

‘Women in Men’s World’: A Focus on the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre of Nigeria

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Abstract

Studies of the professional travelling theatre in Nigeria have always focused on theatre troupes owned by men, thereby giving the impression that there were no troupes owned by women. The main objective of this paper is to identify factors responsible for the exclusion of women from Nigerian theatre studies, especially the female troupe leaders such as Adunni Oluwole, Funmilayo Ranco, and Mojishola Martins. This will be done through a comparative evaluation of their theatre works with that of their male counterparts with a view to establishing gender issues in the modus operandi of men and women theatre. The study reveals a dichotomy in men and women’s theatre and how women challenged those dichotomies with different levels of success. Though the focus of this paper is on female travelling theatre leaders, other categories of women who worked in the theatre of that period will also be covered. The study of the various roles and status of these women demonstrates what it means to live and work as a theatre practitioner in a man’s world. The paper ultimately challenges the exclusion of these women from theatre studies in Nigeria.

KEY WORDS

Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, Women in Theatre, Nigerian Theatre Studies, female actor-managers, pioneer theatre women.

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INTRODUCTION: SOME HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL YORUBA TRAVELLING THEATRE.

The first contact between Nigeria and Europe took place in 1472 when some Portuguese navigators arrived on the coast of Nigeria. Whether connected or unconnected with that discovery, from 16th to 18th centuries, millions of Nigerians were forcefully taken away to the Americas in what is known in history as ‘The Atlantic Slave Trade’ whose eventual abolition began in 1807, and some of the ex-slaves were repatriated to Africa. This historical hindsight is important because the freed slaves eventually became very important to the study of the development of theatre in Nigeria. They are instrumental to the development of western-style of performance in Nigeria.

In the 1850s, the British established presence in Lagos and, between 1861 – 1914, consolidated power over the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, and established ‘Indirect Rule’. The arrival of foreigners and establishment of schools and churches brought Nigerians in contact with Western culture that from this point would exist side by side with indigenous culture. This plurality was exemplified in the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, a theatre form that developed at the time and was characterised by a combination of traditional and modern Western performance paradigms. Social and political impact of the meeting with foreign cultures is reflected both in the content and modus operandi of the professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre Companies.

1960: Nigeria won her independence from the British and a coalition government was formed, led by Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. This development is to spark off a chain of political and ethnic conflicts that will endure through time and long after the British are gone. Thus in 1962-63 a controversial census was conducted in the country that helped to deepen the threatened peace in the regions, and on January 1966 a coup took the life of Balewa and installed Major-General Johnson Aguiyi Ironsi. July of the same year a counter-coup took the life of Aguiyi Ironsi and installed Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon. All these political instabilities spiraled out of control in 1967 when a full-blown civil war broke out in Nigeria and was crushed in 1970 in what was conveniently termed 'no victor no vanquished war'.

Considering the quantum of political and social experiences at that period, and the effort of Nigerian populace to make sense of it all, the professional travelling theatre can be seen as existing in the most dramatic period in the history of Nigeria, and captured it all live. This is why that theatre form, though now extinct, must remain indelible in Nigerian theatre studies and by extension Africa and the world, not just because of its aesthetic variety but because of its cultural and historical contents as well as its social and political role in the country.

THE PLACE OF THE PROFESSIONAL YORUBA TRAVELLING THEATRE IN NIGERIA

Theatre in Nigeria can conveniently be divided into three phases, viz; Traditional festival forms existed during the pre-colonial times, before the arrival of people from the outside world. These theatre forms did not exist on their own but were part of the periodic festivals and ceremonies in the indigenous communities that were usually linked to some religious observances and rituals. This form caters for the homogenous communities and their shared ancestry and aesthetic heritage, as well as serves their religious and social needs.

In the second phase are the liberal forms that developed during the Colonial times characterised by a combination of traditional and western performance paradigms. These forms reflect and catered for the changing societies. During this period, new cities were created triggering a rural-urban migration. There was a lot of foreign human and material presence. A whole new needs and experiences were created through western education, religion, medicine, political system and economic opportunities. The people needed to adapt to these numerous changes quickly. Adapting to these foreign exigencies also meant a separation from indigenous cultural practices. The fear of losing indigenous cultural identity partly accounted for the agitation for cultural revival and struggle for political independence that broke out later in this period. The professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre developed within this era and captures the tension and chaos of that period. This theatre form spans a period from the 1940s to late 1980s. Thus it was born within the colonial period, but it outlasted the period by a couple of decades, because of its popularity. It was gradually edged out by the advent of Film and the Home Video industry in the late 1980s, as well as the growing insecurity in the country. But the legacy that it left behind is yet to be adequately explored by theatre scholars and critics. This study is focused on this phase.

Literary dramatic forms occupy the third phase. It emerged towards the end of the colonial period and is more adequately modeled after modern western dramatic conventions, precisely because the practitioners were mainly products of western education. Postcolonial phase refers to the development of literary drama in the universities with its tendency towards adapting and adopting western theatre practices. The three major forms of theatre in the development of drama and theatre in Nigeria, therefore, are the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial forms. The present study is concerned with the colonial period theatre with focus on the professional Yoruba travelling theatre, and the objective is to investigate possible reasons why there are no records of women's contributions. This study is carried out through a comparative overview of the contents and forms of men and women's theatre output.

THE PROFESSIONAL YORUBA TRAVELLING THEATRE AS MEN'S WORLD

A study of the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre reveals the reason it qualifies to be dubbed “men’s world”. The very glaring truth, readily seen from the roll call of the companies and artists in that theatre form, is the near absence of women. Thus, the theatre is populated by men. Available documents and texts on the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre are all focused on male artists, such as Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, and Oyin Adejobi. In his study, Biodun Jeyifo is pleased to “discover that the travelling theatre movement, from its inception, has been extensively written about in the Nigerian daily newspapers and popular news magazines” (1984,205). He goes on to declare that, “This body of material constitutes quite an impressive source of secondary critical material on the movement”. Jeyifo makes this comment in his book, *The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria* (1984), which is one of the few books that have emerged on the subject. As ‘impressive’ as these secondary sources may be, for some inexplicable reasons, they did not pay attention to the theatre troupes headed by women. Jeyifo himself, though aware of two of these women, did not consider documenting them in his book on the Yoruba travelling theatre, and neither did other writers on the subject before him – Ulli Beier, Joel Adedeji, MJC Echeruo, Dapo Adelugba, Eburn Clark, etc; or even those who wrote after him – Tola Adeniyi, Karen Barber, and Remi Raji-Oyelade and his co-authors. While some of these critical materials are general studies of the travelling theatre, some are studies of individual artists. In all these studies, the same names come up, including the most frequent Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Moses Olaiya, and some others not so frequent – Jimoh Aliu, Lere Paimo, Ishola Ogunshola, and a few others. The question that drives this paper is why is the study of Yoruba Travelling Theatre always centred only on male artists?

A previous journal article by this writer, titled ‘Bridging the Gap in Nigerian Theatre Studies: Perspective on the Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre’, reveals three female theatre troupe leaders—Adunni Oluwole, Funmilayo Ranco and Mojishola Martins – whose contributions have been neglected by theatre scholars and critics. The current writing attempts to determine why these women have never formed part of Nigerian theatre studies. The study will underscore the points that made men’s theatre work more interesting to scholars. The main focus of this study is Funmilayo Ranco because she was the only woman out of the three, who had a sustained and successful theatre career as a theatre leader. Adunni Oluwole’s theatre leadership was short lived, as hinted earlier. On the other hand, Mojishola Martin’s Theatre barely took off. Though she is the only one of them still alive, and she confirmed to this researcher that she, in fact, had a theatre troupe, she declined to discuss it. Throughout the course of the research, no other person linked to that theatre was found – no troupe member and no fans. As these women’s theatre work was not documented, a reliance on existing literature would be futile. Consequently, the information used in this paper came mainly from oral interviews involving over fifty respondents who knew or worked with these women were conducted, authenticated and recorded in audio and video forms.

The Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, a theatre form involving human performers and towing a professional performance line, was developed by Hubert Ogunde in 1946. No sooner he began this unique theatre form that differs from the traditional mode and the pure operatic form of the early colonial era than other artists cashed in on its popularity. All these were men who have already developed their performance expertise through a lifetime participation in all forms of performances, beginning with traditional forms, and on to church and school performances in which they had played leading roles. The skills developed from these diverse sources were harnessed to develop an innovative form. At the beginning, women were not part of the troupes because at the time the phenomenon of the professional travelling theatre was a suspect and parents did not allow their children, especially the girls, to be part of it. There is need to define Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre to differentiate it from other forms of theatre that share some characteristics with it. Travelling Theatre or itinerant performances were usual in Africa, especially in the pre-colonial times. Traditional forms replicated in the Alarinjo masked performances were popular in the pre-colonial period in Yoruba Land. They, however, differ from Ogunde type of theatre by employing masked performers and commercially low

keyed. The Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, as introduced by Hubert Ogunde was performed by human actors, employed some techniques of modern commercial theatresuch as advertising, box-office and was dramatic in its presentation mode.

Because the form was more dramatic than operatic, there were clear female and male roles, but because of the absence of females, male actors had to perform female roles as well. Eburn Clark narrates how Ogunde, advertised for female dancers but received no response, until he advertised for female clerks. The advert for female clerks attracted far more responses than he needed. He employed them as clerks but turned them into dancers. Also, Abiodun DuroLadipo, the wife of one of the travelling theatre gurus, DuroLadipo, in an interview with this writer explained how her husband's theatre troupe managed the lack of female membership. She described how she had to costume males with oranges for breasts to enable them play female roles in DuroLadipo Theatre.

Later, polygamy helped to solve the problem when the theatre leaders' wives came into the business. Some of these women were not married for their talents, as some writers are quick to claim. Some of them had other jobs and their appearance in theatre was incidental, initially. This researcher was opportune to interview most of these actresses, who are still alive. The interviews revealed that while some of them such as Adeshewa Ogunde, Abiodun Duro Ladipo, Grace Adejobi and a few others, were evidently married for their talents in dancing, singing and acting; others such as Margret Adejobi, Idowu Philips and others came into it by chance. Both women's stories about how they joined their husband's theatre were the same. When a lead actress failed to turn up at a crucial moment, a very rampant situation at that precarious stage in the development of theatre in Nigeria, a wife of the troupe leader came to the rescue by taking up that role at that crucial dying minute. Such was the situation that brought both Margret OyinAdejobi and Idowu Philips into stage performance. Before she rescued her husband from an impending failed performance, Idowu Philips was a practicing nurse. And after that chance performance, she could not leave the theatre again because of how well she performed. She stated that some theatre leaders, particularly Hubert Ogunde, who watched that her performance were marvelled and told her husband to do what he could to retain her on stage. Again, some of these theatre leaders' wives were never performers. Many of DuroLadipo's wives did not do any meaningful performance.

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN IN THE PROFESSIONAL YORUBA TRAVELLING THEATRE

This section looks at the way and manner women made their contributions in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre that was dominated by men. Valentine James offers a pedestal for assessing women's contribution in development processes in developing countries. He states, The introduction of gender consideration into development planning in developing countries requires careful examination of the institutional arrangements: government policies, educational systems, cultural and religious norms, and the economic, political, social and judicial systems.

It is common knowledge that patriarchal societies in the developing countries have had their development pace determined by men. The economic fate of these societies has remained largely in the hands of a few powerful elite (men) (1999, p. 3).

Therefore it is men's world. But what happens to women in such a world? How do women fit into this world? James offers an insight into how economic condition is defined by gender role to the economic disadvantage of women. He states, 'Experience in many parts of the developing world indicates that when women are involved in wage labor economy, they encounter tremendous discrimination and lower wage rates' (1999, p.9).

This is a fact that has been captured in many writing world over. The life stories of the ten pioneering career women studied in Rebecca Abram's book, *Woman in a man's world: Pioneering Career Women of the Twentieth Century*, is one of such works that expose the prejudices against women's development and advancement in their chosen career. But this happens when a woman works in a business established and run by a man. The present work will show that women who endeavour to

establish their business escape low wages. The two categories of women in the professional travelling theatre under review represent the financial condition of women in workplace.

To begin with, the emergence of women in the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre was slow, limited and silent. This means that, initially, this theatre form was populated by men, and later women gradually began to appear. Despite the eventual emergence of women, the population of women in that theatre movement remained very low. A rough estimate will put the number of the travelling theatre troupes somewhere between two hundred and three hundred, but out of the lot only three were lead by women. Women emerged in this theatre form in two capacities – first as dancers and singers playing supporting roles in male theatre troupes, where they were obviously overworked and under paid; and second as theatre troupe leaders where they were in full control of their own finances. Those in the supporting roles were mostly wives of the troupe leaders and they constituted the larger female workforce. They include the wives of Hubert Ogunde; the wives of Duro Ladipo; the wives of Kola Ogunmola; the wives of Oyin Adejobi; the wives of Shola Ogunshola; the wife of Femi Philips (he was about the only troupe leader with one wife).

As has been noted earlier in this paper, the need for greater realism prompted the pioneer artists to scout for and lure women into their theatre. To do this, they had to battle with and outwit parents in order to engage their daughters to sing and dance with the troupes. The appearance of the girls on stage revived the enthusiasm of theatre goers and restored box-office glory. Thus, women started as dancers, singers and any other supporting role that attracted very little or no earning power. Having started, these women would naturally be expected to progress beyond the initial status of supporting artists and rise through the ranks, but, surprisingly that was not the case. Except three women who became troupe leaders, the vast majority of women in the Professional Yoruba travelling theatre maintained employees' status.

In this study of the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, therefore, women are categorized into three based on their principal role in the theatre. roles are categorised into three.., There are three major roles including leadership/directorship (actor-manager) role, supporting/cast (supernumerary) role and (surrogate actor-manager). The Leadership/Directorship role has its equivalent in the actor-manager role usually associated with male theatre leaders who are also the lead actors of their theatre troupe. The female troupe leaders/directors were also the founders, managers, directors and lead actors in their theatre troupes and there were three such women – Adunni Oluwole, Funmilayo Ranco and Mojishola Martins. These women founded and lead their professional theatre troupes with different levels of success. Funmilayo Ranco was the most successful and most popular of the three while Mojishola Martins was the least successful. As a matter of fact, her theatre hardly took off before marital pressures forced her to give it up.

The second category of women is the supernumeraries/employees. This refers to the women who worked in the troupes as singers, dancers and actresses such as Abiodun Duro-Ladipo, Ibisomi and Adeshewa Ogunde, Idowu Philips, Grace Oyin Adejobi and many more, many of whom were the wives of the iconic theatre leaders. The third category of women will be called surrogate actor-managers referring to the wives of the Actor-Managers who were groomed by their husbands and were expected to take over the leadership of the troupe. These include Abiodun DuroLadipo, Grace OyinAdejobi, Idowu Philips, AdeshewaOgunde and Dele Ogunmola (ObirinAsiko). Against all expectations, however, these women do not take over the business, for some reasons. Dele Ogunmola and AdeshewaOgunde died, but Grace OyinAdejobi, Abiodun DuroLadipo and Idowu Philips (now owns a video production studio) are still alive.

The life and work of the women in each category reflect what it means for a woman to live and work in a man's world. The sexist nature of the gendered work place is the same in

America's college cocktail bar, as captured in Spradley and Mann's ethnographic work, *The Cocktail Waitress: Woman's Work in a Man's World*, as elsewhere in the world including Nigeria. *Female theatre leaders/directors of the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre*. The fact that there was only one successful woman in the actor-manager cadre, is an indication of the tough conditions that brought the chance of women's leadership in theatre of that era to a near impossibility. The exceptional quality of these female theatre leaders is a further proof that to survive professionally a woman needs to be unusually tough. Rebecca Abrams could well be referring to these women when she states, 'Considering the range of obstacles that faced these women, it is not surprising to find that they had to have a great deal of determination and commitment to their professional lives' (xxvii). In addition to determination and commitment the female actor-managers of the professional Yoruba travelling theatre had physical strength and courage to dabble into theatre leadership at a time when the word 'boss' was not associated with female.

Adunni Oluwole (1905 -1957) is very important in this study because she was the first female theatre company leader in Nigeria, and though very little is known about her theatre, as her theatre was short-lived and she died before she could be documented, she remains a force to reckon with not just for being the first of her gender but also for her unique theatre form that remains unrivalled till date. Adunni Oluwole, a very versatile, innovative, strong and multitalented person was also a free spirit who engaged in actions and behaviours that were considered unfeminine. She was one of the very few female professional performers who made themselves available to the opera troupes in the late 19th century. She was the first of the very few women who ventured into politics. In an obituary publication on the *Sunday Times* of 24th November 1957, she was described as 'one of the greatest women Nigeria has ever seen' (p.7). She was a Human Rights Activist whose support for the labour force was well covered in national dailies, where it was narrated that during the 1945 general strike she supported and encouraged the striking workers with money and food even though she was not known to be rich (Olusanya, 1992, pp. 112).

MEN AND WOMEN OF THE PROFESSIONAL YORUBA TRAVELLING THEATRE

Through a comparative study of the theatre activities of men and women of the Professional Yoruba Travelling Theatre, this article will reveal the undercurrent responsible for the disparity that exists not only in the scale of work but also in the critical attention given to them. Consequently, close attention will be paid to the social, cultural and economic conditions under which these men and women did their work and the successes they achieved.

Institutional support

One of the privileges some of the male artists had was institutional support. It is important to note that without formal training in theatre available at that time, these travelling theatre practitioners were self-made artists. The first drama department in Nigeria, the School of Drama of the University of Ibadan, was established in 1962 with grant from the Rockefeller Foundation, and regular courses began in the 1963/64 academic session. This is about two decades after this form of theatre was evolved by Hubert Ogunde. The practitioners helped in kick-starting the then newly created School of Drama. This is particularly true about Kola Ogunmola, who was invited by the first Director of the school, Geoffrey Axworthy, as the first artist/student in residence (Adedeji and Ekwuazi, 1998, 50; Yerima 2005, 44). Since then it was one artist-in-residence after another, but not a woman among them because by the early 1960s Adunni Oluwole had died and Funmilayo Ranco had not started her theatre. One of the travelling theatre artists, Ayox Arishekola, informed this writer that he was invited to teach dance to the students of the department when Wole Soyinka was the Head of Department.

Institutional support did a lot for the travelling troupes. Adedeji and Ekwuazi (1998, 78) state that,

Institutional support has its own merits. Theatre managers always look up to this, especially because of its promise of external relations and connections. It is widely believed that it was through this kind of support that gave the DuroLadipo National Theatre its international status.

Institutional support did more than expose the troupes to international level; it raised the groups from their subsistent status to prosperity, influence and a force to reckon with politically and socially. It was a great advertisement for the troupes and attracted greater popularity, prosperity and power. They were sought after by institutions and even Governments, both state and Federal.

Experience on the job

Every youth loves to be part of performances, but it was only the males that were not held back from fulfilling that natural drive. Thus, existing work on the travelling theatre traces the beginning of the theatre career of these actor-managers to their participation in traditional performances and in school and church drama. The skills and training acquired through their lifelong participation in traditional performances had the greatest impact on their theatre modus operandi. Consequently, it is not surprising that it was men that started the travelling theatre and raised it to professional level. This is because the courage and experience required to achieve this resides with them.

On the other hand, both Adunni Oluwole and Funmilayo Ranco got their theatre training through participation in school drama. Oluwole's theatre experience began when she was a pupil at St John's Primary School, Aroloya (Olusanya, 1992, pp. 124). Ranco's theatre experience started when she was a pupil of Anglican Modern School, Ilesha where she participated in school's shows (Udengwu: 2014). Oluwole formed a successful but short lived amateur drama group in the early 1930s; and formed her professional theatre troupe called "The First Actress Party" in early 1950s.

It is obvious, from the foregoing, that Adunni Oluwole's theatre experience started before that of Hubert Ogunde and she became a theatre leader before him. However they both went professional around the same period – in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Her amateur theatre group disbanded in 1933, twelve years before Ogunde formed his own in 1945. Ranco quit boxing and wrestling in 1965 to pay full attention to her amateur theatre, "IrawoObokun Theatre". She went professional in 1967 and renamed her theatre "Lady Funmilayo Ranco International Theatre". The theatre ended as abruptly as her life in 1984.

Economic prospects

Men are the inheritors of family wealth and are empowered to make wealth of their own. DuroLadipo established the famous MbariMbayo Cultural Centre in Osogbo in his father's compound. Women, during the period under review, had limited economic prospects in traditional society as they were raised, primarily, to be home makers. Funmilayo Ranco's mother was not in support of her choice of career. She told this researcher that all she wanted was for her daughter to get married like every responsible girl. She did not watch any of Ranco's performances, though she heard a lot about them. On her own part, Adunni Oluwole lost the love and support of her closest and beloved sibling, her elder brother Olugbesan Oluwole because she refused to get married and settle down (Olunsanya, 1992). Thus the female actor-managers studied in this work, represent the few women in history who defied that cultural norm. They can be called rebels. They made their money independently. MajorieKeniston McIntosh (2009, 80) gives an insight into the social structure as it relates to male and female economic opportunities in Yorubaland. She explains,

Because men had an advantage in such areas as Western schooling, new types of employment, and the emerging political parties, they assumed the great majority of

formal leadership positions. Markets were among the few spaces in which women predominated numerically and where they exerted recognized control.

The power of the Yoruba market women, led by their leader, Iyaloja, is well known and captured in Wole Soyinka's play, *Death and the King's Horseman*. There is no such pride of place for women in theatre.

Mentorship

Mentorship plays a very big role in the life and work of an artist. Thus, the big successes of the men of the Professional travelling theatre were dependent on the mentorship they received. HubertOgunde, Kola Ogunmola and DuroLadipo had the fortune of having mentors in the person of UlliBeier, who promoted them to international status and introduced them into academic curriculum. This is particularly true of DuroLadipo as encapsulated by Raji-Oyelade, Olorunyomi and Ladipo (2008, p.10) thus,

DuroLadipo's rise to national stardom and international recognition began in 1963, the year Nigeria became a republican state. For the first time, the troupe moved out of Osogbo and Ibadan to perform in the capital city of Lagos; under Ulli Beier's direction, Ladipo's "Christmas Cantata" was staged at Nigerian National Museum at Onikan. In the same year, *Oba Ko So* was performed at the German Cultural Centre in Lagos. Initiated by UlliBeier and supported by the West German Ambassador Count PosadowskiWehner, the production was a rare and fateful exposure for the DuroLadipo National Troupe.

The authors state further that it was with great excitement that the Ambassador and other officials recommended a repeat performance of the play, in West Germany in 1964.

Funmilayo Ranco did perform in a few other African countries especially Ghana, where she had already made a name as a ring fighter. She had no mentor of any kind. She may have had some measure of support. Her troupe members remembered that one Alhaji donated a car to her so she would stop driving her company's wagon bus herself.

Polygamy was good for Business

Polygamy helped to stabilise the travelling theatre business. Ogundehad twelve wives, Kola Ogunmola three, DuroLadiposix, OyinAdejobi, five. Except Femi Philips of the Osumare Theatre, there was hardly any other travelling theatre leader with only one wife. These wives constituted unpaid workforce the theatre. These wives took care of the family of the male artists cooking, taking care of domestic front and raising children who in turn became part of the troupe. All these they did in addition to their theatre roles as singers, dancers, actresses, and more. Though they did not complain because the thrill of performance simply drowned any feeling of stress, these women had some traumatic experiences. Also, in a polygamous setting the effect of stress is cushioned by sharing the work. However, some of the women narrated to this writer how they travelled on their performances heavily pregnant and sometimes gave birth while on performance tour. Felicia IyaborOgunshola (Efunshetan), who has six children, told this writer that she delivered three of them backstage. Abiodun DuroLadipo said she left stage two weeks to delivery of her children and went on stage two weeks after delivery. Even when a child was sick, they still set off with him. There were also accounts of their babies dying while on performance tours. These wives, though often not recorded, performed other roles apart from dancing, singing and acting. Abiodun DuroLadipo revealed that she wrote the stories and composed the songs with her husband. The travelling theatre wives, therefore, were invaluable to the troupes and contributed far more than they were given credit.

Despite her very busy career schedule, AdunniOluwole had to do her cooking herself. It was on one such occasion that she cut her finger while opening a can of tomatoes. Too busy to pay enough attention to the wound, she took off for her campaign rally and died some days later from tetanus infection, while on campaign tour.

Funmilayo Ranco solved that problem by marrying some of her girls, very beautiful and very talented ones. Marrying may not be the appropriate word, but some respondents claim that she married some of them without the girls' parents knowing that she was a woman. One of her so-called wives, Monishola, who claimed to be Ranco's first wife, described how they were secretly wedded with her sister as the only witness to the union. Another respondent, Elijah, who was Hubert Ogunde's chief drummer, told this writer that he once heard that Ranco was wedding. He was too busy to attend, but someone else, who attended the wedding, showed him the wedding pictures. As for the number of 'wives' Ranco had, her friend AyoxArishekola said she had four, recounting how he had to settle a quarrel between two of the women. One of her troupe members, Prince Obaleye, believed she had six women while Ranco's mother revealed that she was living with ten of her girls. These women, perhaps, took care of the home front for her as well as played with the troupe. It was clearly a marriage of convenience since all the women eventually got married, except one of them, Cecilia, who died.

Domestic issue is often a big problem for women who aspire towards a mainstream achievement in life, especially in a largely traditional setting. This is why Stella Oyedepo, declared in one of the several interviews she had with this researcher that 'if a woman would achieve anything in life, someone must take care of the kitchen.' All these go to buttress the point that Virginia Woolf (2005, 566) has made in her essay, 'A Room of Ones' Own'. It means that a woman should be able to have the freedom, the time and the resources to commit to her work, not just as a fiction writer – Woolf's area of concern – but in any life's endeavour which a woman has committed herself to.

Government support and recognition

The men became ambassadors representing the country in international arts festivals. Hubert Ogunde, for example, was sent to Montreal, Canada, by Nigerian Government, to represent Nigeria in a World Fair titled "The 1967 International and Universal Exposition", or Expo'67, for short. He also successfully represented Nigeria at FESTAC 1977. The government had, in 1963, awarded the first Nigerian Arts Council Trophy to Duro Ladipo as the best performer; and in 1965 awarded him the national merit award, *The Member of the Order of the Niger* (MON), as a cultural ambassador.

Dramatic subjects

Some subject matters are considered more relevant in literature while some are considered not serious and so not that relevant. The men of the professional travelling theatre caught the attention of the intelligentsia by addressing historical, mythological subjects (example, DuroLadipo); political matters (example, Hubert Ogunde). At that transitional period in the history of the country, any venture that contributed to the cultural assertion and advancement agenda was hailed and encouraged by the Nationalists who recognised the power of theatre as agent of mass education (Clark, 79).

Ranco's plays centre around love, friendship, and family relationship. Her plays address popular intelligence and sentiments that is why they were popular. Titles of her plays often reveal the theme for example *Oredunni*(A True Friend); *Jisoron'panyan* (Jealousy Kills).Oluwole's professional theatre addressed political issues, but from a left side of the popular politics and so she was hounded rather than hailed.

Media coverage

Media offered an invaluable boost to the popularity and financial fortune of the travelling troupes. The activities of the troupes were extensively and timely documented in various Newspapers and Magazines of the period – West African Pilot, Daily Times, Comet, The Drum Magazine, and others. Scholars who eventually wrote on the travelling theatre relied

on these media materials. Other outlets for the troupes were television, radio, photoplay magazine (Atoka) and music recording studios. None of the female actor-managers was covered in any of these media outlets. Ranco's troupe members disclosed that she was once invited to come to the television house in Ibadan to be recorded. She told them she had no time for such distraction because she was always fully booked for performances. She also told her members that travelling from Ilesa to Ibadan to be recorded when she would not be given any remuneration is a waste of money and time and she could not do that. She, however, promised to oblige the television invitation when she moved to Ibadan, as she had planned to do. By the way, before her untimely death, she had moved her performance to the third important venue, the Oshogbo Cultural Centre, and was preparing to extend to Ibadan and perhaps, ultimately, Glover Hall, Lagos.

The above are some of the distinguishing characteristics of men and women's theatre contribution in the professional travelling theatre which were responsible for the marginalisation of women's contributions in that theatre form and their exclusion from Nigerian theatre curriculum. However, in spite of all these disadvantages and lack of encouragement, women dared to carve a niche for themselves in the theatre at that stage in the development of theatre in the country, and one of them, Funmilayo Ajayi, (alias Funmilayo Ranco) even succeeded and that is why she is presently being documented in a major research report, so she can take her rightful place in Nigerian theatre studies.

CONCLUSION

Three women emerged as travelling theatre troupe leaders in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre movement. One of them, Mojishola Martins, did not develop because of marital and religious constraints; another, Adunni Oluwole had to disband her theatre after a few years, to go into fulltime politics and met a sudden and untimely death; and the third, Funmilayo Ranco, was the only female theatre troupe leader who had a successful career. What these women share in common, however, is an absence from both Nigerian media coverage and theatre studies. This study has attempted to determine the reason the women were left out of theatre studies, by comparing them with their male counterparts who received relatively enough scholarly and critical attention and even support and sponsorship from the Government and some mentors.

This paper asserts that difference in content and modus operandi of the men and women of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre were responsible for the difference in the level of attention the artists received. The plays that shot the male gurus to fame have political and historical and contemporary contents. On the other hand, the women either avoided controversial topics and chose domestic and love themes, as was the case with Ranco, or prefer to treat political subject matters but in a subversive manner, as Adunni Oluwole did. Apparently, domestic or love themes were no match to the burning political and cultural issues of the time. Understandably, only performances that captured the aspirations of the Nationalists were considered important. Again, while the males concentrated on the mainstream performance venues such as the Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos and Obisesan Hall in Ibadan, the women kept to the fringe venues. Adunni Oluwole did most of her performances on street corners while Funmilayo Ranco performed mainly in schools. The men were also the only ones that honour invitations to be recorded at the Television houses and the photoplay magazine, Atoka. A study of contemporary theatre scene will reveal how much, if at all, things have changed for women. Such investigation should look at the achievement of contemporary female theatre artists in comparison to that of men. That is when the disparity will be obvious.

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