

Police Brutality in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

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Abstract:

Police brutality is a universal phenomenon. It is a world issue that is discussed among the comity of nations. Police are meant to be friendly and polite in their civil activities to individuals in the society but rather the reverse is the case. They are supposedly ought to maintain laws and orders, protect the citizens and promote good governance through various civil duties to the society. Previous studies have largely examined police brutality from points of view of print media, social media, literary texts, histories, religions and journalistic approaches to the neglect of its deeper examination from stand-up comedy point of view. Therefore, this article exams how stand-up comedy is used to lampoon police brutality in Nigeria to create moral sanity among the police, and, at the same time, reveals better way of which police could have humane relationship in their dealing with civilians. The comedy also reveals modalities of how civilians are killed, injured, tortured, shot, raped, extorted, imprisoned, accused, and unlawfully arrested the police. Stand-up comedy performances of Godwin Komone whose stage name is Gordon is used for analysis of this article. Performance theory of Schechner is used to analyse the data. Data are subjected to performance analysis.

Keywords: police, brutality, stand-up comedy, victims, performance

Introduction

Police brutality is a global phenomenon. It has caused a great loss of lives of the affected victims while others are badly injured through excessive use of physical violence of the police (Swaine and McMarthy, 2015; Adekunle 2017: 76). Alang, McAlpine, McCreedy, and Hardeman (2017) reveal police brutality as a factor that increases high mortality rates, psychological depressions, physiological deformity, incarceration, racial segregation, and funeral bills that cause financial constrain. Bandes (1999: 1276) avers that it involves actions by the police that go beyond simple errors and are carried out with deliberate ill intent, aimed at dehumanizing and humiliating their target. Bandes see the inordinate behaviour of police as man's inhumanity to man. Chancey and Robertson (2013: 480-505) observe police brutality as a racial onslaught against the Blacks in the United States of America during slavery era and modern-days. He views it as an injustice to the well-being of the black race. This

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means that Black lives matter. On the other hand, Kahn and Motamed (2016: 403-411) affirms police violence as white phenotypic racial stereotypicality. It is a way of preserving white culture that shows white supremacy over other races, especially over the Blacks.

The concept of stand-up comedy entails a live performance on stage, presented before an immediate audience. It embodies a portrayal of life through dialogue and action (Oripeloye, 2017: 49). In African context, it serves as a medium to reconstruct and perpetuate historical myths, bridging the past with the contemporary world and ritual practices (Adekunle, 2017: 50). To Adekunle (2020: 1), stand-up is a contemporary live theatre. He reveals stand-up comedy as actual realities of our world. Adekunle (2022: 80) reveals stand-up as act of religious satire and linguistic dexterity. Stand-up comedy is gender sensitive performance (Adekunle, 2021: 15-16). It is a social satire of homosexuality (Adekunle, 2021: 8-9). Jackson (2011: 4) asserts that within a pan-African framework, stand-up comedy encompasses a wide range of cultural activities, from religious rituals to large-scale carnivals and children's circle games. This underlines how stand-up comedy in Africa encapsulates historical past, present, and time to come in all areas of African experience. Furthermore, comedy's origins can be traced back to the Greco-Roman religious worship of deities like Dionysus, signifying an evolution (Dasylyva, 2004: 4). The emergence of comedy in Medieval Europe is tied to Christi Corpus Feast of Christian mystery era. (Dasylyva, 2004; Britannica, 2012; Adekunle, 2017). This dramatic form involves processions, open-air settings, symbolic and episodic actions, dialogue, audience participation, concealment, songs, music, dance, impersonation, and various spectacles (Ogundeji, 2003; Adekunle, 2021). The dramatic form characterizes these performing elements as fictional aimed at entertainment (Schechner, 2012: xv).

On a different note, Brodie reveals stand-up performance as a discourse that encourages reactions, participation, and engagement from the audience (2008: 55). Brodie perceives it as reflecting sociological occurrences. Nwankwo views stand-up performance as an element of a rapidly universalized world with diverse intercultural interactions (2014: 1). Stand-up show is also likened to classic folk genres like legends, riddles, jokes, and more. It also takes on polemic and rhetorical forms (Mintz 1985, Mintz 1998; Zolten 1993). Auslander (1992: 196) regards stand-up activity as a unique post-contemporary show meant for particular culture and generation. The sociological realities and cultural contexts play crucial roles in assessing stand-up show within a community. According to Adekunle (2014: 96), stand-up comedy serves as both laughable relief and a form of mockery targeting cultural and socio-economic issues. The evolution of stand-up humor is shaped by dynamic interplay of time,

space, and cultural interactions among countries. This underscores the global nature of stand-up comedy, governed by social discussions that engage performers and audience members alike. The comedic techniques, narratives, mimicry, song enactments, and therapeutic elements within stand-up comedy draw heavily from the experience of comedians, rooted in their societal perspectives of prevalent occurrences (Adekunle, 2017: 25).

Despite scholars emphasizing the features and universal significance of stand-up joke, its comedic function is largely overlooked. Hence, the article reveals stand-up comedy as a modern form of live show that deeply reveals sociological realities of police brutality against societal well-being. Additionally, the stand-up comedy also reveals modalities of how civilians are killed, injured, tortured, shot, raped, extorted, imprisoned, accused, and unlawfully arrested the police. It also investigates how the police and civilians should co-exist without rancour.

Theoretical framework

Schechner's contribution to the field of theatre and performance studies is highly significant (Smith, 2010). Richard Schechner's performance theory, as expounded by the scholar himself, underscores the social and cultural dimensions of performance, emphasizing its capacity to influence and reshape individual and collective identities (Schechner, 1985). According to Schechner, performance extends well beyond conventional theatrical settings and permeates everyday life, encompassing rituals, ceremonies, and various public displays (Jones, 2013). In this critical examination, we aim to scrutinize the fundamental concepts and principles of Schechner's performance theory and explore its implications for comprehending performance across diverse contexts (Brown, 2018).

A central tenet within Schechner's performance theory is the idea of performance as a social process, wherein it is not merely a form of representation but a dynamic engagement with the social, cultural, and political facets of existence (Smith, 2010). Schechner contends that performances serve as a means to enact and negotiate social norms, values, and ideologies, whether through rituals, religious observances, political demonstrations, or even routine activities (Schechner, 1985). They function as a channel for conveying and reinforcing collective beliefs, behaviors, and expressions (Jones, 2013).

Another pivotal element of Schechner's performance theory is the concept of "restored behavior" (Brown, 2018). Schechner posits that performance entails the transformation of the mundane into the extraordinary, enabling individuals and communities to transcend their everyday experiences and connect with deeper dimensions of their

existence (Smith, 2010). Through the process of restored behavior, performance engenders a sense of liminality, temporarily suspending societal norms and encouraging experimentation and exploration (Schechner, 1985). This phenomenon is evident in various forms of performance, including traditional theatre, where actors and audiences converge in a shared, collective space to explore novel possibilities (Jones, 2013).

In summary, Schechner's performance theory provides invaluable insights into the nature and significance of performance within social and cultural contexts (Brown, 2018). By accentuating performance as a social process and highlighting the transformative potential of restored behavior, Schechner expands the conventional boundaries of performance beyond traditional theatrical frameworks (Smith, 2010). His ideas prompt a reevaluation of how performances both shape and are shaped by the societies in which they occur (Schechner, 1985). Ultimately, Schechner's performance theory serves as a valuable analytical tool for interpreting performance in a variety of contexts, shedding light on the intricate interplay between performance, culture, and society (Jones, 2013).

Methodology

Live recordings videos of stand-up comedy performances of Godwin Komone (Gordon) were used for analysis of this article. They are purposively selected based on nature of performances that theatrically demonstrated police brutality, extortion, and other forms of injurious actions that subjugated civilians' human rights. Data were subjected to performance analysis.

Results and Discussion

Collaborative Theatre Showcase: Basket Mouth and Klint De Drunk's Interaction with Audience.

Basket Mouth and Klint De Drunk's interaction with audience theatrically display police brutality in an ill-mannered way that showcases how Nigerian police maltreated civilians. Many civilians have been killed, injured, tortured, shot, raped, extorted, imprisoned, accused, and unlawfully arrested by the police as narrated in the excerpts below. The stand-up comedian, Klint De Drunk, uses the comic to erase insanity of fears created by police force in the hearts of the civilians. He uses his performance to uphold moral value, promote unity, and cohabitation between the police and the civilians. Besides, he uses stand-up comedy to purge the police from their excesses, and, at the same time, call for mutual understanding and respect between two parties. He believes that

the primary duty of police, military and other personnel in paramilitary roles is to protect and treat the civilians with all civility.

You see, the slaps delivered by the Police and the Military are distinctly diverse. There's no commonality between them. Allow me to provide an illustration to clarify my point. [Basket Mouth, another comedian, is invited on stage for a collaborative performance. Klint De Drunk assumes the role of a civilian, while Basket Mouth portrays another civilian. The two comedians aim to depict how civilians interact during disagreements]. Let me warn you now that if you are not careful, I will take life out of you.

Basket Mouth: Don't be stupid [he smacks Klint De Drunk on the face].

Klint De Drunk: You smacked my face? Today, I will show you who I am. In fact, you are like a ... [He spits at Basket Mouth. Basket Mouth and Klint De Drunk engage in a fight with each as civilians].

Basket Mouth: I will you on the face now!

[Following the initial skit, Klint De Drunk addresses the spectators, setting stage for the subsequent act. He adopts the persona of a private citizen, while Basket Mouth assumes the role of a police officer].

Klint De Drunk: Let's consider the interaction between a civilian and a police officer. When a police officer slaps you, what you immediately notice is the uniform, his official role, and his responsibilities towards society. Allow me to demonstrate this for you. [Both comedians continue the skit] I am aware that you are a senior police officer (DPO). I will show you who I am. I'll strip you off your police uniform. You're a very stupid.

Basket Mouth: You are very rude! [He slaps Klint De Drunk on the face. Immediately, he becomes sober and explains his offense apologetically to Basket Mouth, the uniform man].

Klint De Drunk: [Reacting and explaining] Officer, the Police is your friend. I respect you. Look, let me show you, the boy came from here... [He points].

Basket Mouth: [Resolving] I'm not your friend. If I were your friend, you wouldn't speak to me like that. Now, come with me to the station [police station]. How much money do you have on you?

Audience: Hahaha... [Laughter]

[After the conclusion of the second skit, Klint De Drunk addresses the audience again, introducing the next act which highlights the inhumane interaction between civilians and Mobile Police in Nigerian society].

Klint De Drunk: [Speaking to the audience] Understand that Mobile Police officers are known for doing finger press-ups. Their slaps come without any preamble, without considering their position, and it leads straight to explanation. This is the norm. Let me demonstrate it for you (Both comedians resume the performance). Let me show you, I'll talk to the Inspector General. You'll be dismissed. You're foolish. There's nothing you can do. If you doubt it, try me.

Basket Mouth: Tasalala [He slaps Klint De Drunk on the face].

Klint De Drunk: [Shaking and crying before Basket Mouth, the Mobile Police, to recount the events leading to his ordeal]. The boy came out from here, and when he was coming, I didn't see him. You should have asked me at least twice. [After this third skit, Klint De Drunk transitions to addressing the audience once again, preparing them for the fourth and final skit to come. This portion demonstrates how the Military interacts with civilians in an authoritarian manner within the Nigerian society].

Klint De Drunk: [Speaking to the audience] You know, Mobile Police personnel conduct finger press-ups. Their slap doesn't come with any preamble;

they go directly to explaining. Let me demonstrate (Both comedians resume the act). Let me show you, I'll talk to the Inspector General. They'll transfer you. You're foolish. There's nothing you can do. If you doubt it, try me.

Basket Mouth: Tasalala [He slaps Klint De Drunk on the face].

Klint De Drunk: [Shaking and crying before Basket Mouth, the Mobile Police, to recount the events leading to his ordeal]. The boy came out from here, and when he was coming, I didn't see him. You should have asked me at least twice. [After this third skit, Klint De Drunk transitions to addressing the audience once again, preparing them for the fourth and final skit to come. This portion demonstrates how the Military interacts with civilians in an authoritarian manner within the Nigerian society].

In the aforementioned performance, Klint De Drunk humorously portrays the mistreatment of civilians by Nigerian security personnel. The interactions lack proper human relations and often lead to civilians being subjected to brutality, molestation, and even fatalities. These instances of brutality have caused immense suffering and distress among civilians, with some cases involving rape. The performance highlights the rampant corruption within the Nigeria Police Force. For instance, a police officer exploits the situation by openly demanding money from the civilian, posing the question, "How much do you have on you?" This mirrors the actions of some corrupt officers who exploit civilians for personal gain, sometimes even resorting to threats and detainment. Besides, "the slap" in performance represents brutality, dehumanization, and callousness against the civilians. This shows that the civilians are helpless in the face of oppression and suppression.

Similarly, the relationship between civilians and Mobile Police and the military is fraught with severity and danger. This dynamic is analogous to a cat-and-mouse relationship, as shown in the performance where security personnel mistreat civilians without affording them a fair chance to explain themselves. An example is when the soldier orders Klint De Drunk, a civilian, to come closer and account for his behavior. Klint De Drunk approaches with fear, stuttering and using "sir" repeatedly to express his apprehension. Here, "sir" is used metaphorically to denote "fear". Moreover, the Nigerian military and police uniforms symbolize both "fear and respect". While they evoke fear due to instances of brutality, they also command respect because of their role as national protectors. The uniformed men use their uniforms and position to commit atrocities against humanity. The "uniformed men" also means "dictatorship" and "tyranny" in the face of freedom of expression and association.

Conversely, civilians are expected to treat each other with courtesy and avoid callous behavior. The performance satirizes individuals who become agitated over trivial matters and engage in conflicts with their neighbors, epitomized by the line "You slap me? I will deal with you

today. You are, in short... (He spits on Basket Mouth. Both Klint De Drunk and Basket Mouth engage in a quarrel as civilians)”. These minor issues often arise from the pervasive economic challenges in the nation. The comedian underscores the need for addressing societal challenges without causing harm to others.

A crucial message conveyed is the importance of mutual understanding and respect within society, whether among civilians or between security personnel and civilians. The civilian population should hold respect for the “security forces” responsible for safeguarding lives and property. Acknowledging them in public matters and viewing them as allies rather than adversaries is vital. As Ekemenah (2012: 8) points out, Nigeria's issues extend beyond poverty, corruption, and politics; they encompass a disregard for homogeneity and a lack of mutual respect. Upholding the principle of mutual respect is paramount.

In conclusion, the solo and duet performances of the stand-up comedians skillfully blend humor with social commentary. They provoke laughter from the audience while shedding light on prevalent societal problems. Moreover, the performances aim to instill moral sensibility, aligning with one of the key functions of theatre and drama.

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