

Summary: Let's Make the Law Because We Live the Law: New Perspectives on the Role of Political Theatre in Nigeria

In this dissertation, *Let's Make the Law Because We Live the Law: New Perspectives on the Role of Political Theatre in Nigeria*, I seek to reimagine the role of Nigerian theatre practitioners in relation to Nigeria's democracy, directing critical attention to how theatre is used to stimulate and enculturate stronger democratic habits. I pay attention to how playwrights and theatre practitioners have engaged the law, used theatre to protest State abuses of the law, and explored how theatre can be used to overcome legal barriers to citizen participation. Furthermore, I envisage and conceptualise an interface between Nigerian theatre practice and Nigerian laws in a manner that could engage Nigerian citizens in the process of lawmaking. The theoretical framework undergirding my interrogation of the intersection between theatre and law revolves around how citizens live the law in performance using myth and play.

Using a multi-pronged methodological approach which triangulates a contextual, historical and critical reading of dramatic writings, a qualitative sociological study of theatre in developmental policies and governance, and a practice-informed investigation of the potential and pitfalls of the Legislative Theatre methodology, the dissertation unravels the manner in which the Nigerian theatre has served as platform to explore the unwelcome impact of some Nigerian laws on the socio-economic and political lives of its citizens. I examine how Nigerian playwrights have employed their writings as tools of protest against colonialism and military rule and as means of asserting the voice of citizens. I draw from the concept of play to articulate the engagement of playwrights and practitioners/participants with the law at both textual and participatory levels. I explore the reimagination of the democratic citizenship of Nigerians through their involvement in democratic processes including, but not limited to, the processes that produce the laws under which the citizens live.

The dissertation is structured in three main chapters, each of which presents a nuanced view of the interface which connects theatre practitioners and playwrights, on the one hand, with the laws and state apparatuses of power, on the other hand. The first chapter titled 'Political Theatre in Nigeria: Faces, Phases and Contending Forces' opens the dissertation, setting out its historical context, examining the interrelation between theatre practice and Nigerian laws as dramatically relayed on the Nigerian stage and in English language. I engage with the dramatic writings of three 20th century playwrights, specifically inquiring into how they interrogated certain laws enacted in Nigeria from the 1940s during the British colonial era to the end of military dictatorship in 1999.

My analysis proposes two major pathways to Nigerian political theatre: the pathway of Nigerian Popular Theatre represented in this study by the theatre practices of Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola and Adunni Oluwole, and the pathway of university scholars represented by Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. I adopt a contextual, historical approach to critically examine select works by Ogunde, re-enacting the effects of colonial laws on Nigerians during the Second World War. Through this, I establish the anti-colonial ethos of Ogunde's theatre. I further note the extent to which or how the anti-colonial imperative of Ogunde's theatre distinguishes it from the theatres of his contemporaries.

The first chapter continues with a contextual critical reading of selected dramatic writings of university scholars during Nigeria's military era, namely Wole Soyinka and Femi Osofisan. With this shift, I broaden the historical scope of my investigation of the interface between theatre and law in Nigeria, looking at how university scholars dealt with the laws of the military period on stage, and how this differed from the approaches of Nigerian Popular Theatre. Through these two pathways, I argue that the cultural practitioners' dissatisfaction with the state of democratic practices in Nigeria propelled their playful and creative questioning of the state abuses of power. I posit that the political theatre of both the Nigerian Popular theatre movement as well as that of university scholars identified with the plight of the citizens and spoke in their favour against the oppressive impact of the policies enacted by colonial rule and the postcolonial Nigerian State. The chapter underscores the similarity of purpose in the playwrights' nuanced adoption of myth as shield while making critical political commentary. I posit in this respect that the playwrights *playfully* adopted myth in their repudiation of uncharitable laws and policies of the State. I note that notwithstanding the artful deployment of myth, the playwrights could not escape the wrath of the authorities, altogether.

In Chapter 2, 'The Mask of Developmentalism in the Nigerian Theatre for Development (TfD)', I mobilise a qualitative sociological method of investigation to my study of theatre in developmental policies and governance. In this regard, I focus attention on Theatre for Development (TfD), a brainchild of the era of development, and a method of theatre praxis innovated ostensibly to facilitate the cultivation of democratic values and also engender development in host communities. Through a close study of secondary accounts of TfD projects in Nigeria, I assess the extent of the congruency of the projects to the objectives of TfD as advertised at its inception. My specific objective in this regard is to ascertain the extent to which the projects cohere with the tenets of development, democracy and democratic participation. While taking note of the preponderance of TfD in contemporary Nigeria, the dissertation leverages on documented Nigerian TfD projects to discuss the theoretical unity between TfD

and tangible development in contradistinction to their practical split. Put differently, the dissertation notes the appropriation of theatre (TfD, to be specific) by the State in pursuit of goals which are purportedly in the interest of the citizens but which, however, do not ultimately adequately represent their interests. The dissertation posits that this approach to the practice of TfD precludes Nigerian TfD practitioners from contributing substantially to the cultivation of habits that are crucial to the sustenance of healthy democracy.

Chapter 3, 'Legislative Theatre: Foundations, Critical Reflections and Seminal Experiment in Nigeria', contains a theoretical study of the Legislative Theatre methodology. I adopt a practice-informed research approach to investigate the potential of adopting Legislative Theatre within the Nigerian context, while also tracing the genealogies of Legislative Theatre in Brazil and comparing this with other practices around the world. The instances of Legislative Theatre interventions which this chapter parades enrich the corpus which Nigerian practitioners could presumably draw from for the benefit of Nigeria's democracy. The chapter elaborates on a Legislative Theatre workshop/laboratory I designed and conducted with students and faculty members at Adekunle Ajasin University in 2020. The workshop sought to use the Legislative Theatre methodology to put forward recommendations for legal guidelines against sexual harassment at the university. Reflecting on this concrete example allows me to extrapolate the potential benefits of the Legislative Theatre methodology in enhancing the democratic participation of citizens, bridging the gap between citizens and their representatives, and making room for the incorporation of citizens into the lawmaking processes thereby impacting positively on the democratic habits of Nigerian citizens. This is in line with the participatory model of democracy which is my interest in this dissertation.

A deeper reflection on the contents of the three core chapters of the dissertation illustrates the import of the positionality of theatre practitioners. In Chapter 1, the dissertation shows a theatre in which, through the practitioners, the citizens register their protest to the authorities. Chapter 2 critically enquires into a theatre which seeks the compliance and affirmative involvement of citizens in implementing governmental policies with the assistance of non-governmental agencies. Finally, Chapter 3 imagines and dramatises the theatrical possibility of collaboration between theatre practitioners and the citizens, which can potentially strengthen democratic habits.

Crucially, in this dissertation I conceptualise play as a politico-theatrical element which aids the possibilities highlighted above. To begin with, I make a connection between play and myth in the playwrights' interrogation of laws perceived as oppressive. I then conceptualise play as a means of facilitating the incursion of practitioners

and participants into the territory of lawmaking. I posit that as a consequence of the incursion, play crosses certain systemic boundaries and serves the utilitarian purpose of enriching the citizens' democratic agency and facilitating the ambience in which citizens participate in making the laws which circumscribe their living. The research fills the gap in Nigerian theatre history of the 20th and 21st centuries with respect to theatrical approaches to making, changing and implementing laws. The research connects the dots between diverse theatrical forms in Nigeria: folk opera, modern(ist) plays and TfD, and from that interplay introduces the Legislative Theatre methodology.

I close the dissertation by making suggestions on how the three theatre forms – Political theatre and playwriting, TfD, and Legislative Theatre – could be interpreted in the service of Nigeria's democracy. First, I advocate the revival of political theatre in a manner which engages perceptibly with extant realities in Nigeria's democracy. Also, I recommend that TfD practitioners should be decisive in articulating their practice from the referential point of the citizens in a manner that will engender tangible development, rather than being agents of non-governmental or governmental action. In addition, 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. These recommendations countenance the insufficiency of each of the forms to singularly address the deficiencies of Nigeria's democracy. It is therefore argued that Nigerian theatre practitioners could adopt each of the approaches in working with the citizens to make the law by playfully living the law in the theatre.

Samenvatting: De wet (be)leven: Nieuwe perspectieven op de rol van het politieke theater in Nigeria

In dit proefschrift, *De wet (be)leven: Nieuwe perspectieven op de rol van het politieke theater in Nigeria*, probeer ik een nieuwe beeld te creëren van de rol van Nigeriaanse theatermakers in relatie tot de democratie van Nigeria door kritische aandacht te schenken aan hoe theater wordt gebruikt om democratische gewoonten en de burgerparticipatie te versterken. Ik besteed aandacht aan hoe toneelschrijvers en theatermakers zich met de wet en de rechtsorde hebben beziggehouden, theater hebben gebruikt om te protesteren tegen misbruik van de wet door de staat, en hebben onderzocht hoe theater kan worden gebruikt om wettelijke belemmeringen voor burgerparticipatie te overwinnen. Bovendien overweeg en conceptualiseer ik een interface tussen de Nigeriaanse theaterpraktijk en de Nigeriaanse wetgeving op een manier die Nigeriaanse burgers bij het wetgevingsproces kan betrekken. Het theoretische kader dat ten grondslag ligt aan mijn onderzoek naar het raakvlak tussen theater en recht draait om de vraag hoe burgers de wet ‘leven’ door middel van mythe en spel.

Het proefschrift maakt gebruik van een meerledige methodologische benadering waarin een contextuele, historische en kritische lezing van toneelteksten, een kwalitatieve sociologische studie naar de inzet van theater in ontwikkelingsbeleid en bestuur, en een praktijkgericht onderzoek naar het potentieel en de valkuilen van de methodologie van het Legislative Theatre samenkomen. Het proefschrift ontrafelt de manier waarop het Nigeriaanse theater heeft gediend als platform om de ongewenste impact van sommige Nigeriaanse wetten op het sociaal-economische en politieke leven van de burgers te onderzoeken. Ik onderzoek hoe Nigeriaanse toneelschrijvers hun toneelteksten hebben gebruikt als instrumenten om te protesteren tegen het kolonialisme en het militaire bewind en als middel om de stem van de burgers te laten horen. Ik put uit het concept ‘spel’ om de betrokkenheid van toneelschrijvers en theatermakers bij de wet te articuleren op zowel tekstueel als participatief niveau. Ik onderzoek de herverbeelding van het democratisch burgerschap van Nigerianen via hun betrokkenheid bij democratische processen, met inbegrip van, maar niet beperkt tot, de processen die de wetten produceren waaronder de burgers leven.

Het proefschrift is opgebouwd uit drie hoofdstukken, die elk een genuanceerde kijk geven op het raakvlak tussen theatermakers en toneelschrijvers enerzijds en de wetten en machtsapparaten van de staat anderzijds. In het eerste hoofdstuk “Political Theatre in Nigeria: Faces, Phases and Contending Forces” wordt de historische context geschetst en wordt de interrelatie onderzocht tussen de theaterpraktijk en de Nigeriaanse wetten zoals die op het Nigeriaanse toneel en in de Engelse taal worden weergegeven. Ik ga in op de toneelteksten van drie 20e-eeuwse toneelschrijvers, waarbij ik specifiek

onderzoek hoe zij bepaalde wetten bevragen die in Nigeria zijn uitgevaardigd vanaf de jaren veertig van de vorige eeuw, tijdens het Britse koloniale tijdperk, tot het einde van de militaire dictatuur in 1999.

Mijn analyse stelt twee belangrijke wegen naar een Nigeriaans politiek theater voor: de weg van het Nigeriaanse volkstheater, in deze studie vertegenwoordigd door de theaterpraktijk van Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola en Adunni Oluwole, en de weg van universiteitstheater, vertegenwoordigd door Wole Soyinka en Femi Osofisan. Ik hanteer een contextuele, historische benadering om een selectie uit het werk van Ogunde kritisch te onderzoeken, waarbij ik de effecten van de koloniale wetten op Nigerianen tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog weergeef. Op die manier stel ik het antikoloniale ethos van Ogunde's theater vast. Verder stel ik vast hoe en in welke mate de antikoloniale imperatief van Ogunde's theater zich onderscheidt van het theater van zijn tijdgenoten.

Het eerste hoofdstuk vervolgt met een contextuele kritische lezing van geselecteerde dramatische geschriften van academici tijdens Nigeria's militaire regime, namelijk Wole Soyinka en Femi Osofisan. Door te kijken hoe zij de wetten ten tijde van het militaire regime op het toneel behandelden, en hoe dit verschilde van de aanpak van het Nigeriaanse volkstheater, verbreed ik de historische reikwijdte van mijn onderzoek naar het raakvlak tussen theater en recht in Nigeria. Via deze twee wegen kom ik tot de vaststelling dat de ontevredenheid van deze makers (cultural practitioners) over de toestand van de democratische praktijken in Nigeria hun speelse en creatieve bevraging van het machtsmisbruik door de staat stimuleerde. Ik stel dat het politieke theater van zowel de Nigeriaanse volkstheaterbeweging als dat van de academici zich identificeerde met de benarde situatie van de burgers en voor hen opkwam tegen de onderdrukkende gevolgen van het beleid ten tijde van de koloniale overheersing en de postkoloniale Nigeriaanse staat. Het hoofdstuk onderstreept de overeenkomsten in de genuanceerde manier waarop de toneelschrijvers bekende Nigeriaanse mythologische verhalen en figuren als schild gebruikten voor hun kritische, politieke commentaar. Ik stel in dit verband dat de toneelschrijvers de mythen gebruiken om op speelse wijze de onbarmhartige wetten en het beleid van de staat af te wijzen. Ook stel ik vast dat zij desondanks niet volledig aan de woede van de autoriteiten hebben kunnen ontsnappen.

In hoofdstuk 2 ("The Mask of Developmentalism in the Nigerian Theatre for Development (TfD)") maak ik gebruik van een kwalitatieve sociologische onderzoeksmethode voor mijn studie van theater in ontwikkelingsbeleid en bestuur. In dit verband richt ik mijn aandacht op Theatre for Development (TfD), een geesteskind van het tijdperk van internationale ontwikkelingsamenwerking, en een vorm van theaterpraxis

is ontwikkeld om het cultiveren van democratische waarden te vergemakkelijken en ook om politieke, economische en maatschappelijke ontwikkeling tweeweg te brengen. Door middel van een nauwkeurige studie van verslagen van Tfd-projecten in Nigeria beoordeel ik in hoeverre de projecten overeenstemmen met de doelstellingen van Tfd zoals die bij aanvang werden vastgesteld. Mijn specifieke doelstelling in dit verband is na te gaan in hoeverre de projecten stroken met de beginselen van ontwikkeling, democratie en democratische participatie. Het proefschrift constateert de dominantie van Tfd in het hedendaagse Nigeria en maakt gebruik van gedocumenteerde Nigeriaanse Tfd-projecten om het verband tussen de beoogde doelen en concrete praktijken van Tfd te bespreken, daar waar dit in de praktijk gescheiden zaken zijn. Anders gezegd, de dissertatie stelt vast dat de staat zich het theater (Tfd, om precies te zijn) toe-eigent om doelen na te streven die zogenaamd in het belang van de burgers zijn, maar die uiteindelijk hun belangen niet adequaat vertegenwoordigen. Het proefschrift stelt dat deze benadering van de praktijk van Tfd verhindert dat Nigeriaanse makers een wezenlijke bijdrage leveren aan het cultiveren van gewoonten die cruciaal zijn voor de instandhouding van een gezonde democratie.

Hoofdstuk 3, (“Legislative Theatre: Foundations, Critical Reflections and Seminal Experiment in Nigeria”) bevat een theoretische studie van de Legislative Theatre-methodologie. Ik gebruik een op die praktijk gebaseerde onderzoeksbenadering om het potentieel van het Legislative Theatre binnen de Nigeriaanse context te onderzoeken, terwijl ik ook de genealogie van Legislative Theatre in Brazilië traceer en deze vergelijk met andere praktijken over de hele wereld. De voorbeelden van Legislative Theatre-interventies in dit hoofdstuk verrijken het corpus waaruit de Nigeriaanse praktijk vermoedelijk zou kunnen putten ten voordele van de Nigeriaanse democratie. Het hoofdstuk gaat over een Legislative Theatre workshop die ik heb ontworpen en uitgevoerd met studenten en docenten aan de Adekunle Ajasin Universiteit in 2020. De workshop was bedoeld om met behulp van de Legislative Theatre-methodologie aanbevelingen te doen voor wettelijke richtlijnen tegen seksuele intimidatie aan de universiteit. Reflecterend op dit concrete voorbeeld kan ik de potentiële voordelen van de Legislative Theatre-methodologie extrapoleren om de democratische participatie van burgers te vergroten, de kloof tussen burgers en hun vertegenwoordigers te overbruggen, en ruimte te maken voor de integratie van burgers in het wetgevingsproces, met een positieve impact op de democratische gewoonten van Nigeriaanse burgers. Dit is in lijn met het participatieve model van democratie dat mijn belangstelling heeft in dit proefschrift.

Een diepere reflectie op de inhoud van de drie kernhoofdstukken van het proefschrift illustreert het belang van de positionaliteit van theatermakers. In hoofdstuk 1 toont het proefschrift een theater waarin de burgers, via de makers, hun protest tegen de

autoriteiten laten horen. In hoofdstuk 2 wordt kritisch gekeken naar een theater waarin met behulp van niet-gouvernementele instanties gezocht wordt naar de positieve betrokkenheid en medewerking van burgers bij de uitvoering van overheidsbeleid. Hoofdstuk 3 ten slotte verbeeldt en dramatiseert de theatrale mogelijkheid van samenwerking tussen theatermakers en burgers, die democratische gewoonten kan versterken.

Cruciaal is dat ik in deze dissertatie spel conceptualiseer als een politiek-theatraal element dat de bovengenoemde mogelijkheden ondersteunt. Om te beginnen leg ik een verband tussen spel en mythe in de bevraging door de toneelschrijvers van als onderdrukkend ervaren wetten. Vervolgens conceptualiseer ik spel als een middel dat het voor makers en deelnemers vergemakkelijkt om binnen te dringen in het gebied van de wetgeving. Ik stel dat als gevolg hiervan het spel bepaalde systeemgrenzen overschrijdt en als utilitair doel heeft het democratisch handelen van de burgers te verrijken en een sfeer te creëren waarin burgers makkelijker deelnemen aan het maken van de wetten die hun leven bepalen. Het onderzoek vult hiermee een leemte in de Nigeriaanse theatergeschiedenis van de 20e en 21e eeuw waar het gaat om theatrale benaderingen van het maken, veranderen en implementeren van wetten. Daarbij worden diverse theatervormen in Nigeria met elkaar verbonden: volksopera, modern(istisch)e toneelstukken en Tfd. Vanuit dat samenspel wordt de methodologie van het Legislative Theatre geïntroduceerd.

Ik sluit het proefschrift af met suggesties over hoe de drie theatervormen - Politiek theater en toneelschrijven, Tfd en Legislative Theatre - kunnen worden ingezet in dienst van Nigeria's democratie. Ten eerste pleit ik voor een heropleving van het politieke theater dat zich op een waarneembare manier met de bestaande realiteiten in de Nigeriaanse democratie bezighoudt. Ook beveel ik aan dat Tfd-beoefenaars hun praktijk resoluut vanuit het referentiepunt van de burgers verwoorden, op een manier die tot concrete ontwikkelingen leidt, in plaats van agenten te zijn van niet-gouvernementele of gouvernementele actie. Bovendien moet de methode van het Legislative Theatre worden toegepast om de gewoonten van democratische burgerschap te verrijken, vooral wat betreft de deelname aan het wetgevingsproces. Deze aanbevelingen bevestigen dat de afzonderlijke vormen op zichzelf niet volstaan om de tekortkomingen van de Nigeriaanse democratie aan te pakken. Daarom wordt betoogd dat Nigeriaanse theatermakers van elk van de drie benaderingen gebruik zouden moeten maken, om met de burgers samen de wet te maken door hem spelenderwijs in het theater te (be) leven.

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