

EXPLORING THE UNFADING THEMES OF DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE ON THE NIGERIAN STAGE: THE EXAMPLE OF "WOMEN OF UMU-NJAM"

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ABSTRACT.

The performing arts offer a unique lens through which to examine Nigeria's democratic experience, capturing the emotions and physical expressions of the people. This paper explores the enduring themes of democratic experience in Nigeria through the performance of Kelechi Ogbonna's "Women of Umu-Njam", a play, set against the backdrop of Umu-Njam's political history that evolved from a workshop experimentation. The performance offers a powerful critique of the familiar, and imaginary Umu-Njam's democratic journey, revealing recurring themes of democratic experiences. These themes convey the mold and images of humanistic temper, which are examined through a methodical performance analysis of "Women of Umu-Njam", using existentialist theory as background. The paper critically examines the intersection of existentialist philosophy and democratic experiences in Nigeria by analyzing the performance themes, characters and action. The study reveals inspiring individual and collective action towards democratic reform and accountability, thereby fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for democratic governance. The researcher suggests theatre should address current issues to challenge politicians and inform the public.

Keywords: Unfading Themes, Democratic Experience, Humanistic Temper, Performing Arts. "Women of Umu-Nja

Introduction

Democratic experience in the context of this research refers to the collective and individual experiences of the people of Nigeria within the period of the democratic system of government in Nigeria. Recall that the June 12 inconclusive presidential election and the Sani Abacha's coup of November 1993 against Ernest Shonekon's Interim government are unforgettable experiences in Nigeria. However, from 1999 to present, Nigeria has witnessed un-truncated growth of democratic system of government, where power is held by the people either directly or through elected representatives. Though, the acclaimed Nigerian democracy is shaped by its historical, religious, cultural and political factors, the democratic experience has been marked by a complex and tumultuous journey that is filled with moments of hope and despair.

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the country has grappled with numerous challenges including corruption, poor leadership, insecurity, and political maneuvering. Evidence of instability are visible in the October 20th 2020 "End SARS" (a Special Anti-Robbery Squad that was founded by police officer Simeon Danladi Midenda in 1992 to prosecute and investigate crimes associated with, including armed robbery, kidnapping, motor vehicle theft, and cattle rusting, was officially dissolved on October 11th, 2020, due to extensive reports of extrajudicial

killings, torture, extortion, and human rights abuses which triggered the protests. Wikipedia, para.2) that resulted in the killing of Nigerian youths, as well as the Boko Haram's insurgency, the Fulani Herder's and Farmer's crisis as well as banditry. Also, other militia agitations and movements have contributed to negative experiences. The overwhelming effects on the dividends of democracy are far-fetched as the government is unable to enhance the independence and effectiveness of democratic institutions, such as the Judiciary, Electoral Commission, as well as the Law Enforcement Agencies. Thus, the rippling effect therefore denies Nigerians the ability to exercise their rights, freely participate in the political process without one incursion or the other, and the inability to work within conducive social and economic landscapes. But, the performing arts, particularly theatre, have played a significant role in capturing the emotions and physical expressions of the people, offering a unique lens through which to examine Nigeria's democratic experience.

This paper explores the enduring themes of democratic experience in Nigeria which has become a montage of different colours and shades. This thorny and complex journey is explicitly re-lived through the play performance of "Women of Umu-Njam", a powerful critique of the Umu-Njam's democratic journey. The performance captures the emotions, physical experiences and the tempers of the community. The storyline reenacts the recurring themes of political struggle, leadership questions and the upsurge in agitations and revolutionary dynamics of the people. Hence, The study recommends a heightened engagement with topical socio-political issues in theatre performances, particularly as a strategy for interrogating the political class and fostering civic consciousness among the populace.

Research Questions

Three research questions are selected for this study which examines the democratic experiences in Nigeria.

- 1 What enduring themes of democratic experience are represented in "Women of Umu-Njam"?
2. In what ways do these themes reinforce humanistic temper within Nigeria's democratic experience?
3. How do theatre performances such as "Women of Umu-Njam" contribute to the promotion of democratic values and the conscientization of citizens in Nigeria?

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative research approach by analyzing the performance of "Women of Umu-Njam" which took place on the 15th of November 2021 by the 3rd Year students of Theatre Arts, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The performance as a case study explores existentialist themes and democratic experiences in Nigeria. Thus, the methodic process followed a combination of the following:

- 1. Data Collection:** The play script evolved out of a workshop between Kelechi Stellamaris Ogbonna and a class of thirty-four (34) students, devising scenes of everyday life experience, , focusing on dialogue, analyzed characters' actions and themes related to existentialist experiences.
- 2. Data Analysis:** A thematic analysis was conducted, identifying and coding themes, and interpreting their meanings in the contexts of existentialist philosophy and Nigeria's democratic journey.

3. Literature Review: Relevant literature on existentialism, democratic experiences and theatre arts was reviewed to provide a theoretical framework and contextualize the findings.

4. Performance analysis involved a close examination of the play as staged focusing on how the themes and characters' experiences were presented on stage, and how they resonated with the audience. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of how "Women of Umu-Njam" reflects existentialist themes and democratic awareness in Nigeria, as well as the role of theatre in promoting democratic values.

Existentialism as Theoretical Consideration

Humanistic temper resonates in this paper as a mindset or outlook that prioritizes human values, human dignity and well-being. The theatre therefore is the medium through which empathetic and holistic approaches to understanding human experiences, individual and collective flourishing can be explored. Thus, by embracing diverse perspectives and experiences of democratic rule in Nigeria through theatre as medium of exploration, existentialism is considered a relevant theoretical framework because it fosters a deeper understanding of human experience and survival. The Existentialist Theory is an influential school of thought in Europe from about 1430 to the mid-20th century which posits that human experience is inherently problematic due to its individual and nature that is characterized by the freedom to choose and create one's own meaning in life. This philosophical thought stresses the need for personal response to social force that binds the individual to the courses of action demanded by that force. Therefore, existentialism is a philosophical theory that lays emphasis on the existence of the individual as a responsible and free person that determines his or her own action/will. Thus, emerging in the 19th Century with key figures like Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Satre, Albert Camus, Fanon and Friedrich Nietzsche, existentialism has been shaped to meet contemporary relevance in addressing the common concerns.

Gardiner P (1969) records that Soren Kierkegaard is considered the father of existentialism due to his emphasis on individual existence as the individual's process of becoming committed and responsible. Hence, Existentialism focuses on the individual's ability to create meaning for himself other than depending on religion or supernatural powers to direct his perception on what is right or wrong. Hence, the individual creates meaning for his existence and the forces that he or she contends with are to do with the governance that controls his community. Gardiner P (1969) provided background information that "Soren Kierkegaard was a Danish philosopher from the 1800s who is considered the father of existentialism. He was critical of Christianity and religious philosophy, emphasizing living as an individual within reality rather than abstract thought" (Cited in Amy Marschall, para.2). His concern was majorly on the individual's existential challenges and the crises that affect emotion. Also, Arlin Cuncic (2024, para.9) affirms that "existentialism emphasizes that we are all free to make choices in life, and with this freedom to make choices, comes responsibility. However, given the ultimate fate of death, your reactions can appear meaningless when viewed in relation to the bigger picture of your life" .

However, Amy Marshall informs that: "throughout the 19th Century existential writers created novels and plays containing analogies and metaphors for existence and the importance of individuals determining their own meaning" (para.6), that is where the "Women of Umu-Njam" suffices as a yardstick for the assessment of democratic experiences in Nigeria. Thus, "if those in

government cared to effectively monitor the feeling of the Nigerian people since the 1999 and 2003 general elections, they would have found out that the people were totally alienated and did not cooperate to provide the leeway for political and economic advancement" (Nosakhare Isekhure, 91). Again, Richard Evans posits that: The core tenets of existentialism include the belief that human existence is subjective and that individuals are free to make their own choices. Existentialism rejects traditional values and beliefs and instead focuses on personal freedom and responsibility...existentialists believe that understanding an individual's story is essential to providing effective therapy (para. 3)

He further posits that, in literature; drama and other works of art, existentialism emphasizes themes like alienation and despair, while in politics, they argue for autonomy and self-determination. Hence, "existentialists challenge us to take responsibility for our actions and our lives by recognizing the freedom of choice we have over them" (Richard Evans, para.4)

Moreover, existentialist questions begging for answers are those issues that challenge the purpose of our existence, the implication of our actions and inaction, as well as the need to question existing systems and contribute to creating equitable society. Therefore, the Nigerian stage which refers to Live theatre as well as Nigeria's socio-political and economic landscapes in the world of play has witnessed, withstood and endured poor leadership with its consequences since the inception of democratic rule.

A Brief on "Women of Umu-Njam"

"Women of Umu-Njam, an improvised play, is a satire on the Umu-Njam's democratic journey. The play reveals how corruption, poor leadership, insecurity and political instability have shaped the human experience in Umu-Njam thereby perpetuating suffering, inequality, and social injustice. The play is a contemporary drama that deals with the politics of Igweship and governance in Umu-Njam. The Igwe of Umu-Njam is a democratically elected King with cabinet members such as Okafor, Uche and Amadi as his Chief advisers in the cabinet. The Igwe Omere Oha I is the first democratic elected Igwe in Umu-Njam whose reign has become toxic as a result of arbitrary misuse of power. His tenure has failed to provide basic amenities to the community.

The people's farmlands are taken from them forcefully; their women have resorted to petty. Consequently, the people experience untold hardships. Again, without due process, the Igwe sells off the *Ama-ukwu* (Village square) to the CEO of a renowned pentecostal Church. This act sparks off series of restiveness especially from the youth and women. As such, the Igwe Omere Oha I's tenure becomes turbulent as he compels the women to contribute ten percent of their farm produce for the palace up-keep. The women, led by Nwanyieze organize themselves to put up resistance. During the coronation of the Igwe Omere Oha II, he promises fifty percent (50%) inclusivity of women participation in his cabinet. The Chiefs and cabinet members frowns at this women inclusivity in governance, and, as a result, Igwe Omere Oha II meets his untimely death. However, the emergence of Amadi as the Igwe Omere Oha III prepares the women for a greater responsibility as they again work to topple the *Igwe Omere Oha III*.

The Nigerian Stage and Democratic Experience

The recurring images in live performances that reveal democratic experiences in Nigeria are readily visible in play performances through the action, character's temper, dominant mood of the play or the images that surround the storyline. These experiences manifest in the storyline/plot of the action depicting people's sufferings, man's inhumanity to man, leadership failures and toxic relationships. Also, the images include characters embezzling public funds, politicians engaging in corrupt practices, security agents brutalizing citizens or the people taking laws into their hands. However, every society needs good governance without which there will be violence, insecurity and restiveness. This accounts for the expressive reaction of the people of Umu-Njam when the Igwe *Omere Oha 1*, with the support of his cabinet Chiefs tried to enforce colonial policies on the People of Umu-Njam as well as mandating the women to contribute ten percent of their cassava, cocoyam and palm produce for the upkeep of the palace.

Democracy refers to a system of government where power is held by the people either directly or through elected representatives. In the context of the play performance of "Women of Umu-Njam", though a traditional play, the performance exhibits that Umu-Njam was shaped by unique historical, cultural, and political factors which border on the people's cultural and traditional values; a long historic organised society that was built on collective-building and consensus decision making. However, in modern times, the people of Umu-Njam elect their Igwe through voting at the clan level- The chiefs and Village Heads of the four (4) clans-Duruofor-umu, Eleke-umu, Oromodo-umu and Nkwudu-umu, elects the Igwe. The Igwe *Omere Oha 1* is the first democratic elected Igwe in Umu-Njam whose reign has become toxic as a result of arbitrary misuse of power. His tenure fails to provide basic amenities to the community, he results to a reign of threats and intimidation; taking people's farmlands away from them. Gradually, without due process, the Igwe sells off the *Ama-ukwu* (Village square) to the CEO of a renowned pentecostal Church. This act sparks off series of restiveness especially from the youth and women. In reaction to the harsh treatment, killing and maiming of Umu-Njam's youth, the women of Umu-Njam confronts the Igwe:

- Nwanyieze-** (*storms into the palace*) Igwe, so you are the problem? It was you that sent your thugs to force women to contribute to the palace up-keep by impounding their farm produce? What manner of leadership is that, when you allow your wives to be rough-handled in the name of collecting ten percent up-keep?
- Ugonma-** And why not? look around the palace, stading here are the Igwe and his cronies, em i mean, cabinet...show me a woman or youth that is part of this leadership. Show me our voice amongst the leaders.
- Nwanyieze-** Yes, you are right. They make a careful selection of sympathetic representation, even in the midst of democracy. When you spot a youth or female amongst them, goggle it, the name is coming from a kin or relative. We have indeed lost our voice, our vote or should I say, we are shut out from governance, that is why we are called women...Who are we, Ugonma, I ask you, who are we?

Ugonma- We are women! We are We!
Nwanyieze- Then, now is the time to show the we in men (*she beckons on the women. As they enter, they form a circle around the Igwe and his cabinet. Nwanyieze moves closer to the Igwe as the women chant a revolutionary song* We demand that you vacate the seat. Step aside! (*The Igwe and his cabinet makes effort to escape, at the sound of the whistle, the women tried to protest in their own very way by stripping naked before the Igwe* (Scene, 3).

The performance reveals the psychological and social experiences of the people of Umu-Njam. While the people collectively contribute for the up-keep of the Igwe and the cabinet Chiefs, the Health Centres, Post Offices and Government parastatals are filled with incompetent relatives of the Igwe and his cabinet Chiefs. More so, as the campaign for a new Igwe was in top gear, the women earned the support of few palace cabinet members in preparation for the election. In Scene Four (4), The *Igwe Omere Oha II*, during his coronation pronounces fifty percent affirmation of women's rights in Umu-Njam's cabinet. The women are jubilant, but Amadi and Uche makes their protest known to the Igwe. In trying to adapt, accommodate and understand this system of leadership which has failed to accommodate/promote the people's cultural values, the women are further pushed far-away from political participation in spite of the 50 percent affirmation. The Cabinet Chiefs insists on such jargons as quota system, clan rotation or only card carrying members of the Igwe's council will vote during decision making. The *Igwe Omere Oha II*'s decision for women inclusivity in his cabinet sparked off the following arguments:

Amadi: Igwe, the elders have come to say to you that we object to the fifty percent affirmation
Uche: With all due respect Igwe, it is wrong to give 50% to the women, they will begin to agitate for equality and gradually, they will insult us.
Amadi: Put *sim* to your mouth Chief Uche. What do you know? (*Cunningly*) The Igwe has given marching orders, we are to accommodate the women in our meetings (*satirical*) we may even give them the privilege of breaking kolanuts. Anyway, Igwe my lord, we will obey your commands.
Okafor: Chief Amadi, you are a he-goat. (*Advancing towards Amadi*)
Uche: Yes, he is indeed a big he-goat at that.
Amadi: Chief Uche, what did you say? You are a big fool. Poverty has finished you... (*Confusion ensues among the cabinet members as they start fighting. Deliberately, Amadi Pushed Adaugo, she fell head-long, the guards clustered to rescue her, but she died. Angriy, Igwe Omere Oha II rose, tried to separate them but falls to the ground. Taking advantage of the moment, the cabinet Chiefs cluster around the Igwe, Chief Amadi strangles the Igwe in front of other Chiefs. They stare in surprise...then, nod their heads in affirmation,...they carry out the immediate rituals.* (Scene 5)

The death and burial of a cabinet member, Lolo Adaugo, the woman leader appointed by *Igwe Omere Oha II* sparked off violent agitations from the youth and women. In Scene Six, the women dirge and lament thus:

- First Speaker:** Women of Umu- Njam why are we crying like women without hope. Are we not women again? Or have we forgotten how Adaugo single handedly represented us in the cabinet. Adaugo stood as the voice of women, giving us a voice in the midst of the men. Ah Adaugo the great
- Second Speaker:** Women of great values, the mother of our children, women of Umu-Njam, women of nature, the enemy has taken away the only hope we had...
- Third Speaker:** Enough women, enough of this weeping and gnashing of teeth. It is true that our past leader made a lot of achievements, but it is time for a change. Time to elect a new leader that will bring a positive change. The choice is ours. Let us stop looking down on ourselves. We are women, we are powerful. Our task is to do the right thing; to elect a responsible and God fearing Igwe...We say No to money politics, we say no to bribery and corruption, we say no to selectivism. Now come with me women, for I see light at the end of this tunnel. *(They all leave with a song.*

While in Scene Seven, the campaign for the next Igwe of Umu-Njam began in top gear. Igu, one of the Cabinet Chiefs summoned the Chiefs and Village Heads:

- Igu:** *(addressing the Chiefs and Village Heads of the four clans)* My elders thank you for honouring my invitation, I called you here to let you know that the throne of Umu-Njam is vacant, and nature abhors vacuum. *(He prides himself)* Long before now, the Duruofor-Umu clan has been producing the Igwe of Umu-Njam. But we are in the era of democracy, I, therefore, wish to express my interest, I want you all to support me to be your next Igwe.
- Amadi:** Keep quiet, where were you, when I, Amadi Aju, from Oromodo-Umu hatched, plotted, calculated and executed my plans on how to eliminate the *Igwe Omere Oha II? Don't you think* I should be the next king because I am wiser and smarter than you? I am the eldest chief in the cabinet. If not for me that strangled the Igwe, we will not be here deliberating.
- John:** No, I deserve to be crowned. The Eleke-Umu clan has been marginalized for a long time and this got me thinking. I should be the next Igwe because I have desired this position for a long time. I worked my way into the Igwe's heart and became his most trusted ally. Gradually and steadily, I have been poisoning Igwe's food. It was not your strangulation that killed him; it was the poison that made his heart weak.
- Okofor:** What? Even you, John? Special Adviser to the Igwe...I am ashamed of you all.
- Uche:** So this is what you people are up to, now it is confession time abi? I have not done any evil against any of you, neither was I the Igwe's enemy in

- any way. But, let me remind us that it is the Nkwudu-Umu's turn to elect the next Igwe (*they hush him*).
- Okafor:** We cannot turn blind eyes to the truth in spite of your skills, strategies and manipulations. Chief Uche is correct. We had agreed on clan rotation...
- Igu:** (*clears his throat*) Let us forget all these sentiments and focus on electing a capable Igwe to run the affairs of Umu-Njam...Please, support me and I promise to give you money and titles, remember I am the richest man in this community, Amadi please reason with me, I promise to make you the Onowu of this community, Uche I will make you the prime minister (*Okafor exits in anger. The rest of the chiefs leave together*)

Thus, the speed at which corruption and nepotism escalate within the Igwe-ship election affects the public trust notwithstanding the rate of poverty, inequality and economic instability which adversely affect the people. Hence, conflict and tension between the leaders and the citizenry increases and degenerates into power tussle. The more the people push for democratic reforms and accountability, the worse the Igweship candidates commit atrocious crimes against the people for the sake of their personal greed and allegiance to the kingmakers. Hence Chief Amadi's emergence the *Igwe Omere Oha III* of Umu-Njam laced fuel on the fire. The angst of the people stem from lack of basic infrastructure, poor remuneration, employment, inadequate educational facilities in basic schools and tertiary institutions, poor roads and electricity, Insecurity and government's insensitivity to the plight of the people. On ascending the throne, the *Igwe Omereoha III* of Umu-Njam increases the burden on farmers from ten percent to twenty percent and removes subsidy on water-rate. The Umu-Njam people resort to stream water. Ipso facto, the upsurge in agitations, youth restiveness and movements point towards leadership questions. Consequently, the women of Umu-Njam unleash their existentialist stimulus to dethrone the *Igwe Omere oha III*. Through the palace spies, the Igwe Omere Oha III learnt that the women are at it again:

- Igwe:** My elders I heard that someone amongst us is conspiring against me and I will not take it lightly with that person
- Igu :** Igwe I greet you, please Igwe tell us that person, fish him out and let's deal with him or is it our enemies from the neighboring community, if that is the case, let's give them war.
- Igwe:** It is you Mazi Okafor, come out and kneel down here (CS), did you or did you not conspire against me with the women of our community?
- Okafor:** But Igwe how can I do such, how can I betray a man that has stood by me in difficult times
- Igwe :** When your wife and son was admitted at the hospital, you ran to me for help because you could not pay the bills, did I not help you? And now you decided to reward my good deeds with evil?
- Okafor:** Igwe please forgive me, but, it was
- Igwe:** Shut up your mouth and repeat after me, I am the atrocity(*Okafor was being flogged by the palace guard ,after some strokes of Cain enters Nwanyieze and the female warriors, they ambushed and disarmed the palace warriors, while the Igwe and his cabinet are in session*)

- Nwanyieze:** What is happening here, enough of all this, (*the female warriors are in control of the guards, and cabinet members*) now you go and get me the Ezedibia.
- Ezedibia:** (*comes in, chanting incantations*)
- Nwanyieze:** Ezedibia, please what should we do to this man (*the Igwe is forced by the female warriors to kneel down*)
- Ezedibia:** He should be killed and thrown into the evil forest because of the numerous atrocities he has committed in our community (*the Igwe cries out*)
- Nwanyieze:** But Ezedibia you cannot throw away the child with the bath water, please reconsider
- Ezedibia:** Not when the child in question has violated and desecrated the land, but the Gods are merciful. He will be banished from the land and taken across the boundaries of Umu-Njam and Ekeawu and Moshi (*the Igwe is taken away*)
- Nwanyieze:** Now Ezedibia the throne is vacant and the people cannot live without an Igwe
- Ezedibia:** The crown on a maiden, the throne is renewed.
- Nwanyieze:** But am only but a woman, I am the breast that nurture, I give life but I do not take, here is Mazi Okofor, he is a good man, make him the Igwe of this community (*Ezedibia takes Mazi Okafor's hands leading him towards the thrown. Light fades*)

The women, guided by their men formed a formidable revolutionary welfare group as a measure to check-mate the excesses of their leaders.

Analysis

The performance portrays the struggle of the people of Umu-Njam under poor leadership, corruption and political instability. The women's resistance and eventual overthrow of the Igwe exemplify existentialist principles, showcasing their freedom and responsibility in shaping their destiny. The performance critiques Nigeria's democratic failures, and highlights the need for accountability and good governance. It goes further to provide evidenced existential struggles such as - Freedom and responsibility: The women's resistance and empowerment in the performance exemplify the existential principles of taking responsibility for one's freedom. Hence, both Adaugo and Nwanyieze mobilized the women to action.

Existential Crisis: The characters' experiences and struggles reflect an existential crisis, where they question the meaning and purpose of their lives under democratic failures. Thus, the people of Umu-Njam came together to oppose the selling of their ancestral village square by the *Igwe Omere Oha I* of Umu-Njam.

Absurdity and Uncertainty: The performance depiction of democratic failures and the characters' struggles reflect the absurdity and uncertainty of human existence.

Authenticity and Truth: The performance reflects women's resistance and search for truth and justice as an embodiment of existential values of authenticity- the stark reality of the corruptive cabinet members, their accomplices and the Igwe's greed as unveiled by the women.

Existential Awareness: the performance created existential awareness as it encourages the audience to develop its own freedom, responsibility as it lays emphasis on individual choice and action- thus, the people of Umu-Njam's revolutionary action is a montage on how people's perceptions differ. While the inaction of the men of Umu-Njam persists the women made a choice to restore the values of the Umu-Njam community.

Impact Factor on Research Questions

1. The enduring theme on democratic experiences in Nigeria are corruption, poor leadership, political instability and existential crisis and responsibility.
2. These themes re-enforce humanistic temper in Nigeria's democratic experience by: Highlighting the impact of democratic failures on human dignity and wellbeing;
Emphasizing the importance of individual and collective responsibility in shaping democratic destiny;
Showcasing the struggles and resistance of Nigerians in the face of democratic challenges;
Illustrating the need for existential awareness and action in promoting democratic values.
3. Theatre performances like "Women of Umu-Njam" can contribute to promoting democratic values and conscientizing citizens in Nigeria by;
Raising awareness about democratic issues and challenges;
Encouraging critical thinking and reflection on dramatic experience;
Providing a platform for public engagement and discussion on democratic values; inspiring individual and collective action towards democratic reform and accountability, and fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility for democratic governance.

Findings and Implications

Theatre Arts as a performative discipline has played a significant role in Nigeria's democratic experience. The medium serves as a powerful tool for social commentary by addressing political and social issues, critiquing government policies and social injustices. Also, the theatre is one of the functional vehicles through which the audiences are informed, mobilized and are made aware of issues and civic engagements. By educating the audience on democratic values, human rights and social responsibility, the theatre becomes a partner in socio-political orientation. Hence, the performance of "Women of Umu-Njam" effectively depicts the struggles and challenges of democratic experiences in Nigeria, resonating with the audiences' existentialist concerns. Starkly presented are the enduring themes; such as corruption, poor leadership, insecurity, and political instability. These, as exemplified in the performance demonstrate individual and collective responsibility needed for the shaping of Nigeria's democratic destiny.

Theatre performances can serve as a powerful tool for social commentary critiquing democratic experiences and promoting humanistic values. The existentialist themes in the performance encourage individual and collective responsibility which inspires the audience to take action towards democratic reform and accountability. Again, the performances' portrayal of women empowerment and resistance highlights the importance of gender inclusivity in democratic governance and decision-making process. The findings suggest that theatre arts can contribute to

conscientizing citizens and promoting democratic values in Nigeria- thereby, fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility. These findings and implications underscore the significances of theatre performances like "Women of Umu-Njam" in promoting democratic values.

Conclusion

Theatre performances like Women of Umu-Njam offer a powerful platform for social commentary. The performance critiques democratic experiences and promotes humanistic values. By addressing contemporary political issues, showcasing democratic failures, the play impacts and encourages audience participation and engagement. Theatre can focus on topical issues related to democratic experiences to probe the conscience of the political class and conscientize the citizenry by addressing contemporary political issues and socio-economic challenges, showcasing the impact of democratic failures on the people by offering alternative narratives and solutions to democratic challenges, as well as encourage audience engagement and participation in democratic processes.

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