



Nigerian Dances and Theatre

NATIONAL THEATRE II

PROF. S. J. TIMOTHY ASOBELE

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Natural Theatre Vol. II**

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all the members of the all-women Woro Dance and Musical ensemble of the ANCIENT CITY OF KABBA dead or living, viz: Mrs. Titi Dare (Obalaye) Ole Lelege (Late); Esther Ibirewo (late); Asimoyun (late); Metuyun (late) Okomawu (late); Ladejobi; Iye Memoun late); Amudugbe, Ole Obedde, Ole at Obagundo's house (late). Let JohnBull and Abiba his mother; Ojo Asobebe and Bode Asobebe and their children take joy in this work. John Bolo Mewa, Bimbim; Aworo Oko Ijeni; Kolade members of social musical ensemble in Kabba of the 1950s take joy in this work and the Late Pa Goerge Alasan Dare, who made his Manor available to Hubert Ogunde each time the latter visited Kabba for concerts in the 1950s.

FOREWORD

Dr. Jide Timothy Asobebe is an academic enigma. For those who know him well, there will be an agreement with me, that he is a restless intellectual constantly in search of what to put on paper. His fare for the theatrical arts makes one forget most times that he read French and teaches in the Department of Modern European Languages of the University of Lagos. His recent plays such as, **Gamji, Ogu Umunwanyi, Kabba** and **Three Church Plays** remain as forerunners to this new book, which he has aptly titled, **Nigerian Dances and Theatre**.

The book written in lucid English gives profound insight first, into the Lagos theatrical scene from 1980, after the third World Black Arts Festival (FESTAC) in 1977 to 1995 when theatrical activities happened both around the National Theatre Building and around some theatrical figures who are today either, dead or less active in the theatrical scene of Lagos. The socio-economic and financial realities of the years after 1995 to present day has lessened drastically, the "glory days" of the open Air Theatre at the National Theatre and the beautiful years of the National Festival of Arts and Culture which was organised nation wide every year by the National Council for Arts and Culture. Ironically, since the last Festival which was held in :1999, no other one has been hosted by NCAC due to paucity of funds. The book also documents the cultural activities of the country through the works of the then very active Department of cultural and the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilisation (CBAAC) a parastatal where Dr. Asobebe had served out a sabbatical year. This second part of the book remains its strength, as it allows the prospective scholar a good chance to find in one single book a good collection of Nigerian playwrights and their works, Nigerian dances, and festivals. To this effect, the book remains a great reference material.

Yet, is the main part of the book which holds the fascination for me. Dr. Asobebe engages one in fluid arguments which come out sometimes as issues that have continued to pre-occupy his mind and which he has found the book a great opportunity and outlet to express himself In moments of this nature, Asobebe slips in his advice on what path culture should take in its development, or goes out to criticise a particular trend of development without proper consideration to the reasons such a development had to take place in the first place, and why it

had to follow that path. But in most of the books Asobele displays to his readers that he is aware of the various dances in the different ethnic groupings in Nigeria.

Dance is the unifying thematic link in the book. Asobele does not discuss the technique of dance, of course not, Asobele is not a dancer, neither does he spend time on the rudiments of dance, he is also not a choreographer, instead what appeals to him is dance as a "tool" FOR enhancing human knowledge and awareness. Therefore, in the chapters on Dance in Nigeria, Dance Therapy, Dance in Education and Vocation Dances for Social Mobilization, it is the different uses of dance that is his pre-occupation. Asobeles stint as expert and consultant in 1987, with the Directorate of food, Roads and Infrastructure's Community Theatre for Social Mobilization enriches his discussions on the use of dance in a community and dance as a tool for mass mobilization. mobilization. But throughout the chapters on dance, one almost feels Asobele's marvel at the variety of the existence of dance as codification of gestures, within various Nigerian cultures. He is excited and full of pride in the discussion, and one feels his anxiety to reel out all the list of dances he had gathered during his years of researches.

Asobele highlights the entwined relationship between theatre and dance. He even describes what has become known as 'Total Theatre' by bringing in the importance of songs and music in performance. From chapter eight, Asobele moves from dance to general discussion on theatre, and oral tradition. The specific performance of Duro Ládipo's, Oba Koso reveals the most personally written chapter in the book. There, we meet Asobele the pan-Africanist, and agitator for good governance in Africa. Chapters thirteen to the Appendices can be seen mainly as documentation chapters, where Asobele puts all the materials he has gathered over the years in a chronological form for references for prospective users of the book.

In conclusion, it is Dr. Asobele's intrinsically Nigerian spirit which becomes evident in the rhetoric of his intellectual discuss. It is clear throughout the book that he is not cynical about his own heritage, even when he criticizes it. He, is proud of the cultural activities of his people, and has like a good listener and scholar, documented and kept every scrap of paper that has come his way over the past twenty years. In fact one almost feels a sense of compelled patriotism. Appropriately, as footnote to his book, Asobele reminded about the richness of his culture and how his multi-cultural society can find unity through these art forms

By constantly finding cultural similarities and semblances between ethnic groups. Yet historicity is the last thing that mattered to him j his treatment of tradition. Instead, culture and tradition are simply aspects of his people's consciousness, and incidents or happenings within Asobele's socio-cultural and sometimes, political reality, reflected in his occasional narrative style, makes the book a pot pourri of varied knowledge, this is what makes Asobele's book compelling.

Dr. Ahmed Yerima

Artistic Director. National Troupe of Nigeria
9th March 2002.

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My sincere gratitude goes to the following persons whose contributions are inestimable: Mr. Segun Obatolu, Miss Rukayat Moloney, Mr. Jide Jimoh, Mr. Fedelis Medubi, Mr. Dan Essien, Mrs. Adams.

Mrs. Bilikisu Yusuf, John Mark Adekunle and Broda Sam Adekunle and for my friends in the University of Lagos, Dr. Segun Aderibigbe, Dr. Tade Ayinla, Dr. Debe Osaji, Prof. A. Babalola, Prof. E. B. Kwofie, Prof. Ade Kukoyi, Chief Ogunpolu, Dr. (Mrs.) Ogungbesan, Dr. (Mrs.) Solanke, Dr. Dele Onikepe, Prof. Edebiri, Prof. Ojo, Prof. Simpson, Mr. James Olumudi, Benson Olorunhudo, Olomolu Akanmide Obadu Asobebe, Oloosola Akanmidu Asobebe. I say thank you" to my late father Pa Timothy Asobebe, my late mother Ma Grace Bamidele Asobebe, Dare Toba, Yetunde Ibirewo, my children, Bridget Solomon, Mofolayomi, Ajayi, Dde, Oredoja, Iyabo Musa, Alice, Ade Gabriel, Bola Shade who all take joy in this work.

In Nigerian Dances & theatre in order to build self-confidence in young research assistants we have only edited the synopses prepared by Lola Mononey on the many plays acted at the National Theatre on the 1980s.

It is our hope that our creative arts students will take a cue from this laudable proceeding job by one of their own. Constructive stewardship sling of time as demonstrated by Lola Mononey should be emulated for better productivity in our country. We want to acknowledge Unilag Central Research Committee, for the grant that enabled us to do research of Kabba Metempsychosis in Chapter Two and Chief Michael Dada Olufakun, the Olukoya of Oweland, Kabba.

PREFACE

Open theatre series, which were inspired by the Open theatre tradition of the 1980s.

The popular and local live theatre groups that performed in the Open theatre series include such artistes and directors as: Ishola Ogunmola, Ade Love, Jimoh Aliu, Baba Sala, Moremi theatre, Agbomiregun Theatre, Ojo Ladipo Theatre, Obalende Theatre, Jagua, Ajimajasan Drama Troupe, Jesters International and Hubert Ogunde. Most of the plays performed by the theatre in English language group touched the plight of the masses and city people. Such titles as: Ayitale, Ebi, Awero, Home to Ajegimle, The People y Desire Katakata for Suffer Head, Ori Jankariwo, Budisco, The King Must Dance Naked, Egun Lapampa, The Gods Are Not to Blame, If Holding Talks, The Boat, The Raft, Daughter of the Sun, The Anthill, Obaluaye, The Scheme, Langbodo, Esu Elegbara, The Curse, The Chattering and the Song, Red is the Freedom Road, No More the Wasted Breed, Abiona In Love, The Aftermath, Old Wines Are Tasty', The Swamp Dwellers, Jero's Metamorphosis, Death and the King's Horseman, Riders on The Storm, Winds Against my Soul, The imprisonment of Obatala, The Old Master, Sing The Old Songs for Me, Echoes from The Lagoon, God's Deputy, The Game, Osannah to Oninmila, Flat Rate, Dogiosola, Emperor Asharus, Rolella, The Commander's Telegram, Ogu Umumvayin, Gamji, Kabba: A Play, Love in warren Hall, Paradase ni Paradase, Blind Cyclos, Onuigbo Mloko, The Interior, Rebirth at Esther, The Flute. Isiburu, Ogbanje, Omezeu, The Marriage of Princess Sidibe, and Revenge. The popular live theatre group's plays include; Oba ICoso, Langbodo, Kadara, Ija Orogun, Iya ni Wura, Arelu, Digbolesu, Awobaba 1983, Ilese Kuro, Emokan, Obatala, Ologbo Lanrere, Arole, Omo Wai, Omuti gbagbe ise, The White Calabash, Ogun Laye, Ogun Ofe, Aropin N'teniyen, Jayesinmi.

The truth is that while most of the popular local theatre groups played to full capacity audiences on week-ends, our theatre in English plays, performed at the National Theatre on the week-ends did not fare well. The sociological explanation is two-fold. Primero, the theatre in local languages already has a following, because the Ogundes, Baba Salas, Aluwes are crowd-pullers in their own right. Secondly the people

do not have to over-tax their brain to get the messages in the popular local plays. The theatre in English is therefore alienated from its potential audience. It is a truism that where there is music in abundance, there must be dance. Nigerians, we know are a highly musical people. Their dance steps have been preserved in far-away Rio de Janeiro and Havana, where Rhumba, Samba, Pazanga dances are still in vogue today after five centuries of slave trade. The break dance popularized by Afro-Americans is said to share affinity with the Yoruba Bata dance.

Thus we have the well-costumed and elegantly decked Monure Egungun dance from Kabba town in Kogi state, Ere Mole Osele dance from Ikare, ijo omoge from Are-Ekili, Igunuko dance from Ifo, Orile Abeokuta, Sango dance from Oyo, Ijo ode from Iragbiji Ifa dance from Ile-Ife, GangaYaki from Ushafa from Abuja, Laya-ya-bata dance from Abuja, Gbagurasa dance from Agale Lapai, Yanga -Bisa Dutsi from Yaldu in Sokoto, Ibaji dance From idah Egwu Ura Mgbnbugo from Idah in Kogi State, Ireku Dance and Onyimiriweyi from Okene, Tasu, dance from Borya Babaiawo and Daadakuada from fuufu village in Akanbi district of Ilorin, Ndakogboya 'masquerade dance from Lafiaji, Bori/Babule dance from Birnin Gwari in Kaduna, Wasan Waza

runz from Saminaka in Kaduna state, Kalangu (Pawa and Dambe) from Katsina, Rawar Makera from Daura, Kwaifa dance from Ga anda in Adamawa, Shappi Joro and Burli dance from Bauchi state, gosZaikam, Ifiko, Wasan Noma, Adidon, Giplilc Garma, Landi Kworkwot, jalala, Dobzani, Garaya. kukuma from Lantang. Ekpo Ntok Eyen from Akwa Ibom, Denwa Ikapa dance from Akampa in Cross River State, Ekpe Enonke from Big Qua Town in Calabar, Agut Pance from ikom, Uzeko from Osah, llo from Somorika Ododo from Epesa, Ekha from Uneme Nekhua, Egonide from Ogbe and Ukuku from Kakumo of Akoko-Edo in Edo state, Olokun dance from Benin, Elueosi from Fugar, Egwu Ihere from Ekuku Agbor. Ijeleghe from Utomi, Asono from Ubiaja in Edo, Balula from Bichi, Rawar Kaba from Gwarzo, Korotso from Dawakin Tofa, Kula-Kula from Yanhvashi in Kano state, Egun Eleru, Zangbeto from Badagry, Agbo from Epe, Igunuko from Bayeku in Lagos state, Koromor from Taabaa in Khana in Rivers State, Agbila

-Okipa-Ediro from Inodi in Ahoada, Ekpele from Brass, Okolorukwu from Kalaari, Omo Egele front Yenagoa and Ereimiogho from Port Hacourt.

The therapeutic importance of Dance in African possession or Trance dance drama, as well as the importance of Dance to theatre is responsible for the conceptual framework of this book.

Thus our African brothers in the Southern African sphere like the Kenyan, Ugandans and Ipitombi Exit Travelling Theatre of the 1980 should fund solace here that African grandly remembers their act of bravery and bravore of old. Nigeria was countered as a worthy member of the African front line State them. But today Xnophobia Against the did of Niger had blinded South African of the role of Nigeria OBASANJO/Mumfola Region of the 1975 -1979 in Africa History until Nigeria until Nigeria gains respect for Africa in the world says Mandela Black and Africa people will not the respected with concert of Nations.

Hail Mtambo Mbeki Africa Renassanice of the 1990s 2000

INTRODUCTION

NIGERIAN DANCES AND THEATRE

The 1980s witnessed an upsurge in the use of the resources of the National Theatre, Iganmu for the promotion of the Nigerian Theatre. The role of the "*Open Theatre*" in this respect is commendable; because it worked in a consistent manner to promote and support theatrical creativity in Nigeria. Both theatre in English and the local popular theater genres benefited immensely from this cultural windfall.

It is to this cultural phenomenon that this work is devoted. But it must be said here that the dance section of the book benefited immensely from the various cultural Dances organized by Nigerian Council for Arts and Culture since 1974. We are aware to what extent Theatre and Dances can go in 'helping us to realize our national goal of national unity. Theatre and dances are very important in this respect.

Nigerian Playwrights whose works figured in this study include: Bode Osanyin, Larry Williams, Segun Narse, Segun Oyekunle, Ben Tomoloju, Fred Agbeyegbe, Agbo Sikuade, Ola Rotimi, J.P. Clark, Obi Egbuna, Wale Ogunyemi, Kole Omotosho, Femi Osofisan, Zulu Sofola, Wole Soyinka, Laolu Oguniyi, Obatunde Ijimere, Sonny Oti, Rasheed Gbadamosi, Sanya Dosunmu, Femi Euba, Ime Ikiddeh, Samsideen Amali, Nkem Nkwanko, Edith Enem, Elechi Amadi Uwa Hunwick, Uya A. U., Odukwe Sackeyfio, Duro Ladipo, and Kola Ogunmola. All these playwrights write in English.

Premium is put on new plays by these new voices. That is not to say that some old plays by Nigerian playwrights of the "*wasted generation*" are not included. Some of the works of Wole and Clark are included. But the main thrust is on the performed plays, that is, plays that have been performed at the National Theatre. Our position stems from our belief that plays are written to be performed and not to be read exclusively as school certificate set texts. The fact that the National Theatre is now been used as the nervecenter for the promotion of our dramatic patrimony is the highpoint of this book. It cannot be otherwise. Some other plays were still to feature in the that Dance and Drama are intimately linked, both being well choreographed spectacles.

Nigerian Dances and theatre will therefore introduce potential readers to the worldview of the Nigerian people, their religious observances and beliefs, their costumes, their dynamism that are aptly

reflected in their theatre sketches, tableaux, skits, lampoons, etc.

Nigerian Dances and theatre will naturally appeal to classes of Creative Arts in all Nigerian JSS and SSS where the curriculum stipulates the teaching of Nigerian creative arts. Theatre and dances, that combine the finest in our Fine and Applied Arts will receive a boost if the creative energies that our traditional dancers and our modern theatre practitioners have put in the works studied and described in detail in this book are made available to our youths. After all, our youths are the major shareholders in the future cultural, economic and political development of our great nation.

Nigerian Dances and Theatre will be handy to all modern theatre practitioners, our teachers of creative arts in JSS and SSS, our culture managers, and scholars of Sociology, Anthropology and ethnography, as well as the general public. Tourists desirous to know certain aspects of Nigerian cultural heritage will also find the book very useful.

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CHAPTER ONE

DANCE IN NIGERIA

THE NATURE OF DANCE

It must be said right from the onset that dance and music are intrinsically related, one to the other. This is because dance and music use the medium of poetry to touch the soul of both the performer and the audience. This is to say that music is poetry and dance uses poetic language. Those who are versed in the language of traditional dance and music can therefore relate positively and react to drum in dance. Rhythm is therefore central to delight of both dance and music. There are also dances in African culture that only the initiates can decode or communicate. The Ekpe secret cult dance movements of the Ibibios, Efik and Bende Ibos of Imo State are shrouded in cryptic rhythmic sign movement that only members can interpret.

The Igwi dance of the Binisato belongs to this genre, it is a poetic movement executed by dancer subjects to pledge their loyalty to the Oba of Benin. The swaying of the dance sword, left, right, up and down are loaded with cultural messages. Like when the sword goes down this means irrevocable death penalty.

Music at times dictates the movements of dances and meanings that are culturally relevant to a trade group. For the rhythm of Kalangu Hausa music, which is the instrument of predilection for butcher; *Rawan Maharba* for hunters and *Rawan Kidi* for social. The last type of music is very rampant in the Tundun Wada and the city districts of Hausaland. Bashful Hausa spinsters pay the drummer in most cases and dictate the tune to which they want to dance through poetic rhythm. The drummers can heighten her moral by playing rhythmic oriki or praisename of the dancer. These rhythmic body movements are a ploy to use their *bodies* to seduce prospective lovers or satirize those that have gone out of favour.

The Abirinjo Dance for example features masks with long mouth to satirizes gossip or busybody. Like the Kalahari Ekine play, the Alarinjo dances are to characterize the personage in the sketches. Such dances are occasions to use dances for social critique (Skits) and dancers have poetic licence or absolute freedom during this special treat to execute dances of this nature without fear of any censorship whatever.

SAMUEL JIDE TIMOTHY-ASOBELE

Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele is one in a million. He waltzed through Government Secondary School, Okene (1963-1967) Federal Government College, Sokoto (1968-1969), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (1970-1974), University of Dakar (1972-1973), The Sorbonne University of Paris (1975-1979), and scooped up distinctions with the ease of a ballet dancer in training for Les Sylphides.

He stands on the pedestal of the following impressive accomplishments: BA (Hons) Languages (UNN); Diploma (Dakar); CES, MA, DEA, Doctorat de 3 Cycle (Paris); Scholarship by AUPELF-UREF in April 1997; Esteemed Member of the New York Academy of Science, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Nigerian Folklore Society; Chairman Lagos State Library Board; Board Member University of Lagos Centre for Cultural Studies.

Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele is a Specialist in the field of Literary Translation and African and Comparative Literature. He is a Lecturer and the Chairman and Coordinator of the Department of European Languages, University of Lagos; likewise for the Post Graduate Committee and Professional Degree in Translation respectively. In 1988 Samuel Jide Timothy Asobele conceived the Voice of Nigeria (VON) French programme in African Literary Masterpieces, in which he demonstrated his passion for the works of Amos Tutuola. In 1990 he conceived the Community Theatre for Mass-Mobilization for DFFRI and MAMSER. He was Chairman of the Reception Committee for Nelson Mandela at CBAAC, where he was Assistant Director of Research, and Editor of Journal of Black and African Arts and Civilization.

Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele is the author of *Ogu Umunwanyi*, a drama devoted to the historical Aba Women's Riots of 1928; *Kabba*, another drama *Gamjii*, a play devoted to the career of Sir Abmadu Bello, the late Premier of Northern Nigeria. There were collections of poems to his name, namely - *Tree of Trinity*, *Lion Head*, *Diaspora*. *Brotherhood of Cain*, *Langbasa*.

As an accomplished linguist, Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele published the works *Le Francais au Nigeria* and *Une Cartographie Dynamique*. He later wrote and published *New Perspectives in the Training of Translators and interpreters in Nigeria*, *The Essential of French Grammar for Predominantly English-Speaking Learners*, *Top TV Comedians and Operas*, *Yoruba Cinema of Nigeria*, *Historical Trends in Nigerian Indigenous and Contemporary Music*, *Contemporary Arts and Artists: a Modern Guide*, *Essays in World Theatre*.

Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele translated into French the OAU and ECOWAS Summits Cultural Programmes held in Abuja in June and July 1991. As a seasoned translator and researcher in the field of terminology, he believes terminologists, translators and interpreters can help to build the AU, ECO WAS and UNO. He was a Rapporteur in July 2003 during the Leon Sullivan Summit held in Abuja, Nigeria. In July 2006 he was invited by the African Union (AU) to the Conference of intellectuals of Africa and the Diaspora to present a paper on African languages in the educational systems worldwide, which took place in the city of Salvador, Brazil.

Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele used to lecture at the Nigerian Foreign Academy, Marina, Lagos, on topics that embraced Cultural Diplomacy. He is a Patron of the Association of West African Young Writers, located in Ebutte-Metta, Lagos, and Chairman of the Department of European Languages Consultancy Committee of the University of Lagos.

Outside the frenetic demands of lecture halls, Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele maintains physical and mental health through the recreation of lawn-tennis and hockey. His greatest source of relaxation comes by 500a.m. every morning, when he wakes up to read The Bible. Family and parental duties have been significantly minimized by the employed adulthood of his two sons Dare and Tobe, and daughter Ayomide.

It is a striking fact that no other educationist or man-of-letters has patronized the unique story-telling skills of Amos Tutuola with the same passion of zeal as Samuel Jide Timothy-Asobele. For this reason, inter alia, it is only right and fitting that he should be conferred, and he is hereby conferred, with *The Tutuola Palm for Poetry*.