



# From *Alarinjo* to *Oniduro*: Stand-up Comedy as a Neo-Cultural Expression in Nigeria

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This world is a comedy to those that think,  
a tragedy to those that feel

— Horace Walpole

## Abstract

Comedy (*Awada*), a treasured genre among the itinerant (*Alarinjo*) theatre of the Yoruba, has become a dominant influence on diverse performances in Nigeria. Indeed, it could be argued that contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedy has been largely influenced by the indigenous *Alarinjo* tradition of the Yoruba, which harks back to the turn of the 21st century. Building on *Alarinjo* as a dominant precursor, the Nigerian stand-up comedy platform, in the last two decades has integrated ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations to become a bastion of recreation transcending the boundaries of the nation-state. Phenomenal though it has been, researchers have hardly traced Nigerian stand-up comedy from its *Alarinjo* antecedents, it being a dominant source and influence, to its eclectic contemporary state. Therefore, this study, through a neo-cultural lens, examines the development from *Awada/Alarinjo* to Stand-up comedy in Nigeria; with a view to providing a credible understanding of the origin, influences, trends, motifs and forms of the fledgling industry. While acknowledging the complexities inherent in empiricism and positivism, the paper charts a genealogical argument for Nigerian stand-up comedy beginning with the performances of unnamed palace satiric entertainers which are traceable to almost every ethnic group in Nigeria, the diverse comic performances inherent in mask dramaturgy, through the 'de-ritualized' itinerant troupes among the Yoruba. It connects this with the professional travelling theatre of the Ogunde Tradition that brought the traditional theatres of Nigeria, the art of Moses Olaiya, and Gbenga Adeboye, the precursor of Yoruba and indeed contemporary stand-up comedy in Nigeria into limelight. Linking these with aspects of the art of Alli Baba, Gbenga Adeyinka I, Julius Agwu,

Basket Mouth, Gandoki, De Don Klint de Drunk and Mohammed Danjuma among others, stand-up comedy-as a contemporary art- is purposively interrogated. Thus, the paper chronicles the sociological, literary and multicultural metamorphosis of this theatrical and comical form.

**Keywords:** Alarinjo, Oniduro, Nigerian stand-up comedy, Neo-culturalism in comedy

## Introduction: Neo-culturalism and stand-up comedy in Nigeria

Stand-up comedy in Nigeria has transcended the distinct divides typical of the Nigerian multi-cultural space. Unlike other brands of art, which essentially depict specific ethnic leanings, stand-up comedy, in Nigeria, has negotiated a detribalised status. As a result, the genre accommodates an overlap of cultural paradigms through the extensive use of multi-culture (Mary Sengstock, 2009:244) without any group claiming ownership. Thus, the emergent stand-up comedy in Nigeria is immune from the puritan and structural narrative of ethnic slice in such a way that all cultures identify with but no culture appropriates the genre to itself. This is archetypical neo-culturalism, which refers to the alteration of the multiple traditions to evolve a post-modern new-tradition of wider claim. Neo-culturalism, according to Bertrand Badie *et al* essentially operates to strike an appropriate intercultural balance in multi-cultural settings (Badie *et al.* 2011). In essence,

If culture reproduced itself fully from one generation to the next, change would be impossible...There is a realm in which neo-culturalism has no rival: tracing individual behaviour to interpersonal connections. This would apply first to the records of reciprocity and solidarity obligations and the rights and duties assigned to each actor according to his or her place in a vast system of interactions. It would also show that lineages are at the heart of such networks, be they family links, kinship ties, or relationships with neighbours. After all, the unexpected success of “social capital” stems from its ability to focus on networks of interactions among people (Badie *et al.* 2011:15).

At the wake of modernization, and imperialism, culture and popular art have evolved through the vestiges of diverse historical and cultural experiences, which continue to influence the fusion of different forms of art in syncretic fashion. These forms have now attained universal status within the Nigerian milieu. Universality, a principle that strings together recurrent ideas and experiences establishes patterns with archetypical elements such as forms, themes and character types. Ademola Dasyuva (2004) describes this as the measure of ‘universal trust’ that goes beyond the dramatic and that which achieves lasting philosophical significance among cultures. The presence of numerous, yet unique, universal patterns in diverse cultures enables the melding of idea(l)s, which are modified or reinvented deliberately or fortuitously.

Stand-up comedy in Nigeria is largely indebted to this syncretic form of sub-cultures; and within this context, neo-culturalism is a platform of unification that enables a country with complex and diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and political identities to endorse a mixed-matched variety of Stand-up comedy as its new popular theatre. William Mishler and Detlef Pollack (2004) in their political approach to neo-cultural synthesis describe neo-cultural conception as the clarification of the existence of the differences between divergent traditions. To this study, that translates to and accounts, for neo-cultural transition which lends to an evolving performance tradition, valuable syncretism, and eclectics. Besides the fact that neo-cultural synthesis is a contemporary response to modern dynamics, the added value is that parameters for fuller critical studies on the Stand-Up genre will benefit tremendously from the Neo-culturalist theory. Thus, while this paper makes the claim that Nigerian Stand-up comedy has been largely influenced by professional Yoruba performances and comical forms, it does not impose the Yoruba culture on

contemporary Stand-up comedy. Rather, it insists that a middle-ground has been achieved by a neo-cultural blend of features to produce the cultural cocktail now known as Nigeria's brand of Stand-up comedy.

## Chronicling Humour in Nigerian Theatre

It is a global phenomenon for modern theatrical forms to emerge from and be influenced by traditional/indigenous theatre (Ogunbiyi 1981, Ogundeji 2007, Brockett 2011). The critical writings of R. Horton A. Horn, E.O Kofoworola, C.G.B Gidley and several others in Ogunbiyi (1981), accounts for theatrical and dramatic forms within Nigeria: these include the Kalabari, Bori and Hausa and Yakamanci performances respectively. Other traditional forms such as Igbo ritual drama, *Kwag-Hir* of the Tiv, and the Alarinjo, Yoruba Travelling theatre from which this paper takes its bearing, are also documented in Ogunbiyi's encyclopedic work on Nigerian drama and theatre. Indeed, traditional drama has folkloric essence, which it naturally transmits to stand-up comedy. Several writers notably Pakade (2020), Filani (2018), Dore (2018), Filani (2017), Sunday and Filani (2018), King (2014), Nilsen and Nilsen (2000) and Mintz (1998) among others, have defined the scope and elements of stand-up comedy. While Lawrence Mintz has written that "stand-up comedy is arguably the oldest, most universal, basic, and deeply significant form of humorous expression," and that it performs "essentially the same social and cultural roles in practically every known society, past and present" (1998:193). Nilsen, Aileen Pace, and Don Nilsen's *The Encyclopedia of 20th Century American Humor* defines stand-up comedy as a post-1960 phenomenon domiciled in 'comedy clubs' where solo performers as well as small groups have platforms to perform and produce recorded versions of these performance for television broadcast (2000:287-291). Other critical perspectives on the significance of comedic performance include the cultural critic, or an unusual anthropologist who comments on day-to-day existence and unravels behavioural patterns that are tacitly or otherwise operating in the society.

Whereas Mintz hopes to expand the humour scholar's engagement of the form by examining stand-up elements in the myriad of cultural forms such as skits, comedy teams, improvisation among others, Ian Brodie (2015) approaches stand-up comedy from a folkloric stance. Stating that stand-up comedy imitates "...the forms of talk that occur in informal, day-to-day, face-to-face communication among intimates, which is the object at the heart of folklore stories" (2015:217), thus providing the institutional history and framework for standup comedy. This is crucial because the daunting task of generating humour, forging intimacy with, and engaging the participation of the audience requires an array of folkloric elements and performance devices.

However folkloric the premise of stand-up comedy is, Ayakoroma's (2013) claim that Nigerian stand-up comedy moved straight from the folkloric role of the village spokesman and ceremonial anchor to television in the early 1970s and 80s, glosses over the existence of comedy as a professional form reaching back to the pre-colonial era. His reference to Mazi Mperempe's 30-minute TV show on Radio Nigeria and Anambra State Television, Enugu as a classical example of early comedy, and declaration of the art of Alleluia Atunyota Akporobomeriere as the start of "serious" comedy in Nigeria are assertions that do not situate Nigerian Stand-up comedy within its proper ambit, particularly the narrative of its evolution. This paper restates the interlinear narrative by chronicling the transition of comedy from tradition to post-modernity.

The detail that the Yoruba have humour and laughter as dominant elements in their performance is underscored by the tenets of *Ifa*, this has been aptly captured by Durotoye Adeleke (2005). Adeleke observes that laughter is an integral part of the social activities of the Yoruba. The role of laughter is perhaps more functional, even philosophical as seen in Adesina Afolayan's essay, *Hilarity and the Nigerian Condition* (2013). However, Adedoyin Aguoru shrewdly observed that laughter and moderate reaction to jokes and

humour is universally thought to promote health and general wellbeing (Aguoru 2016). Performances and activities that therefore centre on laughter and forms that provoke laughter have become a dominant part of Nigeria's national identity.

The first generation of Yoruba theatre practitioners were court artistes<sup>1</sup>, musicians and subsequently the mask dramaturge (*Alarinjo*), who regaled guests with satiric performances at king's courts and elsewhere up till the early parts of the colonial period. Building on the longstanding *Alarinjo* tradition, Nigerian professional theatre took root in the art of veteran Yoruba travelling theatre whose founding practitioners were Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo and Moses Olaiya (Aguoru, 2011; 2012). It should be noted that the second generation of Yoruba theatre practitioners preceded the inauguration of the first television station in Africa, the Western Nigerian Government Broadcasting TV (WNTV), was founded in 1959, even though they eventually benefited tremendously from the coverage of the media.

Further evidence that the second generation of theatre practitioners metamorphosed from traditional Yoruba theatre is the fact that they maintained the tenets of the *Alarinjo* performers, even long after they were featured on TV. By taking advantage of the ease of transportation which came from technological advancement, the second generation professional travelling theatres' itinerancy took Nigerian theatrical forms to international limelight. Today, stand-up comedy in Nigeria not only still alludes to folk as source, pointing out its primordial relevance, it has also adopted travelling with the theatre, a dominant feature of the Ogunde School as its form of mobility. This authenticates the status of *Alarinjo* as a dominant precursor source, whose transcendental influence permeates theatrical forms and times. This is corroborated by Joel Adedeji and Hyginus Ekwuazi (1998) who affirm that the mask dramaturge of the professional traditional drama of the Yoruba, the *Eegun Alare*, playfully referred to as *Alarinjo* emanated from the mask cult. This mask dramaturge had two distinct forms; the spectacle and the revue. The spectacle was performed as a sole mime of mythological dramas enacting the myths of the deities or local heroes whereas the revue was, in their words:

... a medley. As a comic sketch, music, dancing and singing were its main features. There were three categories of the revue – abstracts, sociological and historical ... All the revue masques depended for their effect on 'audience participation'. Their sketches were mainly improvisational and capable of infinite changes their songs were topical and in most cases familiar. The dialogue included jokes and ribaldry, lack of premeditation and any carefully worked out scenario (156).

Nigerian contemporary comedy concerts adopt this format in its totality as its programme features popular choreographers, solo instrumentalists, as well as trendy and trending old and new musicians to intersperse the comic sketches. Similarly, on the itinerant routine of stand-ups Chelsea Peretti (2002) observes that 'comics ...are often nomads touring the country up to 300 nights in a year and many comedians are known for a body of dramatic - comic work that often acknowledges this history of comic traditions' (20). Certainly, this universal itinerary of travelling theatres, plays out in many ways in contemporary Nigerian Stand-up comedy. For instance, Noma Pakade (2020) in like fashion observes that Nigerian contemporary Stand-Up comedians encourage their counterparts in Africa to become itinerant thereby enjoy intracontinental exposure and collaboration:

For instance, festivals such as the 2019 One Africa Comedy, hosted in South Africa, facilitated the visibility of artists like Agnes Akite (Uganda) and Eunice Mommite (Kenya), enabling the intracontinental exposure of stand-up comedians. Another example is the AY Comedy Show in Lagos, Nigeria, which hosted South African comedian Thenjiwe Moseley in 2017, Similarly,

<sup>1</sup> Court artistes are the different categories of entertainers in Palaces and who predominantly performed for royalty. These artistes are present in palaces across Nigeria and their performances are ethnic specific but do not necessarily have to conform to universal features of theatrical forms of which comedy is one.

Nigerian comedian Basket Mouth has hosted several gigs in Nigeria, inviting a variety of African standup comedians, including Celeste Ntuli (Pakade ,2020:2).

Above all the significant comic role that is evidently a source and influence to Stand-up comedy in Nigeria is enshrined among the Yoruba. This is the role of the court jesters known *asa* in the palace of the *Alaafin* of Oyo, the foremost descendants of *Oduduwa*, the eponymous progenitor of the Yoruba. An *asa*, wears costumes (*aaso*) and made ‘...jest, created fun and satirised specific people’ (Bade Ajayi, 1989; Aguoru, 2016). According to Ajayi, in ancient times, court jesters were a major source of entertainment in the palaces of Yoruba kings. By virtue of their profession, these jesters had to be creative and dynamic to keep their positions; they needed to be constantly on the ball to put in regular performances for specific days of the week, as well as during festive periods in the year. The *asa*, therefore, foreshadowed the contemporary stand-up comedian, here translated as *Oniduro* (the one who stands) to fit Yoruba parlance. Trite to say, the hallowed use of humour is still celebrated by the Yoruba at specific periods of the year. The Oke Ibadan festival in Ibadan during which humour – comics, ribaldry, jesting and joking - is venerated all day, testifies to the deep cultural implicature of humour among the Yoruba (Aguoru, 2016).

## ***Eegun Apidan: Alarinjo and Oniduro in context***

It is fitting at this point to consider specific narratives in support of the status of *Alarinjo* to stand-up comedy in Nigeria. Adedeji (1981, 1994) drawing from ethnographic journals from 1826, describes how the ruling king had invited his guests to witness a performance given by the mask dramaturge which enjoyed the king’s patronage. Recall that the *Alarinjo* theatre evolved from the ritual *Egungun* (Mask) cult. Adedeji alludes to the story told about the origin of the *Alarinjo*, following the mischief of the council members, the *Oyo-mesi*. The people of Oyo at some point had been forced out of the capital, Katunga, by marauding populations. When peace was finally restored, the king sent emissaries to Katunga with the charge to ascertain the suitability of moving back to the capital. The *Oyo-mesi*, however were by then unwilling to return to Katunga, so they decided to put up a ‘scare show’. A scare crew comprised of a hunchback, a leper, an albino and persons with other physical deformities, disguised as ghosts to scare off the King’s emissaries. However, following a lead from his cymbalist, Ologbin, the king had members of the cast of the ‘scare show’ rounded up and subsequently converted them, under the leadership of Ologbin, to entertainers in the king’s court. The king, *Alaafin* Ogbolu was instantly nick named ‘Oba Moro’ the ghost catcher. One imagines that *Alaafin* Ogbolu must have had a morbid sense of humour to have been able to enjoy the re-enactment of the theatre of the six-stock characters that were made up of disabled and deformed persons who must have been a sight on stage!

The satiric story of the Ghost Catcher became the major play in the repertoire of the mask dramaturgy years after the demise of *Alaafin* Ogbolu and his faithful cymbalist who was poisoned because the *Egungun* cult saw the ‘deritualization’ (Ogundeji, 2003:7&8) of the masque performance as defying the cult. It became mandatory to perform the play during the installation of a new *Alaafin* as well as during three significant Yoruba festivals: the orisa *oko* festival, orisa *mole* festival and at the *Oduduwa* festival. At the wake of the futile scare show, the art of mask dramaturgy came to be known as *Eegun Apidan* or *Oje*’s art by the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Upon its ‘deritualization’, the *Eegun Apidan* became established as a court theatre. It earned for itself the respect accorded a lineage profession that metamorphosed into troupes and later evolved into a guild system with each group acquiring expertise in specific instruments, dance, poetry or acrobatics. The *Eegun Apidan* became involved in annual competitions which became the foundation for the formation of the professional

*Alarinjo* troupe and actor succinctly captured in Adedeji's words as 'the costumed actor and a strolling player' (Adedeji, 1981:224).

Anchoring on Adedeji (1981), Jeyifo (1984) and Clark (2008), Aguoru identifies Hubert Ogunde as the pioneer of popular Yoruba travelling theatre, and narrated, in high relief, the influence of the *Alarinjo* theatre on the Yoruba travelling theatre (2011, 2012). This marked a renaissance of Yoruba art, since the mask dramaturge cult had been robbed of followership and patronage due to Christian religious imperialism, which abhorred any trace of syncretism. Thus, Ogunde, the precursor of the second generation of the professional *Alarinjo* theatre, revived the form and adopted the tenets of the first generation *Alarinjo* in his performances, blending them with the operatic form. Writing on the contemporary and continued significance of Biodun Jeyifo's grandly written book on the Yoruba travelling theatre, Olakunle George observed that, "The Yoruba travelling theatre grew out of, and in rebellion against, imitative 'service of songs' and Christian concerts that were prevalent in nineteenth-century Lagos and continued into the early decades of the twentieth century..." the result of that rebellion, he concludes, is the "...the unprecedented inventiveness and social impact of the travelling theatre troupes" (George, 2018 :15 & 16).

Remi Adedokun (1981:19) classifies the genres of the *Alarinjo* tradition under the operatic (musical), tragic, comic or farce and the tragicomedy. Not only these but also the adoption of extra-plotal beginnings, interlude, and endings. These can be seen in the opening and closing glees, in the use of comedy and the role of the comic in the development of Ogunde's plots. According to Biodun Jeyifo (1984) these inclusions dovetailed to the art of the comic in Moses Olaiya, who was "... perhaps the biggest crowd puller of all time in the 'Travelling Theatre movement'" (13). To Jeyifo, Olaiya mastered his art and he was regarded as a comedian:

...whose productions being typically very long and uproariously comic...usually has his audience fully satiated. These deviations are also generally true of the host of imitators of the Olaiya School such as the Ojo Ladipo (Baba Mero) troupe and the Ola Omonitan (Ajimajasan) troupe (Jeyifo, 1984:13).

It is instructive noting that regarding form, Moses Olaiya redefined the aesthetics of performance by developing a framework for what became the tenets and principles of Yoruba comedy, and that those who towed his path followed suit. Adedokun (1981), Obafemi (2001) and Aguoru (2012, 2016) agree that the art of the Baba Sala of the Olaiya School takes root in the traditional role of the satirist in the Yoruba society either in the kings' court, in festivals or as portrayed in the traditional theatres. According to Adedokun the themes of this farcical genre are drawn:

... from everyday social misnomer, corruption and vices. Obscenity, ribaldry and sheer vulgarity provide the verve of this highly extemporaneous theatrical specie ... these comedians hold individuals, social institutions and vices up to ridicule in a most hilarious manner in order to effect positive change (1981:82-3).

One cannot quite overstate the significance of Olaiya's comedy to the development of comedy in Nigeria and Africa. So significant was his contribution that WNTV, the first television station in Africa wrote of him as a talent they had 'discovered' and his art and performances part of the significant contribution they had made in drama on the African continent. Consequent upon which Ikime Obaro wrote:

One of the areas we WNTV think we have made a substantial contribution is that of drama. Our viewers are most likely to recall Alawada, easily our most popular comedy featuring Baba Sala (Moses Olaiya) and his group. Since 1967 when Baba Sala was discovered, he has established himself as a leading comedian in the country... his act is one which possesses international appeal, his dress, his facial expression... Alawada is often penetrating commentary on contemporary Nigeria (Obaro, 1979:43).

The celebration of his plays, on radio and TV gave him as much popularity as his live performances on stage. His continued influence on contemporary comedy is affirmed by Wole Soyinka who dedicated his play *Alapata Apata* (2011) to ‘Moses Olaiya, The Inimitable *Alawada*’. Of him he wrote:

Easily one of the greatest comic geniuses that the Nigerian stage has ever produced is Moses Olaiya...Moses Olaiya’s metier was broad, socially disruptive, falstaffian...Alaba in this play was the kind of character I dreamt for *Alawada*, from whom therefore, inspiration for this play came (Soyinka, 2011: x-xi).

The emergence of Gbenga Adeboye the multitalented ace broadcaster in the early 1990s marked the peak of the impact of the combined *Alawada/Alarinjo* as a dominant cultural influence depicted in Yoruba stand-up comedy in Nigeria. Adeboye transformed the comic on radio, the master of ceremony or anchor of formal programmes into a different art, employing diverse forms and scripts of the operatic, chants, poetry, humour, skits, and music-comedy. He adopted an eclectic style in his stand-up activities developing character sketches and made impact globally. He invented a variety of forms and styles of comedy that took his art to the international community and made him a name before his death at the age of 42. He had a humorously syncretic religious ideology that simultaneously permitted him to be a Pastor, Alhaji, and an Oluwo rolling Islam, Christianity and the priesthood of indigenous and traditional religions of the Yoruba in one. He also completed his archetypal identity and role play by adopting the archetypal role of the king when he crowned himself King of *Oduology* (Traditional fables).

In essence, neo-culturalism in contemporary Nigerian theatrical arts found expression in the art of Gbenga Adeboye. The walls that held people bound: religious, ethnic, linguistic, political, and cultural and the layers of social stratification collapsed as more neo-cultural voices began to rise and the walls suddenly got demolished. All of a sudden, it was fun to poke at the poor and the rich and at all religions without expecting uproar.

As it was in the *Alarinjo* schools, the stand-up guilds began to spring up, forms of comedy concerts became established and promoters of stand-ups and comedy concerts emerged. The Nigerian public, that had gone stage and cinema wary because of the dangers and insecurities of states of emergency, the numerous curfews that characterised the decades of military dictatorship and the incomprehensible democracies that followed, suddenly returned. Though the fear of insecurity persisted, amidst diverse and other unresolved challenges, a new theatre enjoying the absolute followership of a new generation, uncommon patronage and playing to full houses had emerged.

A myriad of outlets: stage, television, DVDs, the internet and travelling by air and through diverse social media, largely controlled by this new generation gave Nigerian stand-up comedy wings and it did fly. Contrarily, the older generation, made up the travelling theatres and its patron assumed that “...the stage...is as good as dead...” (Adedeji and Ekwuazi, 1998:167) but invariably began to patronise the new form by migrating to the new media. Subsequently and according to Pakade (2020) “The documentation and distribution of the live performances, such as the documentary *In Stitches* and online streaming services such as Netflix, have also diversified the catalogue of stand-up comedy both in its production and accessibility to wider audiences” (Pakade, 2020:2). Nevertheless, a neo-cultural Nigerian popular theatre that unites ethnicities and identities in staged performances, meeting the utmost needs of a people in search of what transcends the politicking, that is the bane of the nation, had truly emerged.

# Trends in Contemporary Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

Most world theatres engage concrete structures and forms through which influences and analogies, movements and trends, genres and forms, motif-types and themes are examinable. Here the “empiricist and positivist” approach that characterise analysis seeking evidences of influences and origins are combined with considerations of “analogies and convergences” which play out in neo-cultural forms, genres and the status of contemporary Nigerian stand-up comedy. The inclusion of genres, motif-types and themes from possible and plausible origin centre on criticism of the neo-cultural form which continue to evolve (Aguoru, 2011:5).

Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma (2013) claims that “serious” developments in contemporary stand-up comedy began with AliBaba (real name: Alleluia Atunyota Akporobomeriere), who commenced his career in comedy during his undergraduate days at Bendel State University in the 1988. AliBaba’s pace setting and trail blazing style and method of publicity indeed raised the tempo of the trends in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Whereas the precursor of contemporary Nigerian stand-up, Gbenga Adeboye’s medium of communication was primarily Yoruba, part of his successor, AliBaba’s shine derived from the fact that he took to the English convention which crossed ethnic boundaries. AliBaba gained sterling popularity by featuring on national television programmes, as well as on variety and personality shows. He signed up with companies and earned a handsome income; thus, raising the stakes for Nigerian stand-up comedy. Other comedians on the heels of AliBaba like Gbenga Adeyinka 1<sup>st</sup>, Basket Mouth, Julius Agwu transacted comedy with the Educated Nigerian English (ENE) spoken by elites. Later on, still in a bid to reach wider audience, performers began to use Nigerian pidgin; notable among whom is Gandoki, who is famed as the custodian of pidgin comedy of the warri-waffi style. The waffi style pidgin has come to be the preferred variety among artists who now code mix and code switch it with English and a myriad of other local languages, in quintessential neo-cultural fashion.

Also following closely, in AliBaba’s stead were comedians like De Don, Klint de Drunk, I Go Dye to mention a few. In the last one and a half decades, several other prominent comedians such as Bovi, Basketmouth, AY, Bash, Omo Baba, Seyi Law, Funky Mallam, Mc Ajele, LafUp, Peteru, Still Ringing, Kelly Blind, SLK, Shete, Obama, Dr Smile, Dr Frick, Vitamin D, Rapindaddy, Olympia, Shem, Ojemba, Seeco, Mc Dannie B, Gordons, Akpororo, Elenu, Acapella, Ajebo, Pencil, Kelly black have emerged. In more recent times Female performers like Lepacious Bose, Tatafo, Helen Paul and Princess have also made their mark. Thus, AliBaba opened the floodgates for other stand-up comedians of his age; and collectively, that generation enterprisingly cultivated, promoted and mentored the new generation of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century stand-ups in Nigeria.

Without doubt, by year 2000 the therapeutic value of comedy had come to the fore in Nigeria. In a country perennially under pressure, humour serves as an escape from the rat race of work, financial, social and national crises. To buttress this point, Gordon, alias Comedy Barlusconi, christened his performance “The Gordon’s Comedy Clinic Ward, a space that does good to individuals’ body, spirit and soul”. Indeed, borrowing from the premise of Stand-up Comedy, Nigerians are fast learning the tricks of weaving a joke out of life’s miseries, such as the high spate of kidnapping and even the sad case of the abduction of two hundred school girls by the notorious Boko Haram terrorist group at Chibok.

Online newspapers, billboards, television adverts and diverse social media are platforms through which Nigerian stand-up comics maintain their social relevance and publicise forthcoming programmes. In addition, streams of recorded performances on all

forms of social media render stand-ups readily available to their patrons at the click of a button.

The impact of Nigerian stand-up comedy within the international community is worthy of mention. This theatrical genre avails Nigerians in the Diaspora not only of multi-cultural home-grown humour it, in particular, keeps them abreast with contemporary national issues while they let down their hair. There is also the nascent development of Nigerian stand-ups like M.C Mark Comedian to the United Nations (CUN), this category of Nigerian stand-ups live and perform in the Diaspora.

## Forms, Features and Theatrical Elements in Nigerian Stand-up Comedy

*Ab initio*, it was popular opinion that stand-up comedy was not a matter for intellectual critique and that, irrespective of their shared qualities; stand-up comedy and theatre were unrelated disparate forms. Chelsea Peretti (2002) emphasised the need for a register of terminologies adept for criticism of stand-up comedy discourse which would be useful in operationalising concepts peculiar to the genre (22). In the same manner Kelvin Casper (2016) is quite point-blank. He insists that stand-up comedy ought to be included in the curriculum of college freshmen. In detail, Casper states that such:

... performances deftly dramatise context, audience and the artistic proofs as well as provide a palatable, engaging and ... enjoyable manner in which to introduce genre of specific writing (2016: 426).

Elements such as dialogue, songs, stage, and audience and action characterisation distinguish drama and theatre from other forms of literature or performance. Stand-up comedy engages these elements and diverse eclectic approaches in mediating the relationship between the audience and the stand-ups on one hand, and the stand-ups, stand-up comedy and the community on the other hand. Essentially, mime and imitation are dominant acts of stand-ups, with stage business filling up the space (stage) where the stand-up transacts his business while the microphone is the major instrument and prop in his hand. Engaging these basic interpretative elements, the theatricality, impact and import of stand-up comedy as a form of theatre are unmistakable. In Peretti's opinion, the elements and forms of performance are adopted in specific ways by individual comedians. She notes that while some employ small jokes to build up the plot of a larger story, like a playwright developing scenes; some perform one-man shows, others pursue collaboration with theatre groups, yet others perform solo dramatic comic pieces by playing multiple roles. This is corroborated by Cécile Vigourox's observation that comics rationalise their choice of stand-up comedy as opposed to a one person show with stage characters and props and a story line by invoking a sense of freedom to one's self that the genre provides (2015:250). The flexibility of the form stand-up comedy takes is in itself its greatest asset.

For instance, Klint de Drunk, plays multiple roles in his performances. The strikingly recurrent is that of the comedian, the drunk, and narrator. The excerpt below is typical of a full-length plot and storyline of his: he plays the role of a drunk, which in itself is a comical character who adopts the posture of a storyteller. He primes the audience by first cracking a political joke about Charles Taylor who was seeking political asylum in Nigeria at that time before proceeding to ridicule the "talented" reggae musicians for their gimmicks and antics.

**Klint de Drunk on Talent**

The talent we have in Nigeria is so much that we are even bringing in other talented people. I know one tailor, he is somewhere in Akwa Ibom, his name is Charles Taylor very talented.

**Audience Response:** Laughter

The most talented people in this country are the reggae musicians. After smoking *Igbo* (*marijuana cigarette*), their eyes will be red and their brains will block and they will want to sing for you but they will keep forgetting and coincidentally remembering. So before they sing they will think of the experience they experienced (experience *they have had*). Then they will remember one day, they are walking to see their friend and then they hit their leg on the stone ...music is set. When they want sing for you they will first dance for you, when they are dancing they are actually allowing blood to flow (gesticulation shows he is referring to blood flowing into their heads)

So that they will sing start singing:

**Klint as reggae musician:** Just the other day,  
I say, just the other day

**Klint as Narrator:** Then they will make some noise,

**Klint as reggae musician:** Just the other day, I came out from my own house ieo, eo, eo eoo

**Klint as Narrator:** They are trying to remember the lyrics

**Klint as reggae musician:** Then I saw my friend,  
He was standing around the road,  
So I decided, I decide,  
So I decided ieo, eo, eo eoo

**Klint as Narrator:** A beg weytin dem dey (*please, what is the musician trying to decide*) decide or what are they yet to decide?

**Klint as reggae musician:** Oh why, why, why, why, why, why ,why o  
I started walking, walking, walking, walking, walking  
So I stepped on stone, as was walking (5)  
I cut my leg on a stone  
Stone, stone, stone, stone, stone, stone, stone

**Klint as Narrator:** At this time they will confuse you with something you don't understand like;

**Klint as reggae musician:** Anida e, anida e, anida e, anida e  
And other things like

**Klint as reggae musician:** O why? Why? Why? Why o?

**Klint as Narrator:** So please, let me ask you for the title.  
What is the title of the song? Is it?  
O why? O why o? (William O. 3)

Here, Klint de Drunk multitasks, he is the drunk narrator, who caricatures a highly intoxicated reggae musician. He is also a logical critic who intersperses his musical performance with dialogue and questions directed at the audience. He points out the apparent mishmash that most reggaes players give to the ever-thrilled audience. His performance is a recitative and also operatic in form. His lines are staccatos but he succeeds in narrating the tale of drunkard who wants to make jest of musicians who are on hard drugs.

## Solo Dramatic Comic Piece

Mohammed Danjuma's performance is a typical dare devil religious joke and it is a solo dramatic comic piece.

**Danjuma the Narrator:** A few years ago we had Sharia not ... Christians killing Moslems. A man was stopped by some people and asked what his religion was; he responded

**Danjuma the Mimic:** "I am a Christian".  
Let me ask you a question every good Christian must know.

**Danjuma the Mimic:** In the name of the Father, Son and ...?

**Danjuma the Mimic:** Him Mama (his mother)

**Danjuma the Mimic:** Are you sure you are a Christian?

**Danjuma the Mimic:** *Walai ta lai a su mobi lai!* (*Swearing like a typical Moslem*) I am a Christian.  
(William O. 3)

Here Danjuma engages dramatic irony. He juxtaposes images of the Sharia law and contexts within Moslems and Christians who live in Northern Nigeria. He presupposes that an individual that tells lies about his religion will be found out. Such a person will not understand the fundamentals and basic observances of the religion and is bound to subconsciously recourse to the tenets of his or her religion. 'Him mama' seems logical following father and son, swearing in in a manner that is typically Moslem finally gives the fellow away.

There are as many styles of performance as there are themes, character types. Some are flashy and spectacular while others are provocative, are cathartic narratives or simply do what Peretti (2002:21) refers to as 'shit talking'. Gandoki's purge medicine, church festival and 'shit full church' (William O. 3) jokes fall within this category. Though stand-up comedy in Nigeria has enjoyed extensive linguistic and pragmatic explorations, the theatricality of the form defies the initial inertia that affected the creation of critical tools to engage stand-up comedy. Nevertheless, stand-up comedy in Nigeria requires more critical attention, specifically its style and the form.

## Nigerian stand-up comedians' bewildering array of themes

The neo-cultural harmony of seemingly discordant voices is another instructive angle to Nigerian stand-up comedy. Dramatic performances, in their various forms possess didactic values which endears these performances to the audience who are usually impressed by the visualisation of ideas or societal ideals. The range of themes that characterise Nigerian stand-up comic folio is profoundly impressive. This is particularly because they are imbued with directorial characteristics and they humorously seek to influence the thoughts and habits of the members of society through humour and satire. These ideas often seem to be strung together in constructing a plot or overall theme of a comedy concert. Satire of diminishing social values is a dominant theme in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Recent theme-based studies on stand-up comedy portray identity issues along with cultural differences as central themes. Margherita Dore (2018) not only corroborates this but her study on stand-up comedy further reflects the conscious efforts put in by stand-up comedians to engage the audience in a manner that guarantees a positive response while broaching these matters.

The humour is deliberately constructed to negotiate positive responses to sensitive topics by stand-up comedians (Dore, 2018:105).

For instance, Dario Fo, Comedian and Nobel prize winner is cited to have said: “comics always deal with the same problem - hunger, be it hunger for food, sex or even for dignity, for identity, for power” (Peretti, 2000:20). Hunger in this context is apt in describing the multiplex cravings of the audience, which the comics go to great lengths to meet.

For instance, the influence of women, especially young girls on men and older men are deplored in reckless abandon as thematic preoccupation for stand-ups in Nigeria while, stand-ups strategically assuage the hunger for sex and sexual innuendoes in aspects of the comedy concerts especially the structure of the performance which includes, rigorous or erotic dance, music and choreography of popular and contemporary Nigerian musicians.

Jessyka Finely (2016) through a feminist lens brings in perspectives on the trends and identity markers in performances held in the 1990s:

Part of what come to constitute black racial identity in the pop cultural imagination in the early 1990s was the barrage of mass media images in music, videos, television shows, song lyrics, and film of black youth engaging in illicit sexuality and displaying excessive materialism, titillating yet dangerous, anti-establishment practice associated with street culture (781).

Performances that connote such identity markers as well as portray sex and sexuality are deliberately created to titillate the audience. Bovi is excellent at portraying such scenarios through onomatopoeic sounds and mime. One can decipher the undertones even with Basketmouth’s shrewdness in the following excerpt:

Imagine the difference between Ajebo (*a refined well-born and bred*), bachelor and Pako (*unrefined and unsophisticated*) bachelor. Ajebo go dey (*lives in a*) duplex, sitting room downstairs and bedroom for upstairs. Abeg (*I beg*<sup>2</sup>) how he go tell babe (girlfriend) wey come visit am to follow am go him room for upstairs? (how easy will it be for him to convince his visiting girlfriend to go in to his bedroom) Whereas the Pako guy no get stress because him dey live just one room with no chair (has no such challenge). In fact the only thing for the room na bed and small black and white TV. The bed sef no get any stick, he go just throw am for floor dia (his apartment is sparsely furnished and his beddings are on the floor of his one room apartment) So sometimes, pako dey enjoy and no dey get stress with babes (he therefore implies that the unsophisticated bachelor usually has his way more with ladies) (William O. 3).

In addition, the comics seek to create characters that the audience can at once connect with and ridicule; they paint scenario which members of the audience can identify with, reduce them to ridicule and, by so doing, trigger humour and laughter. Comedians, with a keen understanding of society, create convivial plots which avail ordinary citizens the golden moments to poke fun at the rich and powerful, who, within the ambience of comedy take such satire as part of the humour. Hence stand-up comedies are apt social class levellers.

Social avarice like stealing and attitudes to stealing is portrayed in innumerable ways, De Don in one of his performances directly speaks on this syndrome as a national avarice though he uses stealing clothes off the line as example:

I don observe for Nigeria say if naija person lost something it dey pain am well well but if na we obtain somebody it no dey pain us. Na why be say for estate people dey move clothes anyhow for line. You fit imagine say person go open boutique with all the clothes wey he move from line.

*(I have observed that in Nigeria when one incurs a loss it is an extremely painful experience, but when one takes what belongs to another person or defrauds another individual it is accepted with pleasantness. For instance, clothes that are spread on drying lines in residential estates are stolen with such impunity that one would think they are stolen for the purpose of opening a boutique) (William O. 3).*

<sup>2</sup> Abeg (I beg) here indicates the consternation of the comedian. He wants the audience to reason with him.

The ability to create stereotypes: round, flat, archetypal, gendered, class- based, national and ethnic is the highpoint of the characterisation of Nigerian stand-ups. The ability to see humorous peculiarities in the distinct ethnic groups that make up the nation is also instructive, for instance Basketmouth while drawing attention to stealing as a social avarice places it within an ethnic context:

Na only for Warri thief go steal your thing dem go still come block you say dem thief your thing. One guy for Refinery Junction, dem move (stole) him phone, two months later the guy come stand for the junction dey wait for motor, na him one guy approach am say guy you stand here two months ago wey dem steal your phone, one Nokia 3310, blue abi? The guy say yes hoping say he go see the phone, na him the guy go bring the phone say o boy put the pin number we no fit sell this thing since na, put the pin make I fit sell am. Dem go move your thing come block you say na dem move am.

*(It is only in Warri that a thief will steal what belongs to you and still come back to declare that he stole it! There was a guy at Refinery Junction whose mobile phone was stolen, two months after the guy was at the same junction awaiting a cab when a fellow approached him and said "you stood here two months ago and your phone was stolen? A Nokia 3310, blue colour?" The victim says "Yes" in expectation that his phone had been recovered. The fellow returns with the phone and says "Old boy, put the pin number, we have not been able to sell the thing". They will rob you of your possession and still have the effrontery to tell you that they did!)*

(William O. 3).

Here, one is made to see the effrontery of these people and not necessarily the vices of their villains. The ridicule is not only humorous but instructive.

Adultery and sexual perversion as rampant social avarices are also portrayed by contrasts and how the general posture and popular notions about these are humorously reflected:

Imagine small 18 years old babe go dey call him Aristo<sup>3</sup> Baby. Man wey old enough to be him papa. I love Lagos girls, na for only Lagos you go see young girls they call married men with confidence. Those girls go just take hand knock these big men wey some of them be chief like; honey, open the door for me, honey help me with that cup. If their wife call them like that or try that same thing with the, she go reach village that same day.

*(Fancy a petite 18-year-old girl calling her elderly lover (Aristo) Baby. A man old enough to be her father! I love Lagos girls, it is only in Lagos you will see young girls calling married men with confidence. These young girls casually knock the heads of these big men, though a number of them are chiefs. They have the audacity to instruct their men: 'honey, open the door for me, honey help me with that cup.' If their wives dare to refer to them like that or sends them on such mundane errands she will be sent packing and will in fact arrive at her village that same day) (Okpocha B.2).*

Basketmouth attempts a lesson on health education when he ridicules persons with mouth odour,

Mouth odour no be bad thing, no be sickness. Just know how to use it, if you get mouth odour you fit quarrel win the quarrel, argue win the argument, and settle fight without touching the people. In fact you no need insecticide for house.

*(Mouth odour is not a bad thing, it is not an illness. Just know how to take advantage of it. If you have mouth odour you are sure to win an argument, you are sure to settle fight without touching people as a matter of fact you have no need of insecticides in the house) (Okpocha B.2).*

He sharply contrasts this with onomastics of names and humorously implies that the name given to a girl or the name a girl bears determine how she is treated by her suitors or what she is offered by them in his words:

Basically, e get places wey u fit carry girl go, girls wey their name sound tush like Tasha, Latifa take them to Eko Hotel, Le Meridian but if her name na Linda, Jennifer, Amanda take them to places like Mr Biggs, Tasty Fried Chicken but, if her name na Chioma, Nneka, Kemi, Bisola

<sup>3</sup> Elderly men who date very young girls, they are also referred to as 'sugar daddies'

no waste your money carry them go mama put, like Ghana rice. But if her name na Atutuboyoyo no carry them comot, give them money make them go cook for house.

*(Basically, there are categories of places that you can take girls to. For instance, girls that bear names that sound sophisticated like Tasha, Latifa you take to Eko Hotel, Le Meridian but those with names like Linda, Jennifer, Amanda take them to places like Mr Biggs, Tasty Fried Chicken, if her name is Chioma, Nneka, Kemi, Bisola don't waste your money, take her to a local eatery where they sell food like Ghana rice. But if her name is Atutuboyoyo don't bother to take her out, give her money to prepare the food in the house)* (Okpocha B.2).

He shrewdly connects these with the politics of good looks and how it should influence mate selection when he says:

I'm with an organisation and we are trying to help children. It's an NGO we're helping children and I want you people to support us. The children are suffering, if you know that you're not good looking get married to someone that is good looking. The amount of ugly children in Nigeria is getting too much. If you no fine, help your pikin, marry fine person! *(If you are not good looking help your offspring, marry a fine person!)* (Okpocha B.2).

He humorously juxtaposes several unconnected yet logical images and imagery in constructing the plot of his narrative thereby achieving humour and laughter.

The comedians often thematically weave political problems, paint portraits of politician's greed and mismanagement of funds in public office in to their performances.

A thought-provoking question is asked about the basic qualification and experience of politicians who run the nation:

But why be say we no dey ask our politicians of their experience if dem won contest and if we won look for job them go dey ask us of our own work experiences? *(How be it that we do not ask politicians of their work experience when they want to contest a position and when we are job seeking they make work experience a major issue)* (Okpocha B.2).

Ethnicity recurrently features as a source of contrast and comparison as comedians mimic and inflect their voices to tease out the differences in the speech patterns and the linguistic identities of the ethnicities that make up the Nigerian. De Don in the following excerpt stylishly takes a jab at Igbo boys from the hinterland;

No even make mistake of giving person from village your phone, the mistake wey I do, be say I give one guy from Enugu my phone say if anybody call make he tell the person to call back in the next 30minutes, the guy no know say phone get sweet melody, na so the guy dance to twelve missed calls.

*(Don't ever make the mistake of giving someone that is from your village your phone. I once committed the blunder, I gave one guy from Enugu my phone with the instruction that anyone who calls should call back in 30 minutes. The guy didn't know that the ring tone of the phone is the sweet melody it makes, that is how he danced to twelve missed calls)* (William O. 3).

In some extreme cases the choice of delicacies of specific ethnic groups are satirised. Ali Baba in one of his performances picked on dogs as pets and dogs as delicacies:

Did you know that the people that went for Tu Face's wedding; there was a dog show as part of the show? You know, people went for boat ride, safari. *(Laugh.)* And they bounced three people. They didn't allow them enter. I don't know why. Kate Henshaw, Ini Edo and Forester Giwa. They said we come to watch... *(Laugh.)* They asked them, "What part of Nigeria?" They said South East. They asked, "What part?" They said "Calabar". They said you can't come in here; it's a dog show not abattoir (Utube 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2016).

Poverty is a dominant theme which plays out in intriguing ways among stand-ups in Nigeria. Almost every stand-up identifies with the poor and with those who used to be poor but claim to have become wealthy celebrities. Poverty is an archetypal symbol that is played recurrently and the emergent stereotypes from this theme earlier referred to is the

‘*Ajebo*’ (aje butter) and the ‘*Pako*’ (aje paki/pako) contextually *ajebo* refers to the offspring of the sophisticated elite who is reared on butter and ‘*paki*’ refers to the offspring of the poor or wretched, reared on cassava/ wood, one who has become dynamic by being street wise and who struggles to fit into the upper class within the social strata. The paradigm of the rich and the poor is engaged in a pragmatic manner that captures the hearts and subsequently the patronage of the audience. Basketmouth in this excerpt portrays poverty as a symbol:

When we dey grow up things tough so te, things rough. My school dey Apapa and I dey trek every day from Okoko to Apapa. I trek so te my shoes no road by themselves. During weekend if dem send me to market, the shoe by itself go dey direct me go Apapa where my school dey.

*(When we were growing up things were so tough, things were rough. My school was in Apapa and I had to trek daily from Okoko to Apapa. I trekked so much that my shoes could find their way to school. On weekends when I am sent to the market, the shoes will by itself direct me to Apapa where my school is.)*

(Okpocha B.2).

The *Ajebo* and the *Pako* have become recurrent character types and stereotypes in the repertoire of the Nigerian stand-up comedy. Comedians and their audience no doubt privilege the *Pako* because of the humour generated by the crudeness but practical manner in which the *Pako* resolves issues and in recent times more jokes have been shared on how the *Pakos* always emerge rulers and political leaders because of their ruggedness.

Social stratification and the indices that distinguish the poor from the rich is also a laughable constant thematic preoccupation in Nigerian stand-up comedy. Basketmouth portrays the challenges of heavy traffic in metropolitan cities in Nigeria and the street hawkers that take advantage of these queues to sell all sorts of items. He advances his plot by insisting that the hawkers respond to types of vehicles as indices of wealth or placement in the social strata and the owners of such vehicles are accorded commensurate honour:

Because of the holdup wey dey Lagos, hawkers dey sell everything. Dem they sell plates, spoon, knives, vegetable, and stove. You fit just park cook soup inside hold up. *(The recurrent traffic jam in Lagos makes it possible for hawkers to sell everything. They sell plates, spoon, knives, vegetable, and stove. You might as well just park your vehicle and prepare soup in the traffic jam.)* The most annoying thing is that the kind of car you drive determines the kind of product they sell to you. If you dey drive cars like Mazda 2.2, 404 dem go just come your car, ‘Sir, sir, sir recharge card, Five Alive’ but if you dey drive cars like V.Boot or all those bad, bad 504 dem go just come your side say ‘Bros, buy your rat poison’ *(If you drive cars like Mazda 2.2, 404, they will come by your car and advertise “Sir, sir, sir, recharge card, Five Alive”. But if you are driving cars like V.Boot or a rickety 504 Peugeot they will just come near your vehicle and say ‘Bros, buy your rat poison’ ( Okpocha B.2).*

Nigerian stand-ups constantly compare happenings or fictional experiences they claim to have had in other countries with their experiences in Nigeria. These jokes or humour laden stories comparatively examine attitudes, and the sense of order that seems to be lacking in Nigeria with the orderliness of other much more developed countries.

For instance, the search light is turned on the Nigerian Police Force in this manner:

Two weeks ago when a friend of mine went to London, he tell me say the Police, the way them dey take (they will ask) ask for your papers they will stand beside your car and say ‘Sir pull over’, they will talk to you kindly. They will say ‘Good afternoon sir, can I have your papers?’ But for Nigeria dem go first block half of the road with drums dem go come shout ‘Park! Park! Park here now!’ and they are always drunk. For night dem go say ‘Inner light’ even for hot afternoon, ‘Inner light’. The day wey I know say dem drink too much na one night when I dey drive comot for Victoria Island, naso dem stop me say ‘Park here! Inner light!’ Another guy come dey tell one okada (motorbike) man say ‘Park here! Inner light!’

*(But in Nigeria they would have initially blocked half of the road with drums and they will begin to shout ‘Park! park! Park here now!’ and they are always drunk. In the night they will say put on your ‘Inner light, even in the blaring afternoon sun ‘Inner light!’ The day I realised that they had too much to drink was one*

*night when I was driving out of Victoria Island. That is how they stopped me and yelled 'Park here! Inner light!' Another guy began to tell one bike man, 'Park here! Inner light!'* ( Okpocha B.2).

De Don paints another scenario of a fellow, whose vehicle has just been stolen,

I dey London last week when my friend lost his car as he come out from the supermarket, the guy no make one noise, he just comot him phone call police in another 20 minutes them get the car back but in Nigeria here, if you lost your motor you go first craze for like one hour before person go remind you make you make police report you go dey hear things like 'But I park my car here. No, no, no, here...I pass through Wuse... traffic jam at Area 1'. People go think say the car owner dey mad, dem go carry am go psychiatric, before you know dem no go see him car again.

*I was in London last week when my friend lost his car as he came out from the supermarket, the guy didn't make a noise, he just pulled out his phone, called the police and in another 20 minutes the vehicle had been recovered and restored. But in Nigeria here, lose your vehicle you will first run mad for about an hour before someone reminds you to make a police report. You will begin to hear the owner say things like '...but I parked my car here. No, no, no, here...I passed through Wuse... traffic jam at Area 1.' People will begin to think that the car owner is mad, they will take him to psychiatric, hospital and before you realise it the vehicle is gone for good.*

(William O. 3).

In a domestic context Gbenga Adeyinka the 1<sup>st</sup> portrays two mother/daughter interaction and the likely cultural responses to issues on mate selection from each region:

An American mother, if her daughter tells her, "You won't believe, my boyfriend Brown. I tried him with my friend Jane and they're getting married next week." The mother will say "Oh my God! He did that to you? Oh my God! He broke your heart. You need to see a therapist. You need to lie down." Try that with a Yoruba mother; "You know my boyfriend Kola? You know my best friend Rita? I tried Kola with Rita o. They're getting married in three months' time." "Kare, omo 're bi'yan (Very good, a child as 'good' as pounded yam). Tester, tester. That your Rita friend like this; you tried your boyfriend with her; they're getting married. Emi ko ni mo bi e (I definitely did not give birth to you). Omo ale ni e; mo ti so tele (I've always said it, you are bastard). Sa lo gbomi ka'na mofe lo'we (Go and put my bath water to boil)." Till you get married and leave this house, what is your name? Tester! (U Tube)

Here, Adeyinka portrays distinctly contrasting socio cultural and psychological responses from the mothers. Other topical issues include the regular distractions that members of the audience live with and which may not allow the audience to respond appropriately to the show such as losing a girlfriend or being robbed prior to the show.

The ability to create national and ethnic stereotypes is the highpoint of the characterisation of Nigerian stand-ups. Imitation, mimicry and expressive body language are ingeniously engaged to portray character types. Politicians and the Nigerian political scene, for instance, feature abundantly as objects of jokes. In recent years the body language of former President Goodluck Jonathan as well as the choice of words of his wife, then First Lady, Dame Patience, the looks of former President Olusegun Obasanjo, as well as Governor Oshiomole of Edo State have been hatched and re-hatched countless times in jokes and comic skits.

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The Nigerian film industry and its stars constitute another class of character types replete in stand-up comedies. The comics often underscore ludicrous absurdities and illogic in the production of Nigerian home videos, known as Nollywood. According to Okpocha (Basket Mouth),

Nigerian home videos no try (*are still behind times*). Watch American movies listen to the sound track, the sound track does not have anything to do with the title of the movie, ( in Nigeria) the sound track and the name of the movies na (are) the same thing. Slow motion

for American movies na (*is*) for some kind bad place (a sort of terrifying scene) wey (*that*) the actor wan (wants to) shoot, fall, roll but Nigerian film even when ... they write the name of the producers na (*it is*) with slow motion even when Ramsey Noah dey talk na (*is talking, it is*) with slow motion, the most annoying part na (*is*) their posters, from the poster you don (*have*) understand the movie

*Nigerian videos are still behind in many things. If you watch an American movie and listen to the sound track, it usually has nothing to do with the title of the movie. In Nigeria, the soundtrack and the name of the movies are the same! Slow motion in American movies are reserved for terrifying scenes, perhaps when an actor wants to shoot, fall or roll, but in Nigerian films: when they write the name of producers, it is with slow motion, when Ramsey Noah speaks, it is in slow motion. The most annoying part is the posters made for the films. Once you see the poster you have understood the film (Okpocha B.2).*

Such friendly jibes thrown at Nollywood stars have helped improve the quality of video productions in Nigeria in no small measure, especially in the areas of adverts and voice over for the trailers that precede the film debuts, and the narrative and musical animation in action films. There are also jokes on spousal communication and ridicule that take place in public spaces particularly articulated with the use of dramatic irony. Gandoki in a unique manner interrogates a man's lack of sense of responsibility towards his immediate family implying that it is synonymous to being dead. He says:

I dey church na him our pastor say make all widows come out for prayers, see as widows dey come out, na him one lady come out too, na him her husband hold her, 'Are you a widow?' Na with tears the woman take reply am say 'Out of the eight children wey we born u no train anyone of them' (*I was in church and our pastor called widows out for a special ministration. As they began filling out a woman joined them. Her husband pulled her and asked 'Are you a widow?' The woman tearfully replied 'You have trained none of the eight children we have...'*) (William O. 3).

In the final analysis, the themes range from anything to everything from domestic to health issues even, family planning, and the use of condoms in prevention of STDs.

Irrespective of the thematic preoccupation, the success of the stand-up comedian is determined by the versatility of his art. Stand-ups remarkably incorporate the solo-artist and the many voices and body language of absent characters, whose momentary portraits are nonetheless unmistakably vivid. According to Oliver Double (2016), '... the comedian appears on stage apparently as himself. But within gags and routines, comics often briefly take on the voice and posture of the characters they describe' (Double 2016). The rigour and intense rehearsals put into the development and scripting of the jokes and other elements of the performance, as well as proper audience profiling help to ensure the success of the comedian's art. Ted Ray, a renowned European comic, wrote:

Every night, hour after hour, I would stand in front of the mirror in my bedroom, grimacing, smiling, and winking, with the idea of getting the most effective expression for putting over a joke... Every inflection of voice and every shade of emotion as reflected in a comedian's voice do count tremendously and I was determined that if hard work and ceaseless rehearsal would help, no trouble on my part would be too much (Double, 2016:317).

The success of stand-up in Nigeria no doubt takes root in the proficiency of these comics in communication, particularly verbal and nonverbal arts and body language. The ability to convincingly, assume multiple personalities, including that of the opposite gender, or adherents of other religions adds spice to the art of the comedian.

## Music comedy and Christian comedy as other forms of Nigerian stand-up comedy

Nigerian stand-up comedy privileges the variety form as its programme. This consists of mime, dance choreography, musical interludes, solo instrumentals. There are operatic comedies where topical issues are re-enacted, others include humour-endowed by the crass with legendary Gbenga Adeboye and contemporary Julius Agwu; stand-ups with lengthy hours of comedy theatre.

Julius Agwu's *Different work dey o*, is an extremely humorous type of this form, in a full-length song he juxtaposes the image of 'work', with the new meaning work assumes in contemporary Nigeria. He uses Pidgin English to spice the song while national characters, professions and settings feature prominently in this music comedy. He portrays as well as satirises the Soldier, Gateman, the Honourable members in the House of Assembly and men who ride the motorbike among others. He conclusively ridicules a trend that became popular when mobile phones became a dominant form of communication in Nigeria. He subtly implies that the annoying manner people adopt of 'flashing' numbers instead of making actual calls have also become a profession of sorts.

Stand-up comedy in Nigeria has also created room for itself in religious spaces and among Christians and Muslims with the emergence of comics like Holy Mallam in the Church and Funky Mallam in the Mosques. The quintessential prophet and his interpreter is also excellently played by AY and Still Ringing. Tribal stereotypes found in the art and characterisation Funky Mallam and LafUp are also examples of forms that celebrate specific ethnic identities'.

## Conclusion

The emergence of the neo-cultural form of stand-up in Nigeria comedy has been the focus of this paper. It examines the unanimous adoption of a multicultural posture within the usually polemic Nigerian multi-ethnic space. It interrogates the influence of traditional comedy, on the contemporary form of stand-up comedy in Nigeria. Evidently, stand-up comedy in Nigeria has benefitted tremendously from professional travelling theatres particularly the *Awada Alarinjo* Yoruba tradition. Navigating through times and themes by eclectic neo-cultural modifications, the current form has achieved an intercultural balance to the extent that a new culture has emerged. Critically chronicling professional contexts of humour in Nigeria, the trends reveal features of traditional forms of comedy that are sustained as well as contemporary and syncretic forms that have emerged. Dramatic and theatrical elements such as actors/caricaturists, props, stage, music, mime are implements that are thematically engaged in satirising and for creating humour in Nigeria. While stand-up theatres seem to have 'plateaued' in some parts of the world (King, 2014:59), contemporary Nigerian stand-up theatres thrive and narrate the Nigerian story with humour-coated lips to audiences *in situ* and in the Diaspora. Indeed the audience is part of the *dramatis personae* in live shows and *in absentia* on social media and other media as they burst out in boisterous laughter at the folly of their very lives as humorously depicted by the multi-faceted stand-up comedian.

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## Discography

Adeboye Gbenga	Different Strokes (VCD)
Adeyinka Gbenga the 1 <sup>st</sup>	UTube
AlliBaba	UTube
Agwu Julius	Musicomedy
Okpocha Bright	BasketMouth Uncensored (VCD) Volume 2
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