

“We want Baale”: Theatre for Development and Its Contextuality in Resolving Power Conflict

By

Ayodele Komolafe PhD

Department of Theatre Arts and Music

Lagos State University, Ojo

&

Adeyemi, Olusola Smith

Department of Mass Communication

Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State

Abstract

Power and leadership are like two sides of a coin, in which one is used to navigate the other. Power then plays important roles in leadership crises, as it is an integral reason why in most cases there is tussle or conflict. It has since become a cogent site of attention for scholars across disciplines, such as Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Communication, Cultural Studies and Theatre Studies just to mention a few. The quest for it therefore, is a key mechanism influencing personal decisions and social actions. The focus of this paper is on the exploration of the legitimate power and how its quest could result in leadership conflict. Every community, organization and geographical space occupied by humans, need leadership, as leaders are the living embodiment of ideas and they possess the capacity to inspire and motivate others to think beyond their current frame work, to what is desirable, necessary and possible. This paper therefore, investigated how Theatre for Development (TfD), a special area in Theatre practice can be deployed as a tool for resolution of leadership tussle. The research was conducted in Topo community in Badagry and the findings show that TfD is a powerful for investigating the imbalances in

human society with the sole aim of calling for collective social action.

Key words: Theatre, Theatre for Development, Leadership, Power, Baale, Topo

Introduction

Leadership conflict has become a major global challenge. Whenever and wherever this conflict occurs, it most times degenerates into civil strife and bloody war. Such was the case in Rwanda genocide of the Hutu and Tutsi in 1994, Kenya's Post-election crisis in 2008 and the on-going civil war in Syria. The most painful aspect is the negative effects it has on the populace, as they lose their lives in the crisis. Once such a conflict begins, ending it becomes difficult to achieve, hence, creating the challenge of reconciliation, rebuilding and peaceful resolution. Conflict, as Abisoye and Akazue(2016:56) have asserted 'is a social reality that is inevitable' and its inevitability makes it an important part of human existence, as anywhere there are human beings, conflict is bound to come to play . Of all forms of conflict such as kinship, religious, racial, and ethnic, power and leadership conflicts seem to be the most common forms.

Power and leadership are like two sides of a coin as one is used to navigate the other. Power then plays an important role in leadership crises, as it is an integral reason why in most cases there is tussle or conflict. Power is an important site of attention for scholars across disciplines, such as Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Communication, Cultural Studies and Theatre Studies just to mention a few. The quest for power therefore is a key mechanism influencing personal decisions and social actions. Henry Hawley (1963:422) once states that, "Every social act is an exercise of power, every social relationship is a power equation, and every social group or system is an organization of power". Advancing further, Gruenfeld and Magee (2003:453) conclude that "to have power is to have control over resources,

to have the ability to influence others' behaviour and to be able to act of your own volition".

The assertions above lead us to the questions of the symbiosis between "Power", "leadership" and "Conflict" as all could be noticed to have connections with each other. Describing the notion of power could be a herculean task to engage because of its relativity in meaning. Many scholars and theorists of conflict and power such as Max Webber (1980), Karl Marx (1985), Michel Foucault (2001) and Ken Petress (2007) have ascribed meanings to them from their own perspectives and world views. Talcott Parsons(2015:22) while translating Webber's concept of power asserts that "it is the probability within a social relationship of being able to secure one's ends even against opposition". This implies that Power has to do with having absolute control over people's behavior.

By extension, power according to John French and Bertan Raven (1999:1), can be categorized into two major forms; (1) Personal/Soft power (2) Positional/ Harsh power. The Personal/ Soft power consists of such power like Expert power; which is based on ones credibility of perceived expertise in an area. Referent Power; power based on people's liking and administration and Information power; which reflects power based on the knowledge or information one has about a topic. The second category, Positional and Harsh Power consist of; the Legitimate power, The Reward power and the Coercive power. The legitimate power is based on the recognition and acceptance of a person's personality. The Reward power has to do with the ability to reward and reinforce a desired behavior while the Coercive power is the ability to threaten or punish undesirable behavior.

The focus of this paper is on the exploration of the legitimate power and how its quest could result in leadership conflict. Every community, organization and geographical space occupied by humans, need leadership, as leaders are the living embodiment of ideas and they possess the capacity to inspire and motivate others to think beyond their current frame work to what is desirable, necessary and possible.

The assumption here is that Leadership entails influencing people towards achieving common goals. However, the idea that one is in the position of giving orders implies status and position, hence, the quest to ascend to the status of a leader and give order could at times result in conflict. Conflict as generally agreed by scholars, is inevitable in any social setting or community. It arises because of individuals' different interests and perceptions to life. Conflict as the case may be, surfaces in different forms and advances from simple to complex depending on how it is handled by the personalities involved. Simply put, Owens Pinchcoff (2014:66) asserts that "conflict is a contest of opposing forces or powers; a struggle to resist or overcome; it is present whenever incompatible activities occur". (qtd in Anthony Affil-Broni). Advancing further Affil-Broni describes it as a disagreement or incompatibility in wants, values and aspirations of two or more persons or groups. Conflict could arise as a result of incompatible ideology, objective and reasoning among group of people. Most time, the continuous existence of conflict could result in bloody confrontation, physical attack and antagonism. A vivid example of such case is the Ife/ Modakeke uprising of late 1980s and early 1990s. While leadership and power are necessary for the continued existence of a community, then how do we rescue a community that lacks leadership, and where conflict reigns for about twelve years? This is where the practice of Theatre for Development (TfD) comes to the fore, as Abisoye and Akazue confirmed that:

Conflict resolution therefore emphasizes intervention by skilled but powerless third-parties working unofficially with the parties to foster new thinking and new relationships. They seek to explore what the roots of the conflict really are and to identify creative solutions that the parties may have missed in their commitment to entrenched positions (58).

This paper however interrogates the place of theatre, especially Theatre for Development (TfD) in resolving social conflict that occurs through quest for power. The investigation was carried out in Topo community, a rural community in Badagry, Lagos State.

Discussing Theatre for Development (TfD)

Theatre for Development is a form of theatre practice deployed by its practitioners to highlight certain social problems; and galvanise actions for self-reliance, self-sustainability and participatory development. According to Magret Were, TfD is a form of:

Theatre used to research and analyze development problems and create a critical awareness and potential for action to solve those problems. It is a theatre that is relevant to the people's life and struggles as opposed to the theatre of abstractions and entertainment. It thrives on the participation of the target communities in the development of critical thinking that stimulates resultant praxis. (8)

Hence, it becomes an interrogative form of theatre that is used in the word of Epochi-Oliseh as a forum for "dialogue and a place where not only the oppressed can think about ways of freeing themselves, but where dialogue can be engendered between different factions of society" (130).

This form of theatre practice has been accorded different names like "Popular Theatre", "Forum Theatre", "Theatre for Social Mobilization", "Community Theatre", "and Participatory Theatre for Change" and many more. The reason for this is that these performances are not restricted to the conventional theatre stage, but can be performed in places like the street, market place, motor parks, community square, prison yard and hospital, just to mention a few. In support of the above assertion, Ayodele Komolafe (2011), observes that what the practice does is to "discuss" with the people their woes, expectations and lives generally using the people's

art forms to channel their problems to the appropriate quarters. The assertion re-echoes the fact that TfD is the theatre for the people, by the people and of the people. This why Olu Obafemi(2004:1) submits that:

TfD is a theatre of “grassroots, popular awareness, mobilization and conscientization; a theatre of mass sector of the society, peasants, human and urban “proletariat” and marginalized peoples, for the purpose of challenging and confronting their political, economic and social deprivations, using residual contemporary cultural form of expression and collective improvisation to analyze these conditions”.

Theatre for Development is participatory in nature as it allows for dialogic process between the practitioners and the audience, which at the end ensures that most significant changes are voiced, brought to common attention and assessed for a proper follow-up. The participatory index of this form of theatre engagement prompts Steve Abah (1991:x) to quickly submit that “Theatre for Development centered on the creation of a dialogue drama which, whilst entertaining, was primarily analytical” and this is the reason why it remains a distinctive form, making itself different from other forms of theatre.

TfD is relevant to all spheres of human endeavour, such as politics, economics/ business, history, soldiering, management, Agriculture and rural development, environmental issues and development communication. It is a theatre constructed to create and design its own technique of scenario building through data collected from field work, interviews and participant observation, TfD develops its skits with the involvement of the community members, with the sole aim of engendering social consciousness that would stimulate the people to take positive steps towards solving their challenges. In consonance with this, Rabindranath Manukonda(2003:2) opines that:

TfD is more than simply making and performing plays. It gives target group representatives who typically develop and perform the plays the opportunity to tell their own stories, address matters that are relevant to them. While developing the plot, the actors will start analyzing their own situation. After the performance, the analysis is extended to the audience by asking questions like: Why did the lead character do this? What could he/she have done differently? What can we ourselves do to prevent or solve such situation?

The deduction from the above citation is that, the participatory nature of TfD gives it the prominence of providing alternative means of communication through dialogic approach for the ultimate purpose of change and development for the community involved. However, in the practicality of TfD as an applied theatre, it does not have audience per se, as it turns them (audience) into active participants like drummers, dancers, actors and chanters. Instead of being passive audience, they become what Boal (1979) refers to as “spect-actors”. The essence of this is to de-emphasise the imaginary wall created in the conventional Theatre (proscenium arch) by involving the audience to participate in the play re-enactment.

With all of the above in mind, this paper focuses on Topo community in Badagry and investigated how TfD was deployed as a change agent in effecting and advancing social development.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory adopted for this study is drawn from Sociological theories that are relevant to social development. This is Critical Social Theory as postulated by Max Horkhemier, Jugen Habermas and Theodore Adorno. The choice of the theory is informed by the fact that, it is an adequate and relevant tool to measure the state of social and human development.

Critical social theory was postulated to analyse the society from the stand point of its emancipation and collective social transformation. It asserts that emancipator social transformation is necessary since the contemporary human society fails to satisfy the true needs of individuals and not only that but fails to create civilized society in which every member could live in with satisfaction. In the words of Han the theory originated as a departure from a departure and response to Karl Marx's dialectical and historical materialism which calls for revolution against social and historical injustice and any form of oppression and exploitation. Instead, Critical Social Theory proposes a dialogue as a means towards social conflict resolution. Though the theory is interested in social change, it does not advance revolution for making the changes but collective reasoning and dialogue.

Hence, the aim of this theory is to diagnose injustice and irrationalities within social circle and seek to stop their perpetuation by proposing for a just society that is self sufficient in terms of profound social and economic benefits. Since the theory is society and institution centred, it critically examines issues, examines issues that creates obstacles for social and human development as a means of engendering social transformation and upliftment.

The approach of critical social theory has been on the essence of breaking the traditional deductive methods which favour social development being one sided, to collective social transformation and development achieved through dialogue. This implies that Critical Social Theory is set to question the hegemony in the operations of the dominants that refuse collective social development. In the submission of Habermas (2001:2), he asserts:

Fundamentally, traditional social theory is premised on the analysis and understanding of the status quo. By implicit acceptance of what is traditional social theory does not challenge; but

contributes to the preservation of the status quo. Critical Social theory concerned with finding alternatives to existing social conditions which more adequately address human desires.

From the above assertion, Critical Social Theory rejects the separation of social values and inquiry, knowledge and action from the hands of the majority while centralizing them in the hands of the minority who claims to know it all. Critical Social Theory is a mass oriented theory, this is why it is fore grounded on three fundamental assumptions as stated by Herbert Marcuse and cited in Adeyemi (2015:8):

1. People are creator of their social world and as such can change it if they wish.
2. All scientific knowledge about social world is socially constructed and as such cannot avoid been infused with value orientations.
3. The theory concerns itself with changing the status quo that is hegemony and oppressive in nature to general social transformation.

There is no doubt, that the theory is suitable for Theatre for Development in the exploration of social issues around power and leadership conflict and how it was applied to Topo community in Badagry.

Theatre for Development and Topo Community Encounter

Topo community is a riverside community located within Badagry Central Local Government, in Lagos State. It is an ancient community, located along the ancient slave coast of West Africa, known as the Bight of Benin. According to oral history, the forebears (of the people of Topo) migrated from Ajah in Dahomey kingdom, the present day Republic of Benin. The people migrated due to incessant tribal wars and slave raiding. The first settlers were members of the same family: three were males, while the last one was a female. On their arrival, they first settled on the Island near Gbrefu sea beach. The Island is today referred to as Topo

Island, and about four years later the people migrated further by crossing the lagoon to the present location on which they settled, till date.

Research Methodology

The theatre development workshop, in Topo community was carried out by the writers and the 300 hundred level students of the Department of Theatre Arts and Music, Lagos State University, Ojo. The research was carried out through the adoption of Homestead approach and Participant-Observation method.

The Homestead approach indicates that the research participants and facilitators resided in the community throughout the workshop period, to be able to carry out the research survey effectively, rather than the Migrant approach which stipulates that the researchers resume to the community in the morning, and return to their base at a stipulated time. The Participant-Observation technique employed methods like interview, observation, interaction, and dialogue as instruments of data collection. Through this means, the group was able to observe and carry out the survey by joining in, and sharing in the activities of the community. In this process, the researchers were able incorporated the people's viewpoint in order to contribute to the social transformation system needed by the people.

Data Gathering and Analysis

The TfD group resided in Topo community for fifteen days, with intensive engagement in the people's daily routines, activities, and through participatory-observation technique, the group was able to collect data required for drama piece. The workshop was tagged "Community Communication for Social Development" and the participants for the fieldwork was a 30-member group that was divided into five groups, from which a resource person headed each. Each group was to interview the community members for six days, as data collection. At the end of each day's interview, the group met to give the report of the day's activity at

the plenary session. In all, six plenary sessions were held, in which data collated had to be analysed. However, after series of discussions, the following challenges were highlighted to be perennial to the people:

1. Absence of a Community leader.
2. Youth unemployment and poverty.
3. Government Acquisition of Land.
4. High level of illiteracy among the people.

However, a major area of concern and interest to the research group was the absence of a traditional community leader, who could represent the people in the government; and because of this; the community had been denied of many developmental projects. It was gathered that the root cause of challenge, was the long-standing leadership conflict between the two ruling houses in the community; the Djeregbe ruling house and the Sakete ruling house. While all efforts to resolve the crisis had failed, the research group decided to collectively work with the people towards solving it.

The Performance

After a careful analysis of the data, the research group was divided into two units, to package two different performance sketches that centred on the data collected. Each unit was to come up with two skits, incorporating all the techniques of play production in TfD. The units were also to incorporate other issues they found useful during the process of data gathering and analysis. The team members were given twenty-four hours to package the skits. In the end, the two units came up with skits that anchored on the data collected; and after a close study of the sketches, the entire group agreed on merging them to produce one sketch, that would incorporate all that had been gathered during the field work. This method was adopted as a way of creating a performance that would engage the audience, without losing its cathartic qualities. One major technique (that the group adopted) was the involvement of interested members of the community, in the play making process. Through this, the group was able

to learn some of the folk songs of the people that were infused into the drama. This approach was to fulfill one of the basic objectives of TfD, which is community participation; as it was meant to conscientise and change the mindset of the people positively, by spurring their understanding towards a better living.

At the level of scenario building for the drama skit, the analysed data were prioritised into a non-linear plot structure with the play titled in Ogu language, "Gbenopo" meaning "Unity." The thematic pre-occupations of the sketch explored and highlighted some of the developmental challenges of the community. The play opens with a narrator; an old woman referred to as *Tayin* in Ogu language. Through her narration, the story of the origin of the community and the challenges faced by the people were enacted. Through the interjection of the people folk music in the drama, the performance had impact on the audience.

Post-Performance Discussion

The skit provoked discussion as it ended, because the storyteller engaged members of the audience with questions, in relation to the play. Notable community members of the community that were present commented on how the performance has conscientised them, on the importance of having a leader. They all muted the idea that they would collectively work together, to channel new ways towards moving the community forward.

Conclusion

From the research conducted at Topo community, it is clear that Performance Communication, through TfD can be deployed as an effective tool for making behaviour change possible. It has shown that there is a strong connection (and/or relationship) between Performance Communication, TfD, and social development; as each according to Mohammed (2008:119) "reinforces, projects and distills the other". These connection is fundamental; since communication and theatre, as disciplines, have not only been used as instruments of entertainment and

preservation of culture, but also function effectively to instruct, teach, and educate. The immediate response (from the people of the community) created an environment, where the people were able to analyze their situation and their problems. In addition, as a collective activity, that based its premises in the local community, it created an avenue for cooperation and participation. As a human device, Theatre for Development serves as tools for investigating the imperfections in the society, with a view to encouraging and reinforcing change for the better. In the end, the community came up with its new Baale, Chief Avoseh Michael Olorundami from Djelegbo ruling house, who was presented by the the Akran of Badagry Kingdom, De Wheno Aholu Menu Toyi 1, to Lagos State Government for approval. Today the Baale has been enthroned as the Baale of Topo land. A throne that had been vacant for fourteen years, due to crisis between the two ruling houses (Sakete and Djlegbo).

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