

Museums as living theatre in Nigeria

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Abstract

There is a strong need to evolve programmes to address the general misconception about museum as a repository of dead cultural materials to establish that it is not a fossil of a dead civilization. The theatre has been used and still has great potential to, not only make museum a living arts relevant to modern reality, but also to evolve from it a functional/applied theatre form.

This paper explores this within the context of modern museum of antiquity viz-a-viz total theatre nature of African festival, which is itself a complete living museum experience. It addresses these using the some Museums and traditional festivals in Nigeria. In this ambiance, the museum theatre is defined in view of the traditional as well as the contemporary museum experiences, which are inextricably linked.

The methodology employed is the exploratory approach to serve as basis for further enquiries, materials are collected through interviews, reviews of recordings of events and the observation method while data are analysed qualitatively. We make suggestions for a new creative and participatory experimentation for the future of museum theatre that will enhance museum visits in Nigeria.

Keywords: Museum, Museum Theatre, Theatre and Drama, Traditional African Festivals

1. Introduction

The perception of museum as custodian of arts and cultural objects overshadows its other functions and definitions to the extent that it has led to estrangement between the museum and the community whose heritage it is supposed to preserve. According to Ashaye (2007; 93), “Political and security situations make tangible cultural heritage fragile and of high risk that must only be preserved and protected to survive”. This becomes the preoccupation of the Museums which rather than communicating with the community, become not a lived experience but maximum security prisons to safeguard the artifacts. People are also distanced from festivals which are supposed to be a living museum experience because of estrangement brought about by over mystification of these festivals thereby alienating the same people the more from the cultural, moral, ethical, and aesthetic values embedded in them. It is important to note that whereas museum is not primarily religious in traditional African setting, most of the surviving artifacts are given esoteric/religious connotations.

Although some of these artifacts evolved from religious rituals, they together with other sacred valuable which are non-religious were preserved in sacred places such as Palaces and Museums, as a result of which access to the collections were restricted. There are however other myriad of equally important and sacred artifacts and objects that are open to the generality of the people. Especially so are some intangible components of cultural heritage in the form of traditional festivals that are linked to the sacred artifacts and cultural institutions, making them a living form in the community.

The concept of festivals being total arts and total theatre in Nigeria gives vent to a symbiosis between museum pieces, locale and the various arts, crafts, and aesthetics of the ensuing community. However, the communal nature of the festival does not mean that outsiders were excluded, rather the objects collected by kings who were and are still the custodians of traditional cultural heritage portrayed the king’s power and were used as gifts to show their kingly generosity to visitors and guests. (Areo, 2009: 101).

In the modern context however, museums tend to be preoccupied with just housing the artifacts to preserve indigenous arts and cultural history and also merely showcase traditional festivals primarily to foreign visitors. An attendant danger to this is that festivals and museum pieces survive just as mere relic/fossil of a dead civilization.

According to Soyinka (2008: 5) “when we speak of culture, we are speaking of history, identity and pride of belonging”, and the artifacts are supposed to engender a consciousness of the import of the past in nurturing the present and determining the future. Although Museums in Nigeria have proven to be dumb; the theatre among other things will give it voice. When we observe that African artifacts are beyond mere window dressing as museum pieces, because the tradition that gave them life are still living-although some are vastly diminishing- the problem then becomes how to marry the theatre and artifacts to make it a living experience. Otherwise, in

agreement with Chomsky (1972), quoted in Ishola, A (2010: 1), “our perception of the world can, over time wither away so completely leaving us with hazy recognition”. Festival as intangible heritage, which also needs many efforts to safeguard, ironically is the vehicle that can give relevance to the tangible artifacts to make them relevant to life and living.

This paper engages the exploratory approach to serve as basis for further enquiries and research. It employs the theory of objects as semiotics to interrogate the phenomenon of museum theatre in Nigeria. Barthes (1988: 182) postulates that “there is always meaning which overflows the object’s use” and according to Appadurai (1986: 3) “things have no meanings apart from those that human transactions, attributions, and motivations endow them with”. An application of semiotic theory by Tokarev according to Leeds-Hurwitz (1993: 131) stresses that an object lives through the people who use it, he opines that “a material object cannot interest the ethnographer unless he considers its social existence, its relationship to man- to the person who created it and the person who makes use of it”. He finally conjectures that “anyone who wishes to study people and the worlds they create can appropriately turn to objects as one beginning point”. The field of arts and theatre unlike the social scientist however study objects not only as vehicles capable of conveying human meanings, but for their abstract aesthetic characteristics as well, striving at the same time for continuity and authenticity in the interpretation of museum objects. Objects however have also been considered as bricolage, a study of how meanings change over time, According to Joselit (1991: 49) in (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1991:144): ..”There is no need for mother’s pot in my kitchen,” explained one writer; “has become an emblem of the past, an ornament in my living room”. Museum objects without mediation of the theatre can become just another object, a bricolage; an ornament just to decorate the standard museum.

2. Definitions

It is expedient to put some key terms in perspective, such terms are; museum, theatre and drama, traditional festivals, and museum theatre.

2.1 Museum

Museum is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, as a result according to Mclean, (2003;1) the debates on the principles continue unabated and arose because of the dynamism of museum institution. IMTAL conceives museums as, “any cultural or informal learning institution, including but not limited to art, science, children, natural history, and history museums, historic sites, zoos and aquariums, public and botanical gardens, arboreta, parks, libraries, and cultural centers.” To Areo (2008: 102) “Museums are the treasure houses of human race, they store the memories of the world’s people, their dreams.” and their history. All museums irrespective of their specialisations perform the same basic functions of preservation, documentation and dissemination of culture. Areo thus classifies Museums in Nigeria into seven types, representational of about 36 museums in Nigeria as follows:

Museum types	Location
Ilorin, Ile-Ife and Essie	-National Museum, Lagos, Ibadan, - National Museum,
General Museum	
Archeological Museum	
Arts Museum	- National Gallery of Art, Lagos
History Museum	- Museum of Colonial History, Aba
Ethnography Museum	- National Museum, Benin
Natural History Museum	- Obafemi Awolowo Univeristy, Ile-Ife
Military Museum	- Umahia and Zaria.

This diversity agrees with, Ardouin (1992: 29) who advocated that museums as institutions of cultural importance should be part of the community they serve; they should address problems of health, physical survival, rapid urbanization, poverty, environmental degradation and destruction of natural resources, they should be involved in their community life and communicate effectively with their different publics.

2.2 Theatre and Drama

Theatre can give voice to museum pieces and foster the traditional as well as the new roles of museum in Nigeria. Theatre in the context of this paper refers to the whole gamut of the performing Arts; dance, drama and music primarily because of the total nature of the African Theatre which is also participatory in nature and borne out of its communal origin. Drama refers to the literary play texts fundamentally different from IMTAL's definition of play as a theatrical play in or by a museum referring specifically to a performance by an actor or actors portraying a character or characters and utilizing a dramatic narrative.

The essence of world theatre in their diverse origins can be said to be a re-enactment that evolved from borrowings from traditional beliefs including homeopathic medicine, hunting and gives credence to the assertion that "process of dramatic development begins in religion and ends in aesthetic" (Traore 1970, Schechner1989). The origin of the Nigerian traditional theatre has been traced to the various traditional religious festivals from across the country having its source in the diverse legend, myth, rituals, praise poems and songs, common place events and stories, dances and music.

2.3 Traditional African Festivals

The term traditional festivals is defined,

"to mean an indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and which has, therefore developed distinctive features and whose techniques are sometimes totally different from the borrowed from ...,an integral, dynamic part of the culture of an un-alienated African" (Ogunba, 1978: 4)

By this definition, traditional festivals still continues to have relevance in one form or the other,. Yoruba festivals like the typical African festivals are holistic in nature while the resultant theatre is total in context. The holistic nature presupposes that the festival is a totality of the visual arts, crafts and the performing arts as well as an embodiment of the philosophy of the people in their communal essence. This holistic perception also rubs off on the art of performance as best reflecting man's attempt to articulate the essence of his being. Thus the three areas of the arts of performance/theatre; Dance, Drama and Music are seen as one in a symbiotic relation, an integrative existence. Therefore a typical traditional African festival which is communal in nature involves the entire populace in a set of organization that runs through the three phases of theatrical productions; the pre-performance phase, performance phase and the post performance phase.

According to Ogundeji (2003:8) sacred ritual festival, ritualising, deritualising and deritualised performances constitute the componential parts of the traditional festival. In essence African festival comprising of diverse cultural elements such as folktales, myth, legend, oral literature, ritual observance, dance, drama and music, crafts, props and costumes imply a performance which is a collective work of both the artist and the community. Essentially, festivals coordinate visually all the art forms of a community (Ogunba, 1978:5), and patterns emerged to display the community's assets for promoting its essence, reassuring the citizens of their collective capabilities and advertising them for their well-being.

2.4 Museum Theatre

The theatre and Museum are each complex phenomenon that becomes much more complex when they are combined. The resultant museum theatre while exhibiting characteristics of both museum and theatre transcends just a cosmetic combination, and has been identified as a prominent form of the vastly growing field of applied theatre. Applied theatre is an omnibus concept involving diverse forms of theatre that fall outside mainstream theatre performance which take place in "non-traditional settings and or with marginalised communities" (Jackson quoted in Monica Prendergast 2009: 6).

According to Monica Prendergast et al (2009: 154), "Museum theatre like any applied theatre form presents many challenges. One of the primary ones is that of moving a casual museum visitor into either an audience or participatory role". Other challenges identified are; how much multiple points of view can inform the historical storytelling enacted by performers as well as the use of historical artifacts from the museum. Thirdly is the discipline required to repeat scenarios and monologues multiple times every day and in being an effective improviser? By this understanding museum theatre most often are played in spaces not usually defined as theatre buildings, with participants who may or may not be skilled in the arts of the theatre, and to audiences with stake in the issue taken up by the performers, or who are members of the community addressed by the performance.

Bridal (2007) stresses the importance of education in his definition of Museum theatre and sees it as an extended field of the professional theatre artist. According to him, Museum theatre begins with content based educational performances, typically shorter than those in theatre venues and frequently interactive, performed in formal and informal theatre spaces, both within the museum and as outreach, by trained museum theatre professionals for museum audiences of all ages and for school audiences. The above perception brings about a strong possibility of a professional/amateur dichotomy of museum theatre, a situation that can complicate this newly emerging genre of applied theatre.

Catherine Hughe's definition emphasises the emotional and the educational response thus providing possibilities to use diverse theatrical techniques and styles in museum theatre productions. Aristotelian and Brechtian techniques with their peculiar attributes can be employed depending on the content and message of the museum piece and the evolving drama text. According to Hughes (2007: 27), Museum theatre is defined as "...the use of drama or theatrical techniques within a museum setting or as a part of a museum's offerings with the goal of provoking an emotive and cognitive response in visitors concerning a museum's discipline and/or exhibitions"

This perception of Museum theatre focuses on suspension of disbelief, which could likely stand in the way of the educational experience it sets out to enhance in the first instance. For example, a war museum, which must aim at promoting peace, might achieve the opposite if it seeks emotion and wipes up sentiments. Since museums according to Akinade (2005) are designed to show the brighter side of life by recalling the past and its resources, museum theatre is expected to enhance this and foster museum visits. Other views equate museum theatre to experiences that happen only within a museum and as such foreclose any theatre outreach programme employed to encourage visits as being museum theatre. In all these perceptions, two broad definitions of museum theatre have emerged namely; the performance of theatre (i.e. a play) in or by a museum, and also the use of any of a variety of theatrical techniques by museums

From the foregoing, we evolve a definition of museum theatre as any dramatic, theatrical presentation whose theme is centered on any museum exhibitions, artifacts or piece or an enactment or reenactment of any traditional festival performances. It could be amateur or could make use of professionals; it could precede exhibitions as outreach or be synchronous with museum visits. By this a theatrical presentation within a conventional theatre that focuses on any antiquity with the intention of protecting, preserving and promoting artifacts and any museum piece qualifies as museum theatre, while the corresponding dramatic text qualifies as museum drama. In this context, a stage play by Wale Ogunyemi titled "Poor Little Bird" about the spirit behind an artifact killing a native who colludes with a foreigner to steal the effigy from its shrine is a museum drama. "Edan" a home video by Demola "is about a notorious thief who steals a powerful sacred object from a closely guarded ancestral shrine which threatens evil to the whole village, resulting in an all-out war between the thief and the priest" (IrokoTV- accessed on 23-08-2013), while *The Figurine* a home movie in Nigeria by Afolayan also centres on the famed Essie

stone figures. All these qualify as variants of museum theatre and drama, which can be performed and shown in or outside the museum environment.

In essence, museum theatre is an emerging cultural metaphor through association with museum pieces. According to Gannon (2002:50) A cultural metaphor is any activity, phenomenon or institution with which the member of a given culture emotionally and cognitively identify. It represents a way to obtain new and deep insights into a group's culture and history. So the theatre among other means help to decode the way of life of a people codified in artifacts in museums. The nature and complexities of the codes could at times lead to diverse interpretations that could be conflicting; nevertheless, museum theatre offers an objective way of understanding the society of the museum pieces.

3. Culture as a Lived Phenomenon in Nigeria

The tendency in Nigeria is often to view culture in terms of the past, practices that are no more in existence, and the forgotten traditions of a community, but when we speak about culture we are, speaking of parameters beyond mere language and antiquities, of history, identity, culture and pride of belonging. It is an expression of culture which Soyinka (2008:3) referred to as lived phenomenon, not as a mere abstraction, because even the cultural artifacts existed in their textual context as against the present extra textual context of existence within a standard museum setting.

Soyinka (2008) in a keynote address, "Culture Subversion in the name of name dropping" relate some experiences that reinforce culture as a lived phenomenon, a living museum during which time performances and museum artifacts become mobile and ubiquitous. According to him,

...came the Olori's performance turn ... She was the priestess and custodian of Sango shrine, and she began her incantation, churning out the oriki of Sango. That was when the trouble began...a gust of wind...more violent, with a strength...thunderstorm was unleashed...most unseasonal...as a deluge that it seems as if a dam had burst somewhere....

This writer also experienced similar incident at the same Palace during the investiture of an Are Ona Kakanfo of Yoruba land. A theatrical performance of Sango dances lead to a fierce whirlwind emanating from nowhere in the palace courtyard. This performance within cultural contextual existence of Sango makes the sacred museum pieces of Sango displayed in the palace "museum" relevant as a living museum.

However, a lot of changes occur daily around us that we do not seem to see because phenomena can become so familiar that we really do not see or notice them at all (Isola2010,102) and according to Chomsky in Isola (2010:102) our perception of the world can wither away so completely leaving us with hazy recognition. This situation has to be addressed by museum theatre in educating the people to appreciate the diverse artifacts in conventional museums as well as living museums in the numerous festivals, palaces and other heritage sites.

4. Museum Theatre in Nigeria: An appraisal

Museum theatre in Nigeria can be classified into three; formal, informal, and semi-formal, the last two exist within the various cultural festivals in their cultural context of existence and in palaces respectively. It is instructive to note that palaces, which in themselves constitute museums housing prized artifacts and traditional performances, serve dual role as museum theatre stage and museum theatre event. The formal museum usually receives closer attention in Nigeria and going by the performance of conventional museums in Nigeria, one can then conclude that formal museum theatre is non existing or at best in its infancy, but the three classifications are covered under our definition of Museum theatre earlier given. The appraisal therefore focuses on the categories:

4.1 The formal/conventional Museum

National museums in Ilorin and Ile-Ife with general purpose and archeological specialties respectively serve as the case studies of formal museum in this section.

4.1.1 National Museum, Ile-Ife and Museum Theatre

Ife Museum is one of the foremost tourist attractions in Nigeria primarily because of the “rich cultural tradition and heritage, spirituality and centrality of Ile Ife” (Adebayo, 2013: 17), it is regarded as the cradle of world civilization. Its heritage sites include; Olokun grove, Lafogido Shrine, Ooni Ilare grove, Oluorogbo shrine, Yemoo grove, Opa Oranmiyan among others. The Ife museum, established in 1948 was opened to the public in 1954 with collections that had existed in the palace and with the then newly discovered Ife bronzes and terracotta heads.

Ife cultural prominence emerged as a result of visits and works of some early Europeans and researchers/archeologists like Leo Frobenius with his archeological investigation in 1910, which opened up Ife for further excavation (Ogunfolakan, 2013:16). Part of these findings, the Opa Oranmiyan, a unique stone sculpture with iron studs celebrates Oranmiyan, a grandson of Oduduwa and an important character in Yoruba and Benin mythology. He founded two existing dynasties of Oyo and Benin via his sons Ajaka and Eweka respectively and also reigned as an Ooni of Ife. This staff encodes significant historical and cultural messages that could not be revealed through exhibitions alone but need be complemented with museum theatre either within or outside its cultural textual contexts. There are some theatrical presentations as part of celebrations to commemorate the gods represented by this important artifact namely; Olukere-mude and Olojo festivals, for keeping the heritage alive also constitute museum theatre. Even the ritualized aspects of the festival performances assist in forging a continuity of practice among the initiates who constitute the audience as well as performers.

Ile-Ife museum has a standing cultural troupe and a drama group that perform during its cultural programmes and exhibitions. These performances fall into different categories; cultural

dances, traditional musical performances, and acrobatics, for entertainment and also to provide the appropriate cultural mood for any cultural events. Masque troupes and independent traditional performing ensembles also feature during some of its programmes such as the International Museum day and the World Cultural Heritage day celebrations and exhibitions.

Its drama group performed a play titled; “Good Mother”, during a pictorial exhibition to honour and celebrate 50 women in Ife titled, “Women of Substance in Ife Kingdom: from cradle to the present.” This drama, which x-rayed three categories of women viz; the good, the bad, and the ugly, in addition to awards to both dead and living women, further reinforces the desired symbiosis between the people of the immediate environment and the museum. It thus reinforces the assertion that the appropriate approach for museum to be relevant is to be able to link together, the past and present if they are to arrive at socially responsive history, by inference; the theatre has to be deliberately engaged.

Museum visits at ile-Ife museum is very low over a five year period from 2008-2012 Viz . 3874, 3018, 2982, 2315, and 1339 totaling: 13,528, but other heritage sites and some traditional festivals such as Edi and Olojo festivals recorded reasonably large attendance during the corresponding period.

4.1.2 National Museum, Ilorin and Museum Theatre

Ilorin Museum is a general purpose museum but has low visitor ship partly as a result of what Areo (2009; 103) observes that “location of museums in Nigeria is one of the greatest challenges affecting levels of visitorship”. The statistics of attendance over a five year period reveals low attendance as follows; 2008: 4,327; 2009: 6,713; 2010: 5,656; 2011: 6,748; 2012: 6,179; making a total of 29,623 in five years.

Records show that exhibitions and theatre performances in Ilorin museum are primarily in commemoration of the annual international museum days, and the various activities are usually in line with the themes of the world events. In 2006; Fashion Parade and Hairstyle parade were used to mark the theme of “Museum and young People: Heritage of pride”, while in 2011 it was traditional costumes for the theme “Museum and Memories.” A dance theatre titled ‘New World’ depicting the fusion of African dances with the west was staged in 2012 to celebrate the theme “Museum in a changing world: New Challenges and New inspiration” while in 2013, a dance drama, ‘WAZOBIA’ was presented for the theme, “Museum/memory with creativity and Social change”. The theatre pieces in these instances seek to explain the exhibitions, promote national unity, and enhance the cultural atmosphere of the exhibits as well as providing entertainment. These complimentary roles of theatre to enhance museums objectives and visits strongly emphasis the need for innovation in the use of theatre to achieve museum ends believing fervently that theatre can be used to enhance the strengths and address the inherent weakness of museum in the marketplace.

4.1.3 Statistics of attendance/visits in Ilorin and Ife Museums is as follows

	2008:	2009:	2010:	2011:	2012:	Total	
National Museum, Ilorin	4,327	6,713	5,656	6,748	6,179	29,623	
National Museum, Ile-Ife		3874	3018	2982	2315	1339	13,528

The above statistics reveals that Ilorin museum enjoys more visits than Ife Museum, a situation that can be attributable to several factors namely; relative differences in population and the fact that there are many more heritage sites and many more community traditional festivals in Ile-Ife which attract more audience than the museum itself. These visits to the various heritage sites including the palace of the Ooni of Ife justify these places as living museum theatre and stage thus stressing the need for the engagement of performances/museum theatre to develop and sustain an audience for all categories of museum.

5. Beyond the Standard Museum: Palace Performance and Sacred Museum Theatre in Nigeria

Our concept of museum theatre thus far transcends the traditional perception of museum and heritage sites and also includes palaces as well as shrines as sacred museum theatre, but its existence in the anthropological context does not make it to be less theatre. It is a known fact that most of the museum artifacts were art works and artifacts exhibited in the palaces; as functional objects, decorations, and or religious pieces which were open to different categories of audience and visitors. They eventually find a home in standard museum where their safety far outweighs other considerations, as a result of which they become locked up making them irrelevant to the society that gives them life. Esoteric connotation given to these artifacts within the extra textual existence of the museum makes them to be feared by the people while they are also estranged from the initiates. In essence palaces are living museums and as such performances in palace setting constitute museum theatre. Functional nature of performances in both situations reminds the people of their being and reinforces the values of their existence. Museum theatre through this experience is established as a rehearsal for living a past with a view to let it influence the future, ie rehashing the future as lived in the past through a de-codification of artifacts as cultural props in the future.

The daily traditional musical ensemble performances in palaces and performances in Osun grove (festival) constitute palace and sacred museums theatre respectively, with the river and ogboni temple among others constituting the scenery in the latter context. Both palace and sacred performances include “drumming, dances, including both straight forward performances and magic displays by masquerades” (Soyinka, 2008: 14).

5.1 Traditional Festival as Museum Theatre

Wole Soyinka (1982; 241) sees festival as a relatively climatic event in the life of any community. It is bounded by a definite beginning and end... brings about a suspension of

ordinary time, transformation of ordinary space, a formulator of ordinary behavior, all indications that traditional African festivals will continue to have relevance in modern day context.

Osun Osogbo, Sango, and Egungun festivals are used to illustrate a concept of museum theatre as a living tradition employed in this paper. These festivals are still extant, but while Egungun and Sango have paraphernalia and props that are used to represent them in a conventional museum, Osun does not have anything beyond photographic representations.

5.1.1 Egungun

Although Egungun has a ritual origin, according to Babayemi (1980; 21) “it was developed by the society as an ideology to respond to the society’s ideological needs.” Their classification and characteristics are easily decipherable through their costumes and we have diverse types such as; Warrior Masquerades, Hunters masquerades ‘Egun olode’ or ‘layewu’, Carrier masquerade ‘Egun eleru’ or ‘Egun oloogun’, Sango’s masquerade ‘Alakoro’, and ‘Egun olore’, the professional egungun entertainers who also dramatise contemporary events in each community. In essence even though the masquerade tradition is an ancestral tradition, each has its own expertise and specialty, coded in their outfits, and the theatre in Nigeria has been traced to this robust tradition. According to Soyinka (2008:11)

masquerades have traditionally served multiple social purposes that range from a commemoration of the dead, the seasons, the highlights of history, not forgetting straightforward entertainment and comedy-to the inculcation of mores and ethics within the society.

Such important institutions should not be locked up in standard museums unexplored and unexplained to the people and that is where museum theatre comes in the picture to bring out the inherent living theatre experience, decode the message in the regalia as museum objects.

5.1.2 Sango

Sango is another festival represented in most museums in Nigeria through the display of such paraphernalia as; carved wooden axe “ose sango”, the cap, costume and the mortal or Sango’s traditional stool. All these items and props can determine the content and form of the theatre that evolves to educate museum visitors as audience. It is needless to say that these objects evoke certain memories and reactions from the community of the museum; they can also serve as enlightenment and entertainment from foreign visitors. The ose Sango for instance could generate themes connecting Sango with Ogun and their famed clash, association with Oya, his relationship with his subjects and his eventual deification. Sango’s rejection by his people as a result of his destructive anger provides lessons for life and does romanticize neither Sango nor the past for its sake. A prominent Yoruba theatre practitioner in Nigeria, Duro Ladipo utilized the Sango motive in his plays and played that role as a stock character in his troupe that he became sango personified, giving life to the Sango myth and props in life and even in death.

5.1.3 Osun Osogbo

Osun Osogbo has attained international prominence because the osun grove has been adopted as a world heritage site by UNESCO, and it is arguably the most prominent traditional festival in Africa. Its impact reverberates through traditional institutions and mechanisms that need to be serviced all the year round, and it brings to remembrance the pageantry theatre of the medieval period with events lasting for about nine days, each day representing scenes in the unfolding theatrical presentations. The finale culminates in ritual performances and carnival at the grove and is thereafter followed by a citywide celebration.

According to Oyewo (2013:113), The king of Osogbo has to climb a rock situated in the river with his palms spread out to welcome the fish that usually comes out to accept the sacrifices from him, from which action the king derived his title of "Ataoja" or "Atewogbeja" - he who spreads his arms to welcome fish. The nature of this museum type, a combination of heritage site and intangible heritage gives it uniqueness as a museum theatre in the sense that none of its props exists in any conventional museum and that the sacred objects cannot exist outside its original textual location. At best museums can only exhibit photographs of the events and can only complement this with mood music and theatrical reenactment of annual festival enactment.

However, themes can be created to educate the visitor /audience about the socio-cultural import of the deity as well as the grove, and the emerging theatre, be it in formal or informal museum can enhance the intrinsic values of the festivals and the grove. Adedayo 2007: 80) identified these values namely; historical, spiritual, religious, cultural, economic values-in the over 200 species of plant which are of medicinal and economic values-, traditional education and technology, scientific values and traditional architecture. It is important to note that Osun Osgbo as a living museum and theatre serves all the functions of a theatre existing in a conventional museum and most importantly, it not only develops an audience annually but also sustains it.

The museum theatre envisioned in these examples is participatory in nature, in consonance with the fact that Yoruba gods exist in a commune to exhibit mutual respect and cooperation to uphold harmony and peace.

6. Invoking the gods: limit of authenticity on stage

At this junction, it is expedient to address the issue of authenticity of performance which performance anthropologists might question in our submission about living theatre as museum and vice versa. It is never suggested here that everybody will constitute the audience all the time in a living museum-festival events and venues, what we suggest is that the audience, performers are closely related with the performance in the various stages of performance of a festival as museum theatre. At the ritual stage for instance, the performances would have the desired impact on the initiates as audience and as performers, while the public performances serve primarily to make the hidden values in the sacred events public as a link between the people and their past and

values. It also serves as cultural metaphors that might foster better understanding and appreciation of Nigerian culture to foreign visitors.

However, the fact that traditional festivals existing within a conventional museum have been relocated from their original context, denied of their socio-ritual relevance does not render them impotent nor deny them of their inherent spiritual power, but only make them dormant. Soyinka's reference to an international event at Delphi Greece where he staged his adaptation of *Oedipus at Colonus* by Aeschylus reinforces this observation. According to Soyinka (2008:16)

I adapted that play to Yoruba mythology...and cast Oedipus as a kind of Sango figure...there were these unforgettable few minutes when Sango's incantations began and in English...the invisible horsemen of wind and thunder rode over the stage and auditorium. It was all over in a terrifying ten minutes.

We are aware of some other local realities that defile certain universal principles, whether con- or extra-textual, in situ or replica, the coded artifacts or props can take on potency if the original poetry or incantations are chanted during the period of enactment or reenactment. An experience of this writer will also buttress this phenomenon. At a video recording on location at Osun grove decades ago, there was a scene about a reenactment of the Osun carrier votary maid 'arugba' who in traditional context must be a virgin between the ages of 13 to 16 years. A married woman was cast for the role and as soon as she advanced to the point of sacrifice, she had a terrible fall, which repeated itself up to three times. It was at that point that it downed on us that the fall was probably because of territorial violation. We had to relocate to a spot far from the 'Ojubo', a crucial stage area of the vast grove living stage before we could successfully record the scenes. However, this kind of experience is not restricted to contextual theatre museums alone as there are similar occurrences in conventional theatre stage. What can be inferred is that theme and nature of artifacts should determine the production style to be employed so as not to invoke or provoke the spiritual forces coded in those artifacts whether in a conventional or living museum theatre experience.

7. The future of Museum Theatre in Nigeria: A synthesis of forms, styles and contents

Although, museum theatre as expressed in modern context is novel in Nigeria, the Nigerian artistic terrain has exhibited variants that can be categorized as living theatre. All the variants achieve similar functions with the traditional museum and museum theatre, such as; explaining museum materials to visitors, enhancing museum visits, generating curiosity, making artifacts relevant to visitors, and making museum pieces come alive. As the traditional role of museum is changing in contemporary times, there is the need for the use of theatre with its combined audiovisual attributes as museum theatre to enhance the role of museums. One of these new roles is hinged on blending the formal experience with the living experience to create a unique form of museum theatre thus stressing the need to synthesize style, form, with content and theme to achieve the desired aims of communication. Style is an artistic phenomenon applicable to the drama that will evolve as well as presentation of the drama in production, but a dramatic style might still be interpreted in production effectively in different style. Style is controlled by a

determination of how most effectively the emotional impact and meaning of the play, the object, could be rendered as a unifying device in stage productions. (Heffner et al; 1963; 27). It is crucial to employ the appropriate dramatic as well as production style that will adequately channel the audience thought to the desired result. Whatever style is employed; realism, naturalism, expressionism, the epic style etc., should be desirable in the rendering of the meaning and effects of the museum performance/play. Forms also play a critical role in effectively communicating the message decoded from the artifacts or museum piece, as the form employed whether tragedy, comedy, melodrama, farce, satire, tragicomedy etc goes a long way to determine the emotional response and reactions from the audience. Style and form however derive driving force from the content and theme of the museum piece and artifacts and as a result, the evolving programme should be “historically accurate and, at the same time, highly theatrical and which should meet the educational goals of both the museum...” (Prendergast, 2009: 157) and the audience/visitors. This symbiosis is expected to evolve a museum that will address the interests of both the local and international visitors/audience, because museum has to be fostered within the local and national community before it could be marketable internationally.

7.1 Unilorin Drama and Culture Village (UNDV)

UNDV is a project of the University of Ilorin that offers great promise for Museum theatre in Nigeria, not only in the university system but also in the entire community because its existence is predicated on the need to “address the issue of gaps between the gown and town in terms of traditional culture and modern civilisation” (Unilorin, 8). The project employs an interdisciplinary approach and for that purpose is divided into diverse units such as; Drama, Folklore, Dances, Traditional Crafts and Craftsmanship, Music, Zoological and Biological unit, Fine Arts and Photography, Traditional Technology and Engineering, and Film unit. Part of the objectives of the village is to “organize exhibitions of local art/craft materials with the aim of marketing products and the encouragement of creative ingenuity... and also provide practical strategy towards oral performances...exhibitions, performances, etc.” (UDCV, 10). These objectives among others thus reveal interrelatedness between theatre and museum, a situation that would be mutually beneficial to the two disciplines in the evolution of museum theatre in Nigeria. As it were, only three universities own and operate museums in Nigeria; University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife which has two museums- Natural History museum and MA Odeyemi Museum of Antiquities and Contemporary African Arts. The University of Ilorin propositions of an inclusive and multidisciplinary drama and cultural village, would not only make museum theatre to exist but its studies as a curriculum course would also be guaranteed, and it would further enhance museums visits/participations in all museum variants as a living theatre in Nigeria.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Nigeria by western definition does not have a museum theatre, but our argument is that our living museum locked up in the cultural festivals and the palace performances also constitute museum theatre. Its encouragement, complimented by structured programme will enhance

museum visits and remove the distance created between the imprisoned museum pieces and communities and visitors.

If museum exhibition ‘...is a way of narrating ancient lays under new lights with new voices in different tones and timbre’ (Adeoti, 2012:1), if exhibitions “feed our memories, and open up a new vista of awareness about cultural history” (Adejuwon, 2012:2), then we need the use of theatre to amplify the voices. This could be achieved by also employing experience as the fourth level of economic values by engaging the visitor as audience-participant in the context of the participatory nature of African theatre.

Soyinka (2008:10) in an interview, asserts that “Some classical modes including Yoruba theatre deserve to be preserved not merely as museum pieces but as a certain formalism to be studied and enjoyed in their own right”, so museum theatre gives life to the museum objects also for the purpose of study and enjoyment. It is crucial at this point to offer some suggestions to facilitate the role of museum theatre in Nigeria.

Primarily, there is need for exhibition before museum theatre can become relevant. All artifacts locked up in store for safety or their replicas should be opened to the public in temporary periodic exhibitions; it can then be complemented by museum theatre to explain and provide knowledge and to make them relevant to society. Museum theatre can also create scientific awareness for a museum of natural history for example, theatre pieces could be developed to sensitise visitors/audience to the dangers and values of insects such as Mosquitoes, cockroaches, housefly, termites etc.

Writing and theatre workshops should thus be organized to develop plays and dance librettos based on well-researched efforts- but not exhibiting the weakness of historical inaccuracies in some historical drama texts- about artifacts and museum materials from which appropriate plays could be selected for performances to match any focused exhibition. In essence, a compendium of museum theatre plays can be published i.e. creating drama from visual/museum arts, artifacts and pieces. Museum pieces constitute the tangible heritage and the theatre and festivals as theatre; a strong intangible heritage constitutes a salient weapon to prevent the tangible from becoming a fossil of a dead civilization. We can now evolve from this compendium of plays a new creative and participatory experiment where museum visits are expected to culminate in costumed recitals and performances by professional and visitors, volunteer actors, and audience.

Finally, non-realistic production styles ought to be used for historical and ritual artifacts based plays in order to prevent and ameliorate invocatory tendencies that could be inherent in such plays and the resultant productions.

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