against unjust laws in the Nigerian polity in favour of the citizens. I further hypothesised that the interrogation of the laws served as a means through which the practitioners participated in the struggle for the return of Nigeria to democratic rule. The study of the selected works of notable Nigerian theatre practitioners confirmed my hypothetical assumptions. The study proved that the practitioners were unsparing in their condemnation of repressive laws and reckoned with their theatrical enterprise as a way of engaging in the struggle for the liberation of Nigeria from both British domination and military dictatorship. This often earned the practitioners the ire of, and subjugation by, the Establishment. The methodology adopted in this regard (that is, an analysis of both primary and secondary texts) proved fruitful showing explicitly that Nigerian theatre practitioners did consider both British colonial rule and military dictatorship as an aberration. The application of the methodology also enabled me to validate the hypothesis that the practitioners specifically interrogated oppressive laws enacted by various governments and used this means in the fight to restore the rule of the people (i.e. democracy) in Nigeria.

I also sought to find out the steps Nigerian theatre practitioners could take to meaningfully participate in strengthening Nigeria's current democratic culture. In this regard, I conjectured that through the adoption of the Legislative Theatre methodology the practitioners could play significant role in acculturating democratic practices in Nigeria. My conjecture was based on the documented impact of the methodology as contained in available academic sources. The sources provided evidence of the productive interface between policy making (and policy makers) and the citizens and how that interface resulted in corporeal policy education and political participation for the citizens and, in many cases, to policy shift in favour of the citizens. To test this

hypothetical postulation, I executed an experimental Legislative Theatre project. This was viewed as the dependable way to evaluate the feasibility and appropriateness of the adoption of the Legislative Theatre methodology in Nigeria.

Bearing in mind the gulf which often exists between lawmakers and their constituents, the experiment executed in the course of this research demonstrated that the Legislative Theatre methodology is potentially beneficial in the building of democratic culture and in the incorporation of the citizens into participatory democratic processes. ***The experiment also exemplified the significant utility of the tool in facilitating productive interaction between policy makers and the citizens who are the direct recipients of the effects of the policies.*** The experiment also proved that Legislative Theatre sessions are appropriate occasions for the enhancement of the civic participation of citizens. The sessions are equally useful for the policy education of participants and for the interrogation of the provisions of extant laws. ***It was proven that through Legislative Theatre sessions citizens could learn about the lacuna(e) which exists in extant laws.***

The experiment also provided considerable proof in favour of the hypothetical assumption that ***Legislative Theatre could create the opportunity for Nigerian citizens to be incorporated into the lawmaking processes in a democratic setting.*** In spite of the novelty of the Legislative Theatre methodology within the Nigerian theatre sphere, which expectedly placed inhibitions on the participants, the experiment sufficiently illustrated the willingness of the citizens to offer input and become part of the processes that could produce the laws that govern and determine the socio-political as well as economic atmosphere under which they live. However, in view of the fact that some of the proposals from participants were deemed non justiciable, the experiment also raised concerns about how certain provisions of extant laws could constitute a hindrance to the realisation of the legislative inputs by citizens and the impact that members of the Metabolising Cell are capable of exerting on the Legislative Theatre process. This reveals a challenge which practitioners need to be mindful of and requires that in the adoption of the methodology, practitioners should devise means to further ensure the enhanced agency of the citizens over the process.

A crucial part of my concern in this dissertation, as reflected in the title; 'Let's *Make the Law Because We Live the Law: New Perspectives on the Role of Political Theatre in Nigeria*' is a focus on how the positionality of Nigerian theatre practitioners impacted – and could impact -on the Nigerian polity. Thus, the dissertation is concerned with charting a new course for the involvement of Nigerian theatre practitioners in participatory democracy in Nigeria. In essence, each chapter of the dissertation presents a peculiarly nuanced role which Nigerian theatre practitioners played or could play

within the Nigerian polity. The dissertation commenced by discussing how Nigerian theatre practitioners plied their trade in the interest of the citizens. The practitioners identified with the concerns and agitations of Nigerians by speaking on behalf of the citizens against perceived repressive laws. In other words, the positionality of the practitioners was in tandem with the aspirations and agitations of the citizens. The dramatic outputs of the practitioners were, in essence, the voice of the citizens who were affected by the unjust laws of the government. Underlining the interest of the theatre practitioners was a desire to see a democratic Nigeria free from insensitivity to the plight of the people as it featured under British colonial rule and military dictatorship. In this regard, Nigeria's return to democratic rule in 1999 was (hastily) celebrated as a consummation of that desire.

The role of Nigerian theatre practitioners of TfD differ significantly from the role played by playwrights in the political theatre under colonialism and military rule. While under the Nigerian political theatre of between the 1940s and 1999 the role of the playwrights favoured the interests of the citizens against the State, the developmentalist imperatives of TfD resulted in a collaboration between the practitioners of TfD and the authorities in a manner that apparently relegated the interests and aspirations of the citizens to the background. In this form of practice, the interests of the citizens soon became a secondary, not primary, concern of the practitioners. This casts a doubt about the touted affinity between the Theatre of Development - a brainchild of the developmentalist thinking - and democracy.

The inferences drawn in this dissertation from Nigeria's political theatre and the Theatre for Development (TfD) clearly demonstrate the importance of the role of theatre practitioners in the polity and is therefore the premise of my advocacy for a re-consideration of the positionality of Nigerian theatre practitioners under a democratic Nigeria. Thus, recognising that the proposed Legislative Theatre methodology will be adopted apace with other forms of theatrical practice, I advocate, as stated previously, that practitioners should realign noticeably and decidedly with the cause of the citizens irrespective of the mode of expression of their theatrical output. In specific terms, there should be a revival of political theatre which will engage perceptibly with extant realities in Nigeria's democracy. I also advocate that TfD practitioners should resolutely articulate their practice from the referential point of the citizens in a manner that will engender tangible development. Additionally, the Legislative Theatre methodology should be applied to enrich the democratic citizenship habits of the citizens especially with respect to participation in the lawmaking process.

This implies that Nigerian theatre practitioners will jettison their dalliance with the authorities and will, using various theatrical expressions, give due attention to Nige-

ria's democracy. The cumulative effect of this will presumably manifest in a meaningful positive impact on Nigeria's democracy. The new approaches could potentially engender active collaboration between the practitioners and Nigerian citizens which anticipatorily would result in an enhanced civic participation, thus positively impacting on the political agency of the citizens. The accruing benefits of the active civic participation and the restoration of the citizens' political voice would conceivably ramify in many ways including, but not limited, to the involvement of the citizens in the processes which produce legislations. In carrying out the responsibility of galvanising the citizens to form part of the processes of lawmaking, the theatre artist should expect opposition from the political class who, arguably, have been benefiting from the subsisting practice in which the citizens are reckoned with only during elections. Notwithstanding the possibility of opposition from the political class, the new perspective to the role of the Nigerian theatre practitioner holds considerable prospects and deserves to be put to test in the service of Nigeria's democracy.

Drawing therefore from what has been examined in the study I have adopted a reduction of principles to support my position that democratic culture could be deepened through the praxis of the Legislative Theatre methodology, hence my advocacy for its adoption in Nigeria. Based on the above submissions, Nigerian theatre practitioners should consider playing a more prominent role in the Nigerian political system with the intent of buoying up Nigeria's democracy. As earlier noted in this study, democracy is one of the arenas where theatre has been known to leave its significantly positive imprint. Also, I have previously noted that any democracy not well managed is potentially capable of turning into a post-colonial institutionalisation of colonial domination. In other words, a poorly managed democracy stands the risk of being distorted and is potentially as harmful as both colonialism and military totalitarianism. This is particularly pertinent in view of current assessment of Nigeria's democracy.⁷³² The poor ratings attest to the critical and practical need to ensure equality before the law for Nigerian citizens under a democratic governance and build a healthier relationship between the electorate and their representatives through the participatory involvement of the citizens. Theatrical practice can be decisive in facilitating the citizens' participation given its playfulness and ability to address political and societal concerns on an aesthetic and imaginative register.

Also crucial in this regard is the gap between the Nigerian electorate and their representatives. Nigeria's elected representatives, as studies note, conduct themselves in government with little or no regard for the interests and concerns of the electoral

732 In 2021 Nigeria recorded a Perceived Democratic Deficit of 54%. The slightly improved Perceived Democratic Deficit of 51% in 2022 notwithstanding, the 2022 assessment still returned a worrisome prime position in critical areas such as inequality before the law (58%), limitations on free speech (76%) and fear of unfair elections (85%) for Nigeria.

populace. Thus, I have argued that Nigeria's democracy is reasonably comparable to an electocracy. The absence of collaboration between the electorate and their representatives is one critical factor which reduces a democracy to an electocracy. Even as an electocracy, Nigerian elections have also been said to have significantly lost their essential democratic essence and ingredients. All these indices point to an ailing democracy. My position therefore is that Nigeria's democratic culture is an area of need in which Nigerian theatre practitioners could make significant impact.

The Legislative Theatre experiment exemplified the possibility, as well as the imperative, for a collaborative relationship between policy makers and the citizens who daily live under the impact of the policies. As demonstrated by the experiment, *Legislative Theatre sessions engender the ambience for the education of citizens on the provisions of extant laws and policies, and the interrogation of those laws.* The sessions also reveal any lacunae in extant laws. Such lacunae represent possible areas of intervention by, and participation, of citizens. All these reinforce the utilitarian prospects of the Legislative Theatre methodology for which it deserves to be put to test by Nigerian theatre practitioners. In addition to the possibility of enlisting the citizens in the process of lawmaking, *Legislative Theatre sessions also enhance civic participation which is indispensable for the growth and health of any democracy.* An unhealthy or distorted democracy, as Nigeria now represents, could putatively be positively impacted on through the adoption of the approaches suggested above. In essence, Nigeria's democracy should not be taken as a given, rather it should be seen as a continuum capable of being tilted by theatre practitioners in the direction of training the habits of democracy.

I have noted that the degree of the citizens' participation in the determination of the laws that dictate their daily living is a veritable gauge of the quality of their participation in democracy. Thus, I reiterate my suggestion that Nigerian theatre practitioners should become more involved in Nigeria's democracy through the use of various modes of theatre praxis. For instance, Legislative Theatre could be employed to continuously expose and interrogate unwelcome laws and policies in the interest of those who daily grapple with the effects of those oppressive laws. The dissertation demonstrates that there necessarily ought always to be adversarial democratic engagement between the forces that want society to remain as it is and the counter forces which desire change through democratic means. Legislative Theatre is a way to move beyond the framework of electoral politics in order to secure a people's collective material interest.

In sum, I advocate for a discernible revival of political theatre to address extant democratic concerns with specific respect to laws, a modification of Tfd to ensure that performances are articulated from the reference point of the citizens and, the

adoption of Legislative Theatre methodology to engage the citizens in the lawmaking processes. These approaches will bridge the existing gap between the theatrical engagements of practitioners and the happenings on the Nigerian democratic arena.

This dissertation has offered perspectives, in historical, theoretical and empirical terms, on an area of theatre theory and practice that has hitherto not featured within the Nigerian theatre studies and praxis. First, the dissertation fills the research gap in Nigerian theatre history of the 20th and 21st centuries with particular regard to approaches to changing, implementing and making laws. The dissertation has drawn a connection between diverse theatrical forms such as folk opera, modern(ist) plays and Theatre for Development (TfD) and has introduced Legislative Theatre into the corpus of theatrical forms (both in theory and in practice) in Nigeria. With this study a mode of theatrical practice has been introduced with which Nigerian theatre practitioners could potentially integrate the citizens into the processes that produce legislations. The academic field of theatre studies as well as its praxis could continuously be made more robust by the interaction between Nigerian theatre practitioners and different aspects of society as facilitated on the platform of the Legislative Theatre methodology. This dissertation has provided insight, and also opened up new vistas for investigation, on how that interaction plays out with regard to democratic practices. With my theorisation of Legislative Theatre as play, this dissertation has also enriched available scholarship on the concepts of Legislative Theatre and play.

4.1. Scope for Further Scholarly Investigation

As I conclude this dissertation, I reflect on some germane points which came to the fore in the course of the execution of the study and which call for further investigation. First, the execution of my practice-informed research project on Legislative Theatre revealed an observably high degree of influence which members of the Metabolising Cell are capable of exerting on the Legislative Theatre process. In this instance, the members of the Metabolising Cell categorised some of the legislative inputs of the participants as being non-justiciable. This evidently equates to the silencing of the voices of the sponsors of the affected legislative inputs and thereby to their disenfranchisement. In other words, it detracts from the powers of the participants in a process which is supposedly founded on the intention to restore their political voice and agency. An effective way of benefitting maximally from the expertise of the Metabolising Cell while ensuring that their role does not negatively impact on the agency of participants is an area which I intend to further interrogate in my research and practice.

Also, while acknowledging that this dissertation is a modest contribution to scholarship on Legislative Theatre, the prevailing paucity of literature on Legislative Theatre makes apparent the need for more research in this branch of theatre scholarship. Therefore, I suggest that theatre practitioners should devote more attention to the field.

4.2. Closing Thoughts

When this research commenced in 2018, it was driven by my motivation to investigate what theatre practitioners have done and what they could do to strengthen Nigeria's democratic culture. Nigeria's dictatorial democracy, decades of corruption, autocratic rule, absence of the rule of law and the presence of violent non-state actors as well as militarisation had at that time driven the citizens to despair. After nineteen years of democratic governance there was palpable despondency over the anticipated gains which Nigerians had thought would herald democratic governance. Although the political class was always quick to claim that the 'dividends of democracy' were being delivered to Nigerians their claim was often in dissonant relationship with the expectations and lived realities of the citizens. These realities were ambient to my reflection on how theatre practitioners and playwrights had in the past sought to hold the system to account and how that could possibly be replicated in the face of extant challenges.

Therefore, in view of the concerns of this dissertation with respect to the role theatre practitioners could play in favour of Nigeria's democracy, I deem it apposite to conclude with a quick reflection on some contemporaneous issues which seem to portend a major shift in regard to Nigeria's democracy. My advocacy for theatre practitioners to utilise various theatrical forms (political theatre, TfD and Legislative Theatre) in playing an active role in democratic practice in Nigeria has perhaps been reinforced by contemporary events. Between 2018 and 2022 Nigeria's democratic ambience seems to have undergone significant transformation. This is however not in regard to the delivery of the often touted 'dividends of democracy'. Rather, there seems to be a significant surge in the demand, by the citizens, for socio-political and economic transformation which they (the citizens) can experientially identify with.

The root of the current surge is arguably traceable to the #EndSARS protests of October, 2020 when, for about 2 weeks, Nigerian youths took to the streets in protest against what they perceived as cruelty by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), an arm of the Nigerian Police Force, notorious for its brutality and human rights violations. SARS was established in 1992 to tackle violent crimes particularly

armed robbery. However, over the years the unit apparently abandoned their official mandate and began to engage in 'stop and search' exercise which specifically targeted Nigerian youths and led to unlawful detention, maiming and extrajudicial killing of many youths who neither committed nor were convicted of any known crime. The #EndSARS protests became the springboard from which Nigerian youth sought to aggregately express their discontent with the socio-political and economic situation of the country. The protests reached a climax on October 20, 2020 when officers of the Nigerian police and the Nigerian army allegedly shot at unarmed protesting youth killing some of them.

The alleged shootings ostensibly quelled the protests but failed, apparently, to annihilate the agitation by the youth for a better Nigeria. Prequel to the 2023 general elections, Nigerian youths have organised many politically oriented rallies. The rallies are perhaps evidence of an unsuccessful attempt to annihilate the germ of the #ENDSARS protests. The peak of the rallies took place on October 1, 2022, when Nigeria marked the 62nd anniversary of her independence from colonial rule. The 2022 independence celebrations took a remarkably different trajectory. Instead of the usual march past at various stadia, hundreds of thousands of Nigerians, mainly the youth, organised unprecedented street rallies simultaneously across the country to demonstrate their agitation for a new Nigeria which they hope will be birthed by the 2023 general elections. Nigeria's political democratic landscape is, undoubtedly, currently undergoing a mutation. Thus, while Nigeria has celebrated 62 years of independence from British colonial rule, many Nigerians express optimism that the 2023 general elections will result in 'independence' from bad leadership. This is another indication of the precarity of Nigeria's democracy.

My advocacy for Nigerian theatre practitioners to engage with Nigeria's democracy is couched within the context of its extant precarity. Therefore, I posit that Nigerian theatre practitioners should, regardless (and also in anticipation, perhaps) of the outcome of the 2023 general elections, adequately utilise political theatre to address policies and laws which support inequalities and oppression in the society, adopt a discernible bottom-up approach in the execution of TfD to reflect the voice of benefitting communities and employ the Legislative Theatre methodology to, possibly, incorporate the citizens in the processes of lawmaking. While none of the approaches is deemed singularly adequate, each one of them could be appropriated to hold the State and its institutions to account. Thus, an aggregation of the different forms will presumably help in creating a more robust polity in which, in addition to other indices of a healthy democracy, citizens could also actively engage in making the laws under which they live. Each of the approaches could be employed by the citizens to make the law by playfully living the law in the theatre.