

FROM SATIRE TO ALLUSION: (RE) EXAMINING HOTEL DE JORDAN SONGS AS TOOLS AGAINST SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Dan. E. Omoruan & Charles O. Aluede

Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State,

ABSTRACT

Social stratification or Pluralization in society is a phenomenon that is as old as the history of mankind. This, over the years has become a strong societal force present in all aspects of societal dynamics and has left indelible imprint in human psyche. While this has contributed to societal balancing and regulation in some ways, it has however been a factor for disaffection and resentment by those affected by the adverse effect of such Pluralization. It is in this connection that the *Hotel de Jordan* was conceived and created. The focus of the drama was to mirror the society and expose its attendant ills occasioned by the inherent inequality in it. To effectively carry out this study, interviews, reviews of scripts and the films were done. These were further supported with review of related literature to strengthen the discourse. Good a focus as well as the idea, this paper observes that in spite of the pungent message entailed in the script of the drama, the songs, singing styles of the songs, the costume and make-ups in the drama tended to distract the spectator. It is therefore suggested that in the use of songs as a tool for enlightenment and entertainment, especially through comedy, performing songs comically could rob the drama of not just the message but seriousness of the issues under contestation lest the goal of such drama may be compromised.

INTRODUCTION

The French theorist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) as cited in Emielu, (2009: 16) is believed to be the first to theorize about social construction in his anthropological writings on the collective nature of human behaviour. He opined that, "individuals in the society are products of complex social forces which condition social actions; interaction and social mediations." Going by this definition by a renowned scholar, songs or the arts are excluded as criteria for social stratification. This paper argues that songs and music can be used as criteria for social stratification. The paper draws its primary data from a popular television series *Hotel De Jordan* broadcast on the Nigerian Television Authority Benin between 1973 and 1987 which is currently being proposed to be resuscitated. The theoretical framework of this study is based on the concept of social partitioning as an aspect of the sociological theory of social constructionism. This concept was further elucidated upon by Hobbs and Blank which they described as *social stratification*. They posit that social stratification is "the ranking of individuals, families and population into different levels according to the distribution of privilege, power and prestige." Class system is an aspect of social stratification and all members of a social class view themselves as equals, while holding themselves to be socially superior or inferior to some others (Omorie, 1995: 93). In this paper, song and music would be used interchangeably. Materials for this paper have been derived from personal observation of trends in this programme, the society and other secondary sources.

Songs in Society

In both traditional and contemporary societies, songs are means of communicating messages, information, feelings and emotions. Other functions attributed to songs are that they are entertaining, therapeutic and used as means of documentation. Early in time, while giving an account of music in Africa and the carry over musical attributes of African slaves in America, Haa (1995: 8) opines:

Separated from their homeland and forced to endure the misery of bondage, Africans in the colonial United States sought solace in the musical traditions of their ancestors. Music and oral history had long been an integral element of the folklore of African culture, wherein religion, music, and magic coexisted in a close relationship. Without a tradition of written history,

important events were passed down from generation to generation through song and tribal ritual. This tradition continued in the colonies in the form of slave or work songs, which later evolved into spirituals (p. 8).

In most societies today, songs have become veritable means to speak out against oppression, injustice and inequality. It has become an indispensable aspect of the social process. Emielu, (2009: 28) relates social process to “people and the way they organize individual and group behaviour in the society, including how they define themselves in social terms and their ranking on the social ladder.” He further states that social process involves series of actions on the part of the individual and the society which creates or causes changes in behaviour in one form or the other in the society. This change in behaviour is reflected in the kind of song or music associated with the different social classes. Supporting the above view, Emielu (2009) further observes that, “while there was Highlife music for the ‘High Class’, there was also ‘poor man’s’ music such as *Kokoma*, *Agidigbo*, and others which were also subsumed under a generic label of ‘palm wine music’ because of their predominance in local palm wine bars. In the same vein, Ajah (2004), while writing about class structure in the society says:

Aesthetic values are very highly cherished and they mark the high societies or higher classes of people in the society. This is because it is only when a person has taken care of the basic necessities of life that he or she will begin to be concerned with aesthetic values (p. 187).

From the above it is fore-grounded that those in the lower class of the society are pre-occupied with seeking and providing the basic needs of life while those in the higher class have their values inclined on ostentation. It is in this thinking that Olorunyomi (2005) posits that:

As a divided, sectionalized-even tribalized-group, this comprador alliance with foreign capital has been unable to forge or crystallize an enduring national identity. This critical element in the nature of national class formation, especially the narrow and particularistic pursuit of the elite, has substantially distorted the crust of the working class and other ancillary sectors (p. 17).

Fela Anikulapo Kuti, a popular Nigerian musician was well known for singing songs that were very critical of the class phenomena in Nigeria and the rest of the world. His songs were critical of governments, institutions and wealthy individuals reputed to have been involved in activities injurious to the society or to have compromised the rights and integrity of the individual. *Trouble sleep yanga go wake am*, *Zombie*, *Beast of no Nation*, *Sorrow, Tears and Blood* were songs by Fela that portrayed class reality and identity in the society. Writing further Olorunyomi (2005: 44) notes that:

By the time he started waxing *Zombie*, *Alagbon Close*, *ITT*, and *Sorrow Tears and Blood* which lampooned military and other authoritarian hegemonies in contemporary Africa, it was clear that he had finally unmasked the bogey of the ideological unanimity of contending classes (p. 44).

Continuing, he remarks that “The prevalent interests of his lyrics are those often contrasting situations of power relations between the *big Oga* and the marginal *my people*. In between these two extremes are to be found diverse modes of coping, of acquiescence or, on the other hand, of resistant modes with a large repertoire of sub-cultural linguistic codes. The vehicle for the transmission of Fela’s alternative message was often indirect in the early stage, but later became direct, akin to the discursive modes James Scott describes as the “public” and “hidden” transcripts. The public transcript pertains to the nature of power relations, which is resolved in favour of the status quo, while the hidden transcript relates to forms of resistance of dominance in more subtle and oblique ways such as in gestures, jokes, humour, and parody-which “insinuate” a critique of power”. Sunny Okosun, another Nigerian musician whose songs were popular in the nineteen-seventies and nineteen-eighties was known to be very critical of the apartheid policy in South Africa and issues of class structure in Nigeria. Some of his notable lyrics in this regard included *Fire in Soweto*, *Papa’s land Ozzidi*. Other notable artistes that have trumpeted class attitudes and

resentment through their music are the Mandators, Ras Kimono, Osayomore Joseph, Nowamagbe and Majek Fashek and his *kpangolo* (grass root) music.

Early in time, songs had been used as independent artistic outlet within and outside the stage, other artistic outreach like drama, dance, mime and pantomime had either been used singly or in conjunction with other media like song to express class resentment or attack class attitudes. *Hotel De Jordan* was a foremost dramatic medium which combined the use of dialogue and song for this purpose. According to Olusola (1983):

In the end however` it is the audience who calls the tune for the future of television drama as they have done unmistakably, by reacting most favourably to such dramatic productions as *The Village Headmaster, Case File, Masquerade, Hotel De Jordan* and the growing number of single play specials on Nigerian Television (p. 380).

The Hotel De Jordan

As has been mentioned earlier, Hotel de Jordan was a television series that was broadcast on the Nigerian television authority channels 6, 7 and 9 Benin City in the then Midwest/ Bendel State. Since television was introduced in Nigeria, television drama had been a popular feature on the screen. Between the nineteen seventies and the nineteen eighties, some notable television drama broadcast on the nation's media included *Mirror in the Sun, Village Headmaster, Masquerade, Samanja* and *Hotel De Jordan*. All but *Mirror in the Sun* in terms of origin reflect Nigeria's major geo-political regions i.e. West, East, North and South (Midwest). Despite the tribal dichotomy inherent in their sources, their broadcast and appeal cut across tribal and regional boundaries. Created by Jonathan Ihonde for Nigerian Television Benin, it was a metamorphosis of his initiative in the pioneering of a drama group in 1971 which included artistes like Raymond Dokpesi, proprietor of African Independent Television, Monday, now Nosakhare Isekhure, the Itsekhure of Benin kingdom and one Pius Oleghe a product of University of Ibadan and contemporary of Wole Soyinka.etc. They rehearsed at the defunct Emotan Hotel where they were discovered and invited to Nigerian Television Benin by a British man named Mr. Jarvis, the first manager of the station who was lodging at the hotel at that time. Owing to the fact that the genesis of the group was in a hotel, its name was subsequently influenced, hence, the naming of the programme *Hotel De Jordan*, when they got an outlet in the television.

Thematically, *Hotel De Jordan* embraced the use of dialogue and song to express societal inequality. It portrayed a constant clamour and struggle by the down trodden in the society to extricate themselves from the clutches of poverty and despair which the so called 'privileged class' inflicted on them. *Hotel De Jordan* was a comic satire with hilarious characters like Chief Ajas, Chief Igho and Chief Ugiagbe representing the high echelon of the society while at the middle class level were characters like Gberegbedegbeun, Casino Manager, Dr. Milo Monroe and Bob Alan the irrepressible Journalist. Coming at the rear of the society's ladder were characters like Idemudia, Chief Ajas' house boy, Kokori, Idemudia's friend and a 'nobody', Usiobaifo, a loafer, barman, Okpetu, The Lord Mayor's messenger and Gbemwuan a prostitute all engaged in 'ordinary occupations'. Joseph (1993: 35) relating occupation to people in the society said that "occupations are indications of social class, sharing with others in that class a distinctive way of life in terms of education, diet, dress attitudes and leisure pursuits."

As drama is the use of dialogue and other dramatic medium to express opinion or convey message on stage, Kokori and Idemudia, the singing duo in *Hotel De Jordan* were effective in the use of this medium not only to highlight the plight of the down trodden but as a weapon against oppression. The theme song for the series entitled 'poor man dey suffer' explicitly portrayed the condition of the common man. The opening line of the song reads thus: '*Poor man dey suffer, monkey dey work, baboon dey chop*'. The song typifies a state of unease and suspicion between the rich and the poor. Used for the opening and closing montage, it sets the dominant mood for the series. As in most communities, Jordan city had a head known as The Lord Mayor of Jordan. He was the de facto leader with imperial and dictatorial powers. He was therefore seen by the average Jordanian as responsible for the society's progress or misfortune. The

nineteen eighties in Nigeria was a period characterized by inflation, lack of infra structural amenities and mismanagement of public funds in the midst of the oil boom. This led to wide spread hunger and poverty in the society especially among the people of the lower class. Therefore, the Lord Mayor of Jordan represented those in the upper echelon of the society seen by the down trodden as responsible for their misery. They used the medium of song to highlight their predicament and to call on the Lord Mayor of Jordan to do something towards alleviating their plight. According to Okafor (2005), Human reasoning reflects on issues that bother on worthy, noble and meaningful living in any society. And music is, of course, very acceptable as an instrument of change because people digest it and consume it as entertainment while it leaves a mark on the psyche that redirects the person towards new personality, towards a new activity (p. 277).

Most of the songs in *Hotel De Jordan* reflect the above assertion. We shall consider them one after the other in the segment below.

Song one: Mayor

Text in Pidgin	Translation
Mayor put water for wetin you plant o You planti tree for house rent You planti tree for scatter beer Landlord dey cry, tenant dey cry Seller dey cry, consumer dey cry Kokori dey cry over Jordan	Mayor water your crops You planted trees for house rent You planted trees for scatter beer Landlord is crying, tenant is crying Seller is crying, consumer is crying Kokori is crying over Jordan

In spite of his miserable state, the poor man in *Hotel De Jordan* found respite in hope. He believed that someday his condition would change for good as long as he was focused and hardworking. The song below captures this vision

Song two: Some People

Text in Pidgin	Translation
Some people say Idemudia and Kokori no go better o Because e godi don maki dem poor but we say na lie dem talk Because e godi don make everybody equal Yes we say na lie dem talk o why People like Chief Ajas, Gberegbedegbeun, Casino manager And Chief Ugiagbe na dem make life hard for all the poor people wey dey for this Jordan city So poor people wey e dey for this Jordan city make una no worry, make una still Work hard Because poor man wey e work with him hand today, na him get tomorrow Because poor man wey e work with him hand today, na him get tomo...rrow	People have said that it will not be well for Idemudia and Kokori Because God has made them poor we say it's a lie Because God made everybody equal We say it's a lie It is the likes of Chief Ajas, Gberegbedegbeun, Casino manager And Chief Ugiagbe who have made life tough for the poor in this Jordan City However, poor men in this Jordan City do not worry, work hard Because it is the hard working poor man of today that will own tomorrow Because it is the hard working poor man of today that will own tomorrow

This song was unequivocally, an affront on the rich by the poor and down trodden. It typified the state of disharmony and disaffection in the society brought about by the trend of social stratification. Like the previous song, it ended in a bright and hopeful note. The next song bemoaned the plight of the common man as he found himself unable to provide adequately for his home due to lack of gainful employment or support from the government in the form of loan or social and unemployment benefits. The only option in the absence of employment was to become self employed as rubber tappers and truck pushers, a common form of self employment for the underprivileged in the society. This sets the timing in the nineteen seventies when demand for rubber latex by industries for use in the manufacture of plastics, tyres and other related industrial products was high. This was also the case with truck pushing known in Yoruba parlance as ‘*omolanke*’ as it was the cheapest and most common means of transportation of goods, farm produce and other materials by the masses at that time. The song presents a scenario of abandonment because of poverty as he was deserted by his wife for she could no longer cope with the situation. This therefore brought to fore a social problem of some sort occasioned by class consciousness as the eloped wife was most likely to shun going into further relationship with men in the lower class stratum to avoid a recurrent cycle of living in indigence.

Song three: Ho My Wife

Text in Pidgin	Translation
Ho my wife, ho my wife Ho my wife, ho my wife Ho my wife, ho my wife Why can't you remember me again? I rolli truck one year I tappi rubber so many years When money go woman go	Oh my wife, oh my wife Oh my wife, oh my wife Oh my wife, oh my wife Why can't you remember me again? I pushed truck one year I tapped rubber for so many years When money finishes woman goes away

If the axiom, birds of the same feather flock together is anything to go by in this discourse, it was probable that the wife, who abandoned her husband due to poverty occasioned by class disadvantage, would find it impossible to extricate herself from poverty as she could find the class wall impregnable. This is what Tunde Fatunde posits in his play *Sweat and Blood*, P94 when Kissinger accused Macmillan of romancing with blacks and coloured women in apartheid South Africa.

Kissinger: But you. Do you believe in racial superiority?
Why did you go to the night club with a female cook?
Even if she is a European cook, I do not expect you to go
out with someone who belongs to an inferior class.
I am disappointed at your behaviour.

Despite the ravaging effect of frustration on him, the poor man in *Hotel De Jordan* had been courageous in confronting his oppressors. The next song typified by Casino Manager directly affront on them. They are ready to fight or beat up any of the perceived oppressor who comes their way.

Song four: Casino Manager

Text in Pidgin

Casino Manager you dey for trouble
If you no commot here we go beat you

Translation

Casino Manager, you are in trouble
If you do not leave here, we will beat you

To the poor man in the city of Jordan all is not lost. Despite their obvious predicament in the society, they are hopeful that someday their dreams would come through and they would be freed from the shackles of poverty, starvation and hardship engendered by class stratified society. This is the mood in the next song below.

Song five: My Canoe

Bright is the day today
Everything passes away
I have nobody to comfort my soul
I better paddle my own canoe.

Textual Analysis of *Hotel De Jordan* Songs

It may be considered utterly panegyric if not superfluous to say that most traditional Nigerian songs are laced with anecdotes, ideophones, proverbs, metaphors, hyperboles etc. It is these attributes that the songs of *Hotel De Jordan* keyed into. The use of songs and music related activities in correcting societal ills is not novel in Africa. For example, Herskovits (1958) cites an instance from West Africa where among the Fon of ancient Republic of Benin derisive songs were used to ridicule individuals or groups who offended against communal morality. On a similar note, Finnegan (1970: 272) said: "Chopi musicians of Mozambique in Africa use the medium of song to criticize and pressurize those in authority." While talking of song texts, Aluede and Aluede (2011) remark that:

As one embarks on the textual analysis of songs, one should be mindful of the interplay between text and subtext in songs. African melodies have often been described as short and repetitive. This view may also go with the words of the melodies that go with them. A researcher who is not groomed in the musical traditions of Africa may not be able to elicit any information from their songs.

While examining critically one of the Esan *Ujie* songs, they further observe that:

Uki henlen reveals strong elements of satire. *Uki* in Esan means the moon and *Aghola* is the northern star's illuminating power which is strong when compared to the moon. Of all the celestial illuminants at nights, the moon is the brightest. When this song is performed in a procession while passing through the compound of those who recently performed in a procession, it means that the present performance is heavier in all realms in contrast to theirs in terms of number of wealthy children, audience participation and that the performance proficiency of the ensemble is better and superior to any other previously held around the locality.

Mere reading and singing of *Hotel de Jordan* songs may not make a serious impact on the reader except he is versed in the background trajectories of the socio-political quagmire of the epoch within which the songs were composed. The theme song illustrates the hardship in the country arising from exploitation. Exploitation is a very common tendency in the country and it is the cause of wide spread poverty among the people as they are often paid wages below their capacity output. Baboon here refers to the exploitative employer while monkey refers to the exploited workers. In song one, Mayor was advised to water his crops. In this song, the poor man is calling on the government to ameliorate the impact of inflation on the society because her policies have resulted in increase in house rent and consumer products making life difficult for all the citizens. Scatter beer here refers to the fact that as a result of inflation, the dream to hang out with friends while drinking beer has been dashed. The proletariat are left with nothing than to resort to cheap alcohol (*Ogogoro*) which the poor man consumes in order to drown his misery. This cheap

drink is known to be very high in alcoholic content and so highly injurious to human health.

Song two speaks about the inequality in the country which has almost become an order. On the other hand, the masses that are at the receiving end of this social malaise are encouraged not to accept their fate. This is done by relying on the order of equality established by God. It therefore calls on the poor people in the society to be courageous and hardworking because it is only through these that they can be liberated. In song three, the poor man is bemoaning the attitude of women in the society who fail to stand by their husbands when things are no longer going well. Here, the poor man decries his misfortune as he finds to his chagrin that his wife has abandoned him because he could no longer cater for her needs. Literarily, one may see this song from a simple perspective of just divorce. The divorce here is as a result of joblessness, collapse in economy which the government and her agents are responsible for. For example, when salaries are paid in arrears, retrenchment and job insecurity are noticed everywhere, the problem is government's.

In song four, we find that the patience of the poor man has run out and therefore, he is ready to take the law into his hands by physically assaulting the rich who they believe is the cause of their predicament, song five encourages the poor man not to be disillusioned in the face of present hardship but rather to be strong and self dependent.

Effectiveness of Songs as Tools against Social Stratification

The effectiveness of songs as tools against social stratification can only be measured within the parameter of their uses and goal in the programme. In the first instance *Hotel De Jordan* is a satirical comedy. According to Aristotle, art is a matter of representation, and comedy is an imitation of *worst men*. Dasylva (2004) writes that:

Comedy is a term loosely used, and generally applied to a wide range of dramatic writings. As a form of drama, comedy is concerned with man's relation to society and deals with experience rather suitable than questionable.... He categorizes comedy into two: high and low comedy. These can further be expanded into comedy of manner, humours and intrigue (p. 57).

Hotel the Jordan falls within the genre of comedy of humours. This is dependent on how the playwright presents his characters. He however remarks the danger in this form of comedy as it has the tendency to trivialize serious matter due to its farcical nature. He observes a link between comedy of manner and comedy of character as both suggest *ethics* and moral *actions*.

Although the programme had attracted a lot of viewers and was very topical at the time of its broadcast, one must however not be misled into thinking that the programme was very effective in ameliorating the plight of the common man. This was due to its hilarious tendency which undermined seriousness in the height of hilarity. The veracity of this assertion could be hinged on the fact that throughout the duration of the programme, there was never a noticeable change in the condition of the common man in *Hotel De Jordan* less the lager society which it represented. Neither did Idemudia have his condition changed from that of knickers wearing houseboy who was frequently shouted upon and taunted by his maverick boss Chief Ajas, nor Kokori, a loafer nor was jester able to rise above his state despite singing themselves to hoarse. Rather, they were seen by their audiences and masters as comic figures of some sort relevant in aiding them to get over the tension and pressure of their day to day activity. In other words their comic disposition further empowered or enhanced the capacity of their subjugators to suppress them. This is the irony of *Hotel De Jordan* which Andrew Gamble (1988:5) described in a phrase as "those more directly at the receiving end." The poor man in *Hotel De Jordan* is at the receiving end and his method of expressing his plight through his comic posture only seemed to exacerbate his condition as he was most often not taken seriously rather his antics were regarded as an elixir.

Another factor which tended to downplay the plight of the common man in *Hotel De Jordan* was the factor of the sub dramatic element of *stock character* an established and accepted dramatic rite in the

ritual of play writing relied upon by playwrights as a tool in the construction of plays. According to Abraham (1984:185) stock character is described as “types that recur repeatedly in a particular literary genre, and are so recognizable as part of the *Conventions* of the form.” This definition locates the stock character as an unchanging entity and in this capacity is recognized and identified *ad infinitum*.

The implication of stock characterization in drama is that as drama is dependent on the use of characters to develop plot and unfold meaning through dialogue, it therefore implies that a stock character is a character endowed with an unchanging, permanent or balanced ethos which he must uphold at all times and must be identified with in the course of the play. This is probably the aspect of dramatic flaw not only inherent in the programme but in dramatic studies i.e. the irreversibility of *stock characterization*. Other *stock characters* such as Usiobaifo and Okpetu who fall within the category of the common man did not have their conditions improved either throughout the play. This was not because they did not struggle enough, or cry loud enough, or even work hard enough but because their characters had been so created, established and *stocked up* by the playwright. In this circumstance, nothing could be done to change their destinies within the span of the play.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to show that songs can be used to express a state or condition of a people. In it also we examined how societal stratification can be used as a tool for divisive relationship in the society. While showing how societal stratification perpetuates affluence and poverty in the society, this paper pontificates the essence of songs as a tool for enlightenment and entertainment, especially through comedy. The authors hold the opinion that presenting serious and topical issues comically has its associated adverse effects. Hence, they observe that in such a process, seriousness is lost and the desired goal compromised. To avert these, moderate use of comedy is thus suggested in the presentation of critical matters be it for the screen or the stage.

References

- Abrams, M. H. (1981). *Glossary of Literary Terms*. (4th ed.). New York: Holt, Winston.
- Ademola, O. D. (1979). *Studies in Drama*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers.
- Ajah, O. P. (2004). *Stepping into Comprehensive Philosophy*. Abuja: Timeless.
- Aluede, E. O. & Aluede, C. O. (2011). An analytical survey of the Ujie music and dance. *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, 9, 1-22.
- Awodiya, M.P. (2010). *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Barnhart, T. (1980). *World Book Dictionary, A-k*. Chicago, Illinois: Broadway Publishers.
- Barnhart, T. (1980). *World Book Dictionary: L-Z*. Chicago, Illinois: Broadway Publishers.
- Dasylyva, A. O. (1997). *Dramatic Literature: A Critical Source Book*. Ibadan: Bookman.
- Emielu, A. M. (2009). *High Life Music in Nigeria*. A Doctorate Degree Dissertation Submitted to the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.
- Fatunde, T. (2006). *No More Oil Boom and Other Plays*. Bookcraft Publishers.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: The Clarendon Press.
- Gamble, A. (1988). *An Introduction to Modern, Social and Political Thought*. London: Macmillan.
- Haa, E. (1995). *Soul*. New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers.
- Herscovits, M. J. & F. S. (1958). *Dahomean Narrative*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Okafor, R. C. (2005). *Music in Nigerian Society*. Enugu: New Generation Books.
- Olorunyomi, Sola. (2005). *Afrobeat: Fela and the Imagined Continent*. Ibadan: Gold Press,
- Radice, B. (1981). *Aristotle Horace Longinus*. Middlesex: The Penguin Classics.