

# The Role of Dance in a Depressed Economy: A Study of “The Drum of Danger”

by

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## Abstract

Dance as a form of art has its own unique style of mirroring the society, even though it has been misinterpreted by some people as a mere entertainment. It is true that dance entertains, but what makes dance indispensable is in its communicative value. These communicative values of dance at times awake a lot of problematic rhetorical questions such as; Aside entertainment, does dance have societal value? What really motivates the thematic content of a dance? Can dance really contribute to the advocacy for change? These are problems this research paper sets out to address. From the findings, it is discovered that what attracts some people to watch any dance performance is the choreographic structure and not the contextualization of the performance. Beyond all these, dance can serve as meal ticket for its practitioners even as it is rich in didacticism. In order to appreciate the value of dance as an effective catalyst for change in Nigeria, content analysis method of research would be carried out on the dance "The drums of danger" as a means of emancipating and empowering the masses. In conclusion, dance should always be appreciated based on its interrogative potency rather than as a complementary art.

## Introduction

Dance in any depressed economy, Nigeria inclusive, has a sociological function. It is the sociological essence of dance at any given time that differentiates its usefulness from being mere entertainment and a form of relaxation and exercise. Dance is a serious communicative, reflective and interpretative tool in search of the real truth, which proffers a subjective way forward for survival. In this paper, dance ceases to be solely an entertaining tool; rather it is used to raise a lot of rhetorical questions on Nigerian economy. It awakens the people's consciousness and suggests ways for survival.

Dance as a unique art form while mirroring the society uses a more relaxed atmosphere as its working metaphor. At this point what matters in the dance performance is the contextualization and not the aesthetics. Roxane Fenton observed that

The usefulness of dance in the society is beyond entertainment, rather it constitutes as an indirect reinforcement of proper roles in society, for instance relationships to rulers, to the gods and to the governed (119).

In this paper, what makes a dance performance useful is the ability of the audience to see themselves being reflected in the performance. The authenticity of every dance performance is not in the aesthetics or the form; rather the choreographic style reminds the society at large that dance serves as a reflective tool for positive change or survival of the fittest.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The role of dance in Nigeria in this current depressed economy is highly recommendable. This is so because it is the aesthetic, didactic and economic potency of dance performances that consciously or unconsciously attracts the masses to theatre to watch a live performance either to change for good or bad at the end of the performance. It is therefore of utmost responsibility for the choreographer to always reflect happening in the society and encourage the masses to always work together towards achieving success. Based on this, this paper is hinged on Corporate Social Responsibility Theory. Corporate Social Responsibility Theory as propounded by Garriga J. and Mele K. centers on strategic planning by Organization, Companies, performance, events and religions, which are use to encourage peoples to strive to be successful, improve their reputation and stop being dependent on the government. According to Garriga J. and Mele K., “Corporate Social Responsibility can also through dance serve as a catalyst for change,as it encourages successful human resources, and determination to always achieve something out of nothing” (24).

The aim of CSR in any business-oriented endeavor (dance) is to always remind the key players in such enterprise that their primary assignments are on the masses and their survival style rather than on the depressed economy that has granted big gulf between the rich and the poor in the community. Robins as cited by Placier Klara maintains that

Corporate Social Responsibility Theory wherever it exists takes liability not only for activities and impact in business, rather the possible ways on how to impact on society and environment (200).

Putrova and Seknicka as cited by Klara further add that “Corporate Social Responsibility also helps in developing a code of ethics for corporate governance, transparent conduct and anti-corruption policy”. (42).It is based on the above, that the role of dance in a depressed economy falls within the theory and it could be used while analyzing the case study, “The Drums of Danger”.

## Dance and Depressed Economy

The present situation and position of lives of the citizens in Nigeria are quite alarming and nightmarish. Nigeria as the Giant of Africa is acceptable more especially in oil, agriculture and human resources; but its form economically at this current regime politically is nothing to write home about. In the present situation of Nigerian economy, the rich are getting richer, while the poor are kept living the life of absurdity a condition he/she always hopes will be fine one day. The high level of depressed economy in Nigeria has awakened a lot of social problems, ethnic and civil conflicts and terrorism. This paper therefore advocates that the best way to survive in this depressed economy is for the ruled to consciously ignore the government political promises and sermons, rather welcome the following:

- A Strongly belief that there is no manna anywhere, unless it is being worked out.
- B Utilization of our creative potency as source of business income.
- C Reasoning beyond political pockets of politician during election in order to elect the ideal leader (if any)

However in a situation, whereby the aforementioned fail due to human weakness and quest for wants, then dance as an empirical art plays big and inter-ethnic roles among the citizens. Gone are the days where Nigeria as a country is a bed of roses both in its currency, social amenities, employment; health care and others. Instead, what we get in the current situation politically is total dehumanization, poverty and unnecessary fear of the unknown. Tshlkuku Kabeya pointed out that

The lack of equilibrium between the economy and social amenities is problem of undeveloped countries. This automatically dehumanizes the citizen's rational reasoning and mind, thereby placing them at the edge of mercy in hands of ruling class (150).

The Nigerian Government's intrusion in people's business cycle really affected the economy in all ramifications. The people's hope of a better Nigeria and means of daily survival are thrown into the winds, thereby leaving the poor masses at the mercy of the survival of the fittest, sometimes some who could not withstand the struggle end up committing suicide. In view of this, the Nigerian government "anti-realistic" form of intruding into Nigerian's business cycle contributed to the current economic depression. Business cycle, according Central Bank of Nigeria (Understanding Monetary Policy Services No 14), observes that

Free market economy is where there is no government interventions in economic activities rather demand and supply interacts to correct disequilibrium in the market (1).

The inability of the citizens to believe in their government in Nigeria gave room high level of lawlessness and depression.

In dance scholarship, the topical issue in the society motivates the choreographer to mirror the society by dissecting the existing problems through the dancer's body and proffer possible solutions for change. The dynamism in modern dance has gone beyond excessive creative ingenuity of the choreographer or his/her ability to make dancers body flexible, instead, movements in dance based on the current Nigeria's political, religious and environmental issues, serve as a watchdog, clarion call tool, survival tool and a corrective tool. Grace lee Boggs observed that

People are aware that they cannot continue in the same old way (of fake political promises) but are immobilized because they cannot imagine an alternative. We need a vision that recognizes that we are at one of the great turning points in human history when the survival of our planet and the restoration of humanity require a great sea change in our ecological, economic, political, and spiritual values (10).

What makes contemporary dance movements acceptable is its ability to serve as a tool for positive propaganda. At this point, the aim of every dance movement in its entire ramification is to speak the voice of the voiceless and also encourage the masses to seek for positive means for survival and not depending on the government (Nigeria) especially when all hope is lost. The use of dance as a corrective and awakening tool reminds the people that collectively, a particular goal is targeted and actualized, but individualism becomes a problem towards set goals.

Individualism is problematic in the sense that people's views, opinions and taste differ while struggling to achieve something, either for good or bad. The sociological potency of dance based on individualism, reminds the masses that for success to be achieved in current Nigeria's situation everybody should de-emphasized his/her selfish desires, communal interests, religious interests, and work towards making our country the "Ideal Dream Land For Change" and not the current APC "Change" where the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer. But through communicative dance during political crisis in the world, we will begin to understand that we, individually and collectively would need to shun our difference as people and work towards making the ideal change to better the lives of people.

The role of dance in a depressed economy which is the thrust of this paper, is to motivate the masses to always ask the four w's questions of what, why, where and when during political elections, especially when the ruling class are making fake and empty promises. It will no longer be business as usual, where people's consciousness, right and belief are bought with money because of hunger, fear of the unknown or of being pointed out as the "black sheep". I strongly suggest that through communicative dance movements people can begin to seek for the truth or form organization, social movements or use the media through interviews, drama, discussion and dance to say 'enough is enough'.

Page agreed that

Social justice movements x-rayed through dance have the opportunity to shape transformation and lead citizens to become bolder, more alive, more loving and more impactful. (129).

The essence of dance, wherever it exists, is to communicatively encourage its owners that creative work of art, though entertains, has a sociological function, which should always consider more, especially when it has to do with communal interest and way of actualizing their success.

## **The Survival Strategies in the Role of Dance in Depressed Economy**

Cara Page says that ‘Dance as an art is incomplete if through its performativeness cannot give the audience hope of belief, hope of sustainability, hope to work towards achievement and hope for positive decision’(202). She further states that ‘dance is the only art form that uses semio-aesthetics, semio-corrective and semio-interpretative tool,in performance as a means of preaching survival strategy to its audience’(34). The essence of this survival strategy is to encourage the masses to always believe in themselves, find what they can be doing when all hope is lost and as well welcome team work. Cara Page survival strategies which every performative act should adopt especially in depressed economy like Nigeria are as follows;

### **(1) Hold Broad Awareness**

The Choreographer uses the dancers’ body here to X-ray the activities of the ruling class to the ruled which is not always nice at tall or simply unfriendly. The audiences through communicative dance movement are encouraged to say enough is enough. The use of dance essentially takes communicative propaganda and sensitization much closer to the people for serious charge towards a change

### **(2) Creativity**

Some rhetoric dance performances in theatre like “Which Way Nigeria”, “Official Zombie”, “No Money No Exist” and “Another Hand” are well choreographed dances telling the audience (Nigerians) according to Page “to always generate unexpected fresh ideas and action that would inspire and work for the good of all” (24). The socio-communicative essence of dance should always be appreciated in performance and not only the aesthetics. The use of aesthetics is good, but when much valued by the audience the intended message embedded in some dances, which is always aimed to encourage the audience to think outside the box will be lost. The core desire of every dancer or choreographer at the moment of crisis in Nigeria, is to always see him/herself as a communicator and not pure entertainer

### **(3) Synergy and Alignment**

The major problem we have in Nigeria among her citizen during depressed economy is that we complain a lot “government this’ and government that”, which is not always advisable, reason being that the complaints are not reaching the appropriate quarters. So the citizens should learn to take the bull by the horn. Taking the bull by horn objectively should not be by fighting or making unnecessary utterances like the “IPOB”(Indigenous People of Biafra) rather it should agree to what Page said:

With synergy and alignment we move together from vision and core values, with diverse strategies and functions for big collective impact. Whichever medium used in preaching this be it dances or any other medium let the form be totally acceptable by the audience. (19).

#### **(4) Trust and Innovate**

The role of dance through the choreographer is to always make use of semio-communicative movement. Like the dance under study in this paper “The Drum of Danger” the choreographer uses different variation in drums to remind Nigerians that nobody is jack of all trade, that mistakes are bound to happen. But what makes it unique and interesting is the ability of both the ruling and ruled to give room for suggestions, observations and constructive criticism. In so doing, there should be no atom of ill feelings and betrayals, rather people should learn how to trust, respect and accept new innovation whenever they are coming. Power avers:

Through trust we practice openness to possibility through fierce inquiry, healthy debate, trying new approaches, taking risks, learning from mistakes laughing, dancing and playing (34).

From the above, the aim of every dance didactically in Nigeria with its topical issues as choreographic styles is to always according to Page

To remind the ruling class that they can lead and care for the society whether in a depressed economy or not by centralizing the leadership for the progress of the society and well being of the human mind (24).

### **Summary of the Drum of Danger**

This is a command performance, performed in Imo State during Governor Rochas Okorochoa’s two days seminar with the young professionals to dialogue on the way forward with the current situation of things in the country, more especially with the depressed economy. The performance “The Drum of Danger” was choreographed by Arinze Akaji. He is a popular indigenous performer in Imo State and he is from Ezisu in Orlu. The choreographic style employed by the choreographer is totally different from the known dance performance during the governor’s visit anywhere in the country. As his choreographic style he made use of a dancer with so many drummers. The dance in summary from the performance based on the singular performer and too many drummers, represents the citizens of the country (Nigeria) and the various sounds of the drums portray stages of problems undergone by the masses and how they struggle on daily bases to either win, feel depressed or withdraw to try again later.

According to the choreographer, Arinze Akaji, (in an interview) “The Performance Drum of Danger is not to entertain anybody rather to keep everybody on his/her toe to be aware that the artist is no longer fantasizing rather he/she wants everybody to put on their thinking cap”. The performances followed the anti-convention format of an ideal performance thereby encouraging the youth through their themes to believe in themselves, work hard to survive or accept survival of the fittest as the last option when all hope is lost.

## **Analysis of the Drum of Danger**

The analysis of this performance would be done on the three themes created by the choreographer and how he was able to actualize the themes with the variation of the drums. Arinze Akaji also said (in an interview),

I am unlucky not to study dance in any university. My style of creation in dance movement is based on what I see or feel, so the drum of danger is my own thing and nobody can influence my idea or perception at all.

The three major themes in the performance are

- (a) Promises
- (b) Failed Promise
- (c) Survival Strategy

These themes were symbolically interpreted through the body of the single dancer and the drummers.

### **(a) Promises**

The dancer’s movement here is very energetic, as it tries to assume the dual roles of politicians with sign posts showing promises and then transforming back into the role of the masses who believe a messiah has come. To portray the potency of these promises of good road, employment, water, security and electricity, the drummers being the soul of this performance through their cues show signs of hope, liberation and the New Nigeria. The dancer here has the choreographic license not to make use of stylized movement; rather free improvised movement was introduced and used here to showcase the new era. The drummers on their own side were given different tonal variation with the drums to awaken the people’s consciousness based on past the administrations promises and the current one. There were dance and drumming of jubilation. According to the choreographer Akaji (in an interview) this is the proverbial “period where a man can make promises to woman just to have a taste of her.”

## **(b) Failed Promise**

The drumming pattern changed to danger, confusion, aimlessness and dehumanization. The drummers were seen on various unplanned positions drumming randomly, while the dancer was face downward with heavy load on his back with various inscriptions to showcase level of uncertainty based on various promises made earlier. The dancer's dance movement was crawling on the ground with heavy pains and injuries all over him while the drummers here were highly individualistic in their style of drumming. This symbolically shows that "all that glitters are not gold". When compared with the current situation in the country, the ruling party APC has failed Nigerians and they are bleeding seriously seeking for assistance.

The level of failed promises as displayed in the performance when linked to Nigeria's situation, has caused a lot of mayhem in the country such as; Boko Haram, Chibok girls, monkey pox, sickness, poverty and stealing. This act has claimed a lot of lives and still claiming. So, the masses need a peaceful revolution. The idea of peaceful revolution was portrayed at a point in the performance where the dancer regained strength to perform few seconds; he then fell back, weak and hopeless. This simply means with determination one can survive. The use of dance here becomes a tool for awakening moral consciousness and sustaining human rights and obligation.

According to Akaji (interview),

"I represent political promises as a gift; anything one sees he takes."

## **(c) Survival strategy**

This is where the choreographer through a choreographic stylized movement and drumming, encourages the masses not to depend on the government alone. Rather everybody should try to develop him/herself in order to be useful economically. The days in the bible when "manna" falls from heaven no longer exist; rather all hands must be on deck for achieving set goals. The style of drumming and dance movement reassures the masses that all hope is not lost at all.

## **Conclusion**

The role of dance in contemporary society has gone beyond mere fantasy by the choreographer and the dancers themselves. Dance as an art should and must mirror the society to correct the ills and proffer the way forward for an ideal change. In the current depressed economy, the use of dance as a corrective measure is very apt because the masses seek where to ease off tension in theatre, churches, and social gathering. It therefore becomes mandatory for artists to always be topical in their performance and de-emphasize gain and profits, because through the art, human being seeks for the truth and fight for change. Dance, due to its use in the current depressed economy of Nigeria, should be valued more for its interrogative potency than its complementary art.



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