

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION: PLAYTEXT AND PERFORMANCE APPROACHES AS PANACEA

Mohammed-Kabir Jibril Imam (Ph.D)

*Department of Theatre Arts
Prince Abubakar Audu University Anyigba, Kogi State
kabirjib@gmail.com/kabirimam@ymail.com
08037355827/08051123410*

&

Musa Yunusa

*Department of Theatre Arts,
Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, Kogi State
Musayunus68@yahoo.com
08066054468*

Abstract

Conflict over the years has been seen as one of the elements of existence. It is a truism that there must be a conflict for a viable co-existence in any given society. Hence, the proper management and resolution of conflict have been the quest of scholars in all the fields of endeavour to search for how conflict could be managed for societal advancement and development. Because as long as people have different opinions on issues around them, so there is bound to be conflict. It has been observed that lack of its management has led to destruction of life and property, also, conflict has created lasting among nations, states, communities and other places. Thus, highlighting and pinpointing how conflict can be managed is the concern of this study. The paper adopts the content analysis of qualitative research to see how conflict can be managed by borrowing a leaf from drama and theatre. The findings revealed that playtext and play performance could serve as leeway for conflict management and resolution. This study explores the theoretical basement and practical adoption of drama and dramatic techniques and theatre in conflict resolution, management and transformation through play performance. The paper concludes that drama has the potential to open insight and avenue for conflict management and resolution.

Keywords: Community, Advancement, Element, Endeavour and Resolution

Background: Conceptualizing Conflict

Nigeria as a country is endowed with numerous differences like ethnic, cultural and social differences. But one of the major challenges bedeviling Nigerian society is the inability to manage and harness these differences for adequate development and advancement. These differences, according to Ernest Emenyonu, "...when properly harnessed, would engender a sense of oneness in the country"

(45). On the contrary, it is these differences that have caused the country to face different forms of conflict and wars. There is no effort to understand these differences for the growth of the nation, rather planting the cord of discord. In line with this, Onigu Otite argues that: "Conflict is usually caused when people in a community begin to pursue divergent interests, goals and aspirations" (154). It implies that conflict can never be swept out of human lives because there are interests in human existence. Rather, its management should be the ultimate concern of man if we must live together. Emeka Ofora opines that: "The expression of culture and observance of tradition in human society sometimes creates conflict or disagreement among people or groups" (168). Because conflict is natural with man as long as there is a clash of interests, there must be conflict. Otite goes further to posit that: "conflict is a social problem that can be addressed through the formulation of a workable strategy, competent enough to bring it under control" (154). Despite the clash of interests that causes conflict, the ability to understand that interest may be geared towards conflict management and resolution. Hence, the need for proactive measures in resolving and managing conflicts will go a long way in reducing conflict to the barest minimum. On this note, Ogu-Raphael rightly notes that: "...the government in an attempt to stem these conflicts has enlisted a number of measures, including workshops and conferences aimed at resolving the conflict situation..." (1). This position adduces that the government is trying in the area of conflict resolution. However, there is a need to invigorate the efforts for peaceful co-existence.

There is nowhere around the globe where conflict is considered a normal thing. World over, including Nigeria, conflict is considered to be abnormal. According to Adamu Buba, "Conflict considered in most parts of the world, including Nigeria, to be abnormal. Yet conflict is a part of life. Every plural society is bound to experience one or another form of conflict" (175). This explains why conflict can never be eradicated. As long as people continue to live in communality, there is bound to be conflict. Corroborating this, Oquaye places the meaning of conflict as: "a sequence of interactions between groups in society, between groups and governments, and between individuals" (18). Where people decide to live a lonely life, there may be no interpersonal conflict.

Above all, among the aforementioned positions about conflict, one thing that stands out is the transformation of conflict to a normal thing, "conflict can be a learning process because it creates an opportunity for people to know each other better and to live together by tolerating and accommodation each other's strength and weakness. People need to come together to find a common ground" (Buba 176). This can contribute to the growth of the Nigerian society. Again, Buba states that: "...conflict needs not to be portrayed as warfare or violence... is not conflict per se but the way one responds to it. Conflict needs not to follow a negative course. If constructively handled, it can become an agent of growth and development for all parties" (175).

However, this does not discard the definition of conflict rendered by Chukwuma Oparah, Gbenga Ajileye and Ngozi Eluchie that conflict: “means armed fighting, a war, and a struggle between opposing principles or aims, a clash of feelings or interests, to be at variance, clash, to struggle” (9). As far as there is a clash of aims or interests, there is bound to be conflict. Conflict as cited in Adamu Buba is, “a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the opponent aims to neutralize or eliminate their rivals” (175). Alder and Rodman in their efforts conceptualized conflict as “an expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceived incompatibility goals, scarce resources, and interference from other party in achieving their goals” (180) Correspondingly, Adegboyega Karim submits when he conceptualizes that conflict: “...remains the most permanent characteristics that makes humanity conceived that growth and development are predicted on conflict” (134). It implies that the growth and development is premised on conflict when it adequately managed. Whenever there is conflict in any community, there would be a clarion call for resolution and management, from there onwards it metamorphosis into conflict transformation and the end of it are growth and development. From the avalanche of definitions above, it is crystal clear therefore, that conflict is part of existence, that if well managed, it could lead to developmental strides. That, however, does not negate the fact that conflict has caused more harm among Nigerians than any good. Hence, the need to interrogate the menace and see how it can be controlled, managed and resolved for an egalitarian society.

Conflict Management and Resolution

Chukwuma Oparah, Gbenga Ajileye and Ngozi Eluchie see conflict as:

...some form of friction, disagreement, or discord arising within a group when the beliefs or actions of one or more members of the group are either resisted by or unacceptable to one or more members of another group. Conflict can arise between members of the same group, known as intragroup conflict, or it can occur between members of two or more groups, and involve violence, interpersonal discord, and psychological tension, known as intergroup conflict. (14)

If the above scholarly position amplified what conflict is, and how it can occur between the same and different groups, then, there is a need for conflict management, resolution and transformation. What is then conflict resolution and management and even transformation? Conflict resolution according to Ofora: “is the systematic way of using traditional means to mediate between two or more disagreeing people or groups in a given situation so that peace and order can be attained in the society”(168). However, to these researchers, conflict resolution is seen as a structured and organised means of mediating between two or more warring groups to accommodate peace and tranquility in a given society. Because if conflict is managed well,

the resultant effect is resolution of the conflict and the advancement of the community. That is why the management of conflict needs conscious attention towards its resolution. In line with this, Bubaposis states that: “conflict resolution, transformation and management need to be handled with utmost care” (178).

Owing to this assertion, there is a need to go into management and resolution of conflict for smooth running of the society because, “if conflict is managed, its escalation can be avoided. We can maintain the respect for life and property...”(176). In the same vein, Adegboyega Karim succinctly states that: “Conflict resolution is essentially aimed at intervention to change or facilitate the course of a conflict” (135).

Hence, conflict resolution can be seen as reconciliation. Resolution therefore, can be deduced as making peace between the contending communities or societies. It is in the same vein conceptualized as: “... the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict and retribution” (Oparah, Ajileye and Eluchie 57). Any attempt to settle or make peace between two opposing societies, then one is seen as being engaged in conflict resolution.

Theatre and Drama Approaches to Conflict Transformation

This subheading examines the theoretical pedestals and concrete use of drama and theatre in conflict resolution and conflict transformation. This part presupposes that drama has the potential to open up insights and avenues for understanding of the roles of drama in conflict transformation. Corroborating this, Thomas Arendshorst succinctly captures it thus: “... through drama, one can readily approach the precise problems that can lock people in conflict – intolerance, inability to perceive an adversary’s point of view, and the blindness to one’s contributions to antagonism”(1). This is apt because drama and theatre are out to mirror the society. They pick their raw materials from the society re-cook it and resend the message to the society. Therefore, coming to a theatre performance to watch a production, can go a long way in the amelioration of the avalanche of problems outlined by Arendshorst above. He equally opines that: “Well-established theory provides the foundation for the development of drama in conflict transformation” (10).

Drama consequently, has numerous roles to play in the society as Augusto Boal submits that: “theatre is the first human invention and also the invention which paves the way for all other inventions and discoveries” (Boal 2), and that theatre permits us to discern ourselves and by so doing, it enables us to: “discover what is not and imagine what we could become” (Boal 2). Peter Emeka Aniago submits that: “drama provides an existing forum for dissecting societal ills and problems with the ultimate aim of finding solutions” (285). He further avers thus:

Hence playwrights use drama as a medium of re-enacting some prevailing realities in the society in a bid to instigate public debates which are aimed at creating the fore for mind-rubbing, which in turn,

will generate robust awareness amongst the populace in order to trigger positive communal quests for solutions to varied societal maladies and anomalies (285).

Substantiating this, Emmanuel Ebo posits that:

Drama reflects one or more of the intense socio-political, economic, cultural and ideological travails and struggles of the society as seen through the microscope of playwrights, thus showing the class power structure that shape everyday lives... one can conclude that the playwright has shown the efficiency and potentials of drama. (116)

Alex Asigbo argues in favour of the playwright thus: “He serves as the memory of men and watchdog of the communal ethos and in fact remains bulwark and last bastion of defense against tyrants and deviants who often seduce the world with illusions of grandeur” (11). The avalanche positions on the roles of drama in the society quoted from different scholars above do not nullify the negative perceptions people have about drama and theatre as aptly captured by Ogu-Raphael. He looks at these acuties about theatre: “has never received any considerable measure of attention from government and its agencies... it is considered as an ‘unserious business’ and a ‘time waster’, therefore not capable of engendering development...it is difficult to conceive of it as capable of generating any form of development, both for the individual and the society” (5). But now, it is glad to note that these perceptions are beginning to change dramatically about theatre and what positive impact the theatre has on the society. He notes that:

...the functions and manifestation of the theatre in our society today, has taken a very radical dimension, such that the entertainment value has received some kind of de-emphasis. Its role now is to serve a more constructive purpose: one that will contribute to social and revolutionary change in the society. (Ogu-Raphael 5)

This is true about the perception of both the individual and the government about the theatre in our society today. The theatre is seen as an agent of social change. That the theatre is capable of impacting positively to the growth of the society: “One of the agents of socio-political change is drama/theatre. Drama is the most economical mode of experience, which conveys an idea that can be accepted as true. Drama’s impact is also direct and more immediate than other forms of expression” (Obuh 138). Perhaps, this is one of the major reasons why both governmental and non-governmental agencies and organisations have adopted dramatic means to ameliorate and quench the numerous problems like conflict, bedeviling the Nigerian society. Ogu-Raphael on this, emphasizes that: “The functionality of the theatre is no longer in doubt, as many people have come to realize the potency of the theatre in development. It has the power to influence thought and opinion and can serve as a popular and effective means of political propagation, economic empowerment and culture diffusion” (5). And, supporting this point, Zulu Sofola says it is the: “medium

through which the soul of man reaches out beyond itself to transform” (2). Premised on this, the positive roles of theatre and drama in the society can go on and on, in fact it is endless.

Performance management is one of the core practices of theatre professionalism in the world. There is no doubt about it, as the director, choreographer and theatre manager plans his production he puts the management and control of the environment and venue on the front burner. It has been argued that both human beings and equipment in the performance arena clash at times. That is why human being as an integral component of the performance needs to be controlled to avoid conflict in the performance venue.

This is explicit from the opening of Femi Osofisan’s *Morountodun*. As the play opens, we see conspicuously the efforts by the director to manage and resolve conflict that could have marred the production process. The role of the director cannot be swept under the carpet in terms of managing the actors and actresses on set. This prowess of the director can be copied for the management and resolution of conflict outside the theatre environment. This is not only found with the theatre director, this can be found virtually, in every compartment of the play production processes. For instance, the light manager is in the lighting booth to avert conflict among the various components of the dimer board, audio mixer, video console, etcetera.

This is applicable to the theatre manager. The theatre manager manages the house, the box office and everyone who is coming to the theatre as an audience. , it is obvious that they manage the aforementioned units to avoid conflict. The same thing is applicable to costume and make-up. If these areas are not managed well, they may conflict between the actor’s role and the costume they putting on. If the costumier/make-up artist is not there to manage this aspect of the production, it may go a long way to creating conflict between two or more actors and actresses on set.

Conflict Resolution through Playtext and Play Performance

From the foregoing, it becomes apparently clear that the position and responsibility of drama and performance in this modern era has gone beyond mere entertainment, information and education, to assume more challenging roles of helping to identify the numerous challenges facing man and the possible means of quashing these problems. These researchers are of the opinion that the theatre as an alternative means to conflict resolution employs the democratic process in conflict mediation and transformation. The study therefore opines that the theatre/drama in performance has the potency to utilize the abundant theatricalities and total theatre aesthetic components of music, dance, song in conflict management, resolution and transformation. Theatre, therefore, stands for conscientisation as Mloma aptly captures it when he posits that:

Indeed to empower the common man with a critical consciousness crucial to the struggle against forces responsible for his poverty. It is

an attempt to enable the masses to break free from the culture of silence imposed on them and re-awaken or strengthen their latent culture of resistance and struggle which needs to be part of the process to bring about their development. (67)

Hence, the theatre and drama can function as a cohesive force that will relate the individuals to groups towards a collective positive attitude that will engender peace and development. Put succinctly that the duo in performances will be used to stimulate the consciousness and awareness among contending individuals or groups to a point of realisation that lasting solutions to their challenges can be attained through amiable dialogue, rational understanding and intelligent belief in the individuals and groups engaged in conflict. Concisely put by Paulo Freire that the theatre: “can bring the community together, building community cohesiveness, raising important issues... creating a forum for discussion of these problems and stimulating group action” (14). The aforementioned is hinged on the willingness of the people to come together and find a permanent solution to the issue of conflict in the Nigerian society.

Even though the manager takes care of the commercial aspect of the theatre performance, the process of play production involves a group of people: artists, technicians, designers, dancers, choreographers and others. Hence, there is important need for the control and management of these persons in the processes of play production to avoid clashes and conflicts. Perhaps, that may be the essence of the director being the ‘controller-general’ of the production progression.

Again, it is a known fact that of all forms of management, the management of human beings is the most difficult, this is because of the peculiarity of man in terms of behaviour, idiosyncrasies and attitude. That is the reason why Chris Nwamuo lent his voice to the nature of human beings in terms of audience engineering. To him, audience engineering involves man, and man engineering is the most difficult engineering. Of all the engineering – chemical engineering, building engineering, civil engineering, audience engineering is the most difficult. He reiterates thus: “Of all the other kinds of engineering, namely, civil, chemical, mechanical, electrical, highway or industrial engineering, none is as complex, as demanding, as compelling, as gruesome and in the end as unappreciated as audience engineering” (Nwamuo, 2).

When you have been able to bring the audience to the theatre, you will need what Effiong Johnson conceives as the audiences’ interest: “The people, who come to the theatre, show therefore that they have need. They choose to pay to have their need met. They may not be able to describe the apparatus with which their needs would be met, but they seem certain that they would get their money’s worth” (192). Satisfying this interest of the audience, is again away for the director and the theatre manager to avoid conflict among the parties involved in the theatre business. Hence a pointer towards conflict management and resolution.

More so, the director’s motive in the plotting of actors, props and others on set is geared towards conflict management. For instance, the hugger-mugger of

movements between two characters on stage, the scheming of movements between two or more props on set, are geared towards avoiding clashes and conflicts between two or more actors on set. If such a notion can be applied, the reality of conflict management outside the theatre realm is assured. When the relationship between two or more conflicting parties is given a clear definition, then, there would not be any need for conflict or clashes among them. We make bold to uphold this opinion that the director being in charge of production is to prevent and manage conflicts or clashes whenever they arise. However, the director's piloting and huggermugger of actors, props, light, costume and others on set is highly crucial to the advancement of the performance. The idea behind the plotting of all these things is to avoid conflicts and clashes between a group of actors and actresses or individual actors and groups between a group of actors and props and between a group of props and props.

The dialogues or exchanges between a group of actors and individuals are equally managed to avoid clashes and conflicts. The dialogue is intended to avoid conflict. For example, no duo actors are expected to talk at the same time on set, and if they must talk at the same time, the dialogues must be structured and organized so well that there will not be a cacophony of noise, which is the conflict or clash we talk about. Their speaking together at the same time may be for some aesthetic purposes and dramatic effects, if not there would be conflict on set. To avoid conflict, therefore, the director tries as much as possible to place them and structure their dialoguing to avoid clashes.

Conflict is essential in life as it gives birth to social change. It may be for good or bad, just like deviance which results in an effect that questions the status quo. A deviant may apply wrong ways to achieve something good for the society. What is important is the end brought, not the means. In this light, we will examine the Emeka Nwabueze's *Dragon's Funeral* and Emmy Idegu's *Six and Half a Dozento* to see how conflict was resolved and if the deviant happens to give birth to a social change with his/her actions.

Play Synopsis

The play is gender sensitive. Adaugo (The deviant) gathers the women to question the act of taxing them in the community in which Chief Okeugo is forced into by the attitude of his fellow Warrant Chiefs, who file a report against him. Adaugo conscientises the women for them to see the need to reject the white oppression of the women through imposition of tax on them, the women, farm produce and live stocks. This is met with varied husbands' reactions and resistance to this quest. The height of the abnormalities done by the colonial ruler through the warrant chief is when Emeruwa, a primary school teacher meets Adaugo and tries to force her to obey the instruction of the government and Chief Okeugo, the women descend on him and spark off to the palace, as the chief escapes, they move to the district officer's office and get their desired results.

Play Analysis

The conflict in the play was sparked off when the District Officer (Cook) invited the chiefs and imposed laws on them without hearing their own opinion about it. This is seen in the play thus:

Cook: There will, therefore, be a new method of taxation ... I want you to bring to me, as soon as possible, a complete list of all the adults in your community – whether male or female and a complete listing of their income.

Nduka: Ndi-Eze, the District officer wants you to go and obtain the population of the adults in your communities because both men and women will be taxed to pay ... (39 - 40)

This did not go down well with some chiefs because it is against their tradition and the District Officer did not seek their consent but mandated them to do it, against their will even though it was welcomed by Idike who sees no issue with that since he is to gain from the exploit. Hear him thus:

IDIKE: We should count everybody. If possible, we should even count children. The more people we count the more tax money we collect. We should insist that we should be allowed to collect the tax ourselves. In that case, we stand to benefit from it because he who blows the horn also wipes his mouth. (49)

This interest was enough to cause conflict. It is clear here that Chief Idike is only interested in what he stands to gain and not the welfare of his people. Chief Okeugo who stood his ground not to obey the District Officer was reported by his fellow warrant chiefs to Cook which made him shift his ground as he narrated to Emeruwa.

OKEUGO: I don't know what this world is coming to? What evil has the white man brought in this land? That a man who calls himself a titled elder would spit out saliva and suck it again. I invited them to this palace and they carried the corpse of themselves and came here. We decided that it was an abomination to count people. But I now hear that they have complained to the District Officer that they could have complied if I hadn't incited them to disobey him. So, teacher that is why I've called you. I want you to go and do the counting today, not tomorrow. Bring on the result as soon as you finish. If the full moon did not kill me, the half moon cannot harm me. (60)

On this ground, Emeruwa sets out to accomplish the request of the king. While the women are angry over the decision to tax them. This on its own is the clash of interests that brings about conflict which is what we are gradually to in the play. Emeruwa steps into Adaugo's wrong foot and tries to intimidate her which blows up the angry women who dealt with him after they exchanged words:

EMERUWA: whom do you call a vulture? (Emeruwa raises his hand to hit Adaugo...)

ADAUGO: (To the women) Don't help me. I will deal with him. Go to the market and call the other women. Nothing will stop us now. (...The other women join in the attack, Emeruwa is brought to the ground...). (69)

The anger of the women was first tested by the Innocent primary school teacher who was working under the directives of the government and the chief. Adaugo and the women set off to the palace and discover that the king had escaped. Then moved to the district officer's office to demand for the dragon (Chief Okeugo) in order to give him a funeral. She explains that:

Adaugo:We are peaceful people. We could have liked to deal with him, but we can take another route to achieve our aim. His cap constitutes his authority. Send us his cap to celebrate his funeral. That is the only thing that will bring peace in this land. (75)

Nduka, the secretary to Mr. Cooks (Do) brings Chief Okeugo's cap and staff of office to the women. Adaugo breaks it, they torn the cap into pieces and did a funeral rite for the Chief. But the women did not stop at this. The conflict is resolved as the women demand for exclusion from taxation through Adeugo thus:

ADAUGO: We are simple people but not simpletons. Our cause is not yet fulfilled. We know the difference between victory and success. Go back and tell the District Officer to declare in writing that women will never be taxed, that the counting of people and farm products should stop immediately. Tell him to write down that forced labour should stop, and that women should be consulted before any decision affecting them is concluded. Let him write them down so we can preserve it as an agreement between the government and us.

Their request was meant with a speedy confirmation which the women rejoiced over because Cook could not stand the women at all. The women's interest here was met which serves as a pointer to how possibly conflict can be resolved with the common provision of the parties' needs. This is the playwright's simple ways of nipping the issues of conflict between the women and the Chief in the bud. If this is taken into consideration, it will go a long way in quashing conflict from our existence or managing conflict.

Conclusion

From the content of the play analyzed above, it is apparently clear that drama as in playtext and in performance have an effective means of ameliorating avalanche of conflicts facing the Nigeriansociety. Apparently, conflict and the means of managing it is one of such challenges bedeviling the Nigerian society. The concerns of all a sundry is, how do we manage or control conflict in the present Nigerian society.

The concern of this researcher therefore, is looking at how the playwright tries to manage the conflict between the women and elders and the white man, borrow a leaf from there towards the amelioration of conflict in the Nigerian society. This obviously may serve as a panacea to the challenge of conflict management and resolution.

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