African & Diaspora Discourse

A Journal of the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos
A-DD Volume 4, September, 2022.

The African - Diaspora Discourse, A-DD, is a peer-reviewed academic journal that sets out to reconfigure African Studies through original and intellectually stimulating research papers that are capable of provoking new questions, theories and debates. The Journal is domiciled in the Institute of African and Diaspora Studies, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

Interested authors should send in manuscript of not more than 7,000 words by 30th of September every year. Submission in ei- ther English or French is considered but abstract must be writtenin both languages.

Authors are responsible for proper acknowledgements of sources of all forms, including figures and graphics. The editor may,where necessary, demand evidence of such permission(s) before accepting a manuscript for publication.

Correspondence
Editor,
African - Diaspora Discourse, A-DD,
Institute of African and Diaspora Studies,
JP Clark Building,
University of Lagos.
08126519419.
oeesuola@unilag.edu.ng,

Printed by

Academic Publishing Centre
South-West Zone
University of Lagos
apcentre@unilag.edu.ng
https://tetfundswacadpubcentre.com/

ISSN: 2705-4268-9-772715-426003

CONTENTS

ONE

Ayobami Ojebode:

Negotiating cultural productions through dance and visual arts mediation: An eye on restitutive research

Abstract

In this short note, I present a brief description of cultural production and products and what it means to negotiate cultural production. Then I proceed to discuss the need to negotiate, and what we negotiate. I suggest one or two ways by which we should negotiate, and I challenge us to a less extractive and a more restitutive mode of negotiation and research.

Key words: Cultural productions, Restitutive research

Négocier les productions culturelles par la danse et la médiation des arts visuels : un regard sur la recherche restitutive

Résumé

Dans cette courte note, je présente une brève description de la production et des produits culturels et de ce que signifie négocié la production culturelle. Ensuite, je mets en lumière la nécessité de négocier et l''objet de la négocions. Je suggère une ou deux façons de négocier, et je nous mets au défi d'adopter un mode de négociation et de recherche moins extractif et plus restitutif.

Mots clés : Productions culturelles, Recherche restitutive

Cultural products and production

Stated rather simply, cultural products are those goods and services which draw their inspiration, contents, relevance andmeaning from a people‘s contemporary or ancient cultural experience. These include the performing and visual arts, heritage conservation objects and forums, broadcasts and films, and print media content. They also include carnivals, festivals, dances

including village dances (Ferri, Basile, Dominici and Aiello, 2014). Therefore, what constitutes cultural products is a widerange of the outcomes of the engagements of humans with the artistic.

One would understand cultural products better if one compares them with commercial products such as a car, a phone or a television set which are produced essentially for profit and are meant for the purpose which they currently serve. Cultural products, on the other hand, are primarily meant to preserve, communicate, challenge or even confront people, practices, heritages and power. Cultural products such as a play, a painting or a festival in themselves do not serve purposes independent of the actors involved in the process. It is at this point that we shouldagain try to distinguish, therefore, a television set, for instance, which is a channel or a medium from the cultural play, for instance, that it transmits. In other words, the content may be a cultural product but the carrier of that content, in this case atelevision set, is not a cultural product.

We did point out at the beginning that commercial products serve the purpose which they currently serve. This suggests that a commercial product today could be a cultural product in a museum in fifty years' time. In 1876 when Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone, those wires, strings and pans were not a cultural product. Today, however, because they offer insights into how people lived and conducted their dailybusinesses nearly 150 years ago, they can be described as visual –even aural – cultural products. Those contraptions and the first generations of analogue telephone sets that followed them, are now found in museums and galleries speaking loudly about the people and ways of times past. The time that a piece of art was used, purposes of the use, as well as the participants in the use, are some of the factors we take into consideration as we distinguish between commercial and cultural products.

Discussion of cultural products often takes off from the theorisation of Pierre Bourdieu, a French ex-soldier and professor of French Sociology. Bourdieu proposed the theory of cultural production, including the ideas of habitus, cultural capital, field ofpower, social space and taste. In the views of Bourdieu, a culturalhabitus is the environment or structure within which the cultural production takes place. This environment or culture or structure or location can also be a person's social rung or the socio- economic class to which a person belongs. This environment or location determines what one produces, and how and who appreciates and understands and as well accepts it. Therefore, to Bourdieu, there are high art – for the bourgeois—and low art which is produced by and for the poor. It would be considered inappropriate for the aristocrats or the bourgeois to publicly patronise such low cultural products.

Interestingly, the conditioning of the cultural agent or artist or producer, by his or her habitus is a completely unconscious and sub-conscious process. In other words, both the cultural agents and the users of the cultural product are not even aware that their environment has conditioned or is conditioning them to conceive, produce, patronise, appreciate, and use a particular kind of cultural product. For instance, a cultural agent may say ‒I made this painting or I organised this dance in order to call attention to HIV and AIDS‖ but that hardly explains what made them to think of that art in that way, in that location in the first instance. The environmental conditioning of the artist is very strong and is very difficult to wriggle out of. Therefore, disentangling this relationship takes careful contemplation, that is, negotiation or interrogation.

In the African context, one cultural product genre that exemplifies the point here is dance. There is a thin line between dance and trance. Dancers often migrate from dance into trance and back in seconds. In the stories told in Ifa corpa, when somebody has offered a sacrifice and the sacrifice has been accepted and the

desires behind the offering have been granted, it is time to give thanks and this usually involves dance. The lines typically run thus:

O ranse pe agogo n"Iporo
O ranse pe aaran n"Ikija
O ranse pe opa kugu-kugu lojude Iserimogbe
Ese to na, ijo fa a!

Roughly translated:

S/he sent invitation to the gong in Iporo
S/he sent an invitation to the drum in Ikija.
S/he sent an invitation to the rhythmical drumsticks in the front yard of Iserimogbe
The moment s/he stretched his leg, dance seized it!

In other words, the celebrater-dancer lost control: s/he didn‘t choose to dance – s/he merely stretched his/her leg, and dance seized it. How long this celebrater dances, what manner of dance it is and what comes out of it are totally out of his/her control. This is where in contemplating and negotiating dance, we must recognize the indeterminacy of autonomy of the artist.

The indeterminacy of autonomy of performers and artists is a question that has occupied the minds of many scholars. Chilisa (2012), for instance, talks of the ethical – and I want to add, epistemological and methodological – quandary one experiences when western ideas and methods are brought into indigenous and esoteric research settings. In a specific instance, she pondered how and if one should interview a possessed person who is making vatic utterances from the ancestors or spirits. If one interviews this person on the one hand, whom does one cite? The person or the ancestors speaking through him or her? How does one, for instance, get someone who is possessed or in trance to sign an informed consent form which comes before interviewing in the tradition of the social and human sciences research? On the other hand, if one waits till the spell of possession stops and the

possessed agent returns to sober, can their responses be regarded as an authentic rendition of their experiences? These are some of the questions that should also engage us as we negotiate cultural production using dance and visual arts.

Why negotiate? Negotiation is the process of coming to a mutual agreement, a level and kind of understanding that is acceptable – or at least, tolerable – to both or all the parties involved. To negotiate is to embark on a dialogue over the worth and true nature, meaning and the importance or necessity of something. The word *negotiation* is capable of conjuring the market image. However, metaphorically, it is a dialogic process, an unending nonlinear communication process among people and people or between people and non-people such as cultural products. Why should we negotiate cultural production and products?

First, cultural products are cultures; they are about the way of life of a people coded in and into their arts and artefacts. They transcend the present or even the past because cultural products do actually provide a window into the future. They are therefore necessarily peculiar, even esoteric. To those who are outsidersdue to space or time, they call for deeper than casual observation and comments – they call for both contemplation and negotiation. Why did the ancient kings in Yoruboid areas never cry at sad news but instead, stand up and do a dance of few steps? A dance of royal mourning? Now we are split in time and, maybe in space, from these people and only a disciplined negotiation can bring us face to face with their truths.

Second, cultural production often involves many and sometimes contending parties. At a particular point in time, the voices and faces of the dominant party can drown the voices of the minority. As a result of that, the impression can be given that the subordinate party does not even exist. Therefore, it becomes important for us to negotiate the layers, to investigate with care, in

order to understand the multiplicity of parties and interests around the cultural production process and products.

Third, cultural products often involve confusing and confusable motives or purposes. Digging deep and getting to the root of the motive or purpose of a cultural product take contemplation and negotiation. A ready example in this case is Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King"s Horseman*. When this author and his classmates encountered the play for the first time as second-year undergraduate students, the immediate conclusion we had about the theme was that this was another clash-of-culture play. It took guidance and contemplation for us to understand that he wastalking about a more complicated problem that was beyond time and space: the problem of greed and obsession with the pleasures of this world, and how this often truncates the destinies of individuals and peoples.

The complexity of the purpose of cultural products is such that even the author who can actually be described as the agent of the product sometimes does not understand the entire purpose or motive behind their art. Again, this is because the inspiration, the prompt for a cultural product often goes beyond what the agent themselves can clearly lay their finger upon.

Four, cultural products have the potential to speak to this ailing world. They afford the agents the opportunity to address questions of injustice, questions of abuse of power or poverty of maternal mortality, and all sorts of torture to which our world has been and is being subjected. This is why we cannot afford to be indifferent to the production and use of cultural products. In Nigeria, our past is replete with examples of cultural products that sought to correct the ills of the society. For instance, when everybody was lost in the euphoria of independence in 1960, Wole Soyinka was busy penning *A Dance of the Forests*, a play that warned about, rather than rejoice at, the independence. It warns that our remote and not so remote history suggests that the leaders taking over from the

colonial officials might be as bad, if not worse, than those officials. Not many people liked that.

Experience in Nigeria show the response of the ruling class to that kind cultural products. An instance should make the point: In 1964, the late Hubert Ogunde produced Yoruba Ronu, a film that warned Yoruba against betrayals. Chief S. L. Akintola who was the premier of Western Region then felt it was a slight on him, having just fallen apart with his leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Chief Akintola used his power as premier to ban all the activities of the Ogunde Theatre in all of the Western Region for two years. It is ironical that the military whom we all accuse of tyranny and philistinism were the ones that lifted that ban. It was the then Military Governor of the Western Region, Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, who lifted that ban on July 4th 1966. Such examples are numerous. In fact, the life and career of Fela Anikulapo Kuti could actually be summarised as confronting power with cultural products despite consequences.

Finally, we should pay attention to cultural products because there is a lot of infraction being done to these products. For centuries, cultural products have been victims of mindless pillaging, piracy and doctoring so much that the authenticity of certain cultural products has become rather doubtful. Plundering of African cultural products was one of the unforgiveable and unforgettable crimes of the so-called archaeologists and explorers. Soyinka (1986) says of Frobenius, foremost archaeologist of the pre-colonial and colonial Africa:

> For, not content with being a racial slanderer, one who did not hesitate to denigrate, in such uncompromisingly nihilistic terms, the ancestral fount of the black races – a belief which this ethnologist himself observed – Frobenius was also a notorious plunderer, one of a long line of European archeological raiders. The museums of Europe testify to this insatiable lust of Europe

Recently, agitations for the return of some of these arts have taken an uptick, and are yielding some result. In November 2021, the government of France returned some stolen art work to the Republic of Benin. Germany also promised to return some of the thousands of art works stolen in Benin city in 1897 (BBC, 2021).

What do we negotiate?

When we talk of negotiating cultural production, what specifically should our attention rove around? First, we need to negotiate who the owners of these cultural productions and products are. Who really is the source of a dance? Is it the artist, the director, the writer, community, or the ancestors? How do we unpack this to know who really the owner of dance is?

In some situations, this is not complicated; in others, it is. For instance, it took years of careful investigation for JDY Peel to establish a vital connection between Ifa, an episteme of the Yoruba, and Arabia (Peel, 2008). Soyinka (1991) made an essentially comparable point in *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*. He implies that the influence and global presence of Yoruba traditional religion can be felt in the religions of Egypt, India and even among Greek gods. This position, similar in spirit with *Black Athena* by Martin Bernal (Bernal, 1991), has been the source of severe and passionate criticism by Classical scholars who seem to detest Afrocentrism with passion – such as Mary Lefkowitz who authored *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. It is a book that takes as its mission denigrating Afrocentrism as a mode of thought and negotiation. Others are Stephen Howes and Keith Windschuttle (Howes, 1998; Windschuttle, 1996). What anti- Afrocentric classical scholars miss (or ignore) by a mile is the transforming and transformative subtlety with which cultural products migrate especially across long periods of time. And it is shocking they missed that.

In addition to negotiating ownership, we also negotiate uses and consequences of cultural products. A cultural product may be meant to simply telegraph history or to teach morals --most African stories end with ‒the story teaches us that…‖. A cultural product may also intend to convene a spiritual communion amonghumans, gods, and the spirits in what Wilson calls extramundane communication (Wilson, 1988). Importantly, when we think of the art of Fela Anikulapo Kuti and a few others, we know that there is another purpose of cultural products and that is mobilisingpeople for action. There are cultural products that may accomplish all of these: Tunde Kelani's *Arugba* is one such product: not only does it telegraph contemporary history, it teaches morals and also mobilises people to rise against the denigration of women, corruption and HIV and AIDS. In addition, it documents an important cultural practice: the Osun Osogbo festival.

We negotiate not just ownership or uses and consequences, but also benefits accruing from cultural products. They may not be monetary, but then there is some reward, or recognition that comes from the production of cultural products. What are these? How do we identify them and who should have them? And who has them? Who today is benefiting from the Benin art that were plundered and taken to Europe in 1897? And who should really have been benefiting from them? And this is where negotiating cultural products goes beyond doing the academic into the interventionist kind of research and action, sometimes known as advocacy.

How do we negotiate?

As researchers and academics, how do we negotiate ownership, uses, impact and benefits of cultural products? First, as public intellectuals – and that is what we should be -- we should be in the frontline of redeeming the injustices that have been carried out around these cultural products. The plundering and the efforts to

redeem these injustices should not be stories that we are being told; they should be stories that involve all of us.

In addition to advocacy or activism, we should turn the focus of our research towards negotiating cultural products. There are basically a limited number of schools of thought when it comes tohow we do research. And, here we wish to distinguish between extractive research and restitutive research.

Positivism as a research tradition and approach prides itself in objectivity and scientific rigour. It sometimes seems that, to the positivist, the scientific rigour of a research is far more important than the subject of that research. Positivists seek to describe a world that is knowable and separated from the knower by a stretch of clinical space. Surveys, experiments and all the statistical tools belong to this school. However, these methods are extractive in the sense that researchers using them simply go to people and collect data about their lives, beliefs, attitudes and the reasons for their actions. They extract these data, one can even say they extort the data, and disappear. In the end, it is about the researcher going to extract a piece of people‘s life, processing it and sharing it in the form of journal articles with members of theirown community for the advancement of their own career.

On the other hand, interpretive researchers attach a lot of significance to the subjective experiences and expressions of the people that they are studying. Examples of interpretive method include ethnographic and anthropological methods. Ethnographic method, especially participant observation, gives the researcher the opportunity to live with and live among the people that they are studying. Focus group discussion provides an opportunity for the people that are being studied to express, in community, their experiences and views with little control from the researcher.These give maximum attention to the culture and sub-cultures andthe subjectivities in which these people live and work. All the same, the interpretive researcher also collects data; it is just that

the data is in a different form. Like positivists, they collect data in a community and leave, analyse data and share the knowledge among members of their own community.

Reflective methods are different from both positivist and interpretivist methods. Reflective methods, especially those in the critical traditions, place a lot of power in the hands of the reflector. A reflector is both his/her own data and his/her thinking is his/her own method. The reflective researcher dips himself in existing literature and comes up with a position based on logical and often inductive reasoning. This is presented as their own reaction or addition to ongoing academic conversations. As subjective as this appears to be, it has been the major way by which African intellectuals have pushed back against western dominance of humanistic and social science discourses. It is in fact, the major tool in the process and practice of the decolonising methodologies. Through critical reflective engagements, wechallenge conceptual captivity (such as the definition of _dance‘as a profession and _dance audience‘ as consumers; of Esu as Satan; of deities as idols) and epistemological entrapment (such asone that denigrates what the five senses cannot pick as non-knowledge). It should bother us, shouldn‘t it, that all the religious practices found in Africa recognise even practice trance: Sufi ecstasy; Aladura and Pentecostal visions and trances, and Ifa _ese to na…‘. Yet, we have been helpless in our studies of trances. Thebest we have done is to conduct questionnaire-based survey of theopinions of people about trance: that is not a study of trance; it is the study of what people think about it. Our helplessness results from the point that the empirical methods received from the West have schooled us to ignore, even disrespect, whatever our five senses cannot pick.

Emancipatory methods, especially the participatory research approaches, insist researchers working in partnership with communities to identify and address community problems. Importantly, the research cycle is not over for participatorists until

a jointly identified community problem is addressed and possibly solved. Participatory research or participatory action research forces the researcher to dismount their high horse and be on the same epistemological and linguistic pedestal with the community, working, sleeves rolled up, to come to a definition of a community‘s problem, to agree on the solution and pursue the solution.

Our methods of negotiation and engagement must return cultural products to their owners. That is restitution and respect. The owners of dance, visual arts, and other forms of cultural products are the communities.

Maa wi, maa wi
Oba kii mu onkorin
Trans:
Speak on, speak on
No king can ever arrest a singer

Why? The singer‘s immunity comes from the community because their message is from the community. The vocalisation may be theirs but the message, even the expression, is not theirs.

Dance, like other cultural product, originally was not meant to be commercialised and commodified. The whole idea of a dancer or an artist and an audience that are separated by stage and space is a recent and foreign idea. There is no space for instance between Eyo and their audiences, or between the Gelede and the audience. The singing, the dancing, the recitation – everything-- is taken up by both the audience and the people whom we can call the agents of cultural products. In a sense, at some point, the line between the agent and the audience completely disappears.

It is understandable that people have to pay money to be entertained by agents of cultural products, because cultural production now involves a lot of training and training costs money. Therefore, cultural production is seen more as an

investment than as social responsibility. However, we must adopt a methodology of negotiation that takes dance and arts back to the owners. We must make dance and arts to speak to the daily challenges faced by its owners: the challenges of unstable and collapsing buildings; a currency and economy that are completely out of control; insecurity on the farms and in the city; insurgency, and classrooms on water. These are the daily challenges facing the owners of dance and art.' And these are the challenges that we must ensure dance, art and other cultural products speak to through a methodology that is inclusive and restitutive – such as reflective and emancipatory methods.

References:

BBC (2021) Benin Bronzes: Germany to return looted artefacts to Nigeria. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56949003

Bernal, M. (1992). *Black Athena*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell Alumni Federation.

Chilisa, B (2012) *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Ferri, M. A.; Basile, G.; Dominici, G. and Aiello, L. (2014) ―Cultural Product Management from Environment to Territorial Context: Configuration of the Main Relationships‖ In L. Aiello (ed) *Handbook of Research on Management of Cultural Products: E-Relationship Marketing and Accessibility Perspectives* IGI Global

Howe, S. (1998) *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* London: Verso

Hussey, L. (2010) ―Social capital, symbolic violence, and fields of cultural production: Pierre Bourdieu and library and information science‖ In G. J. Leckie; L. M. Given and J. Buschman (eds) *Critical theory for library and information science: exploring the social from across the disciplines*. Santa barb. Calif: Libraries Unlimited

Lefkowitz, M. R. (1996) *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History*. New York: New Republic and Basic Books

Peel, J. D. Y (2008) ―Yoruba Religion: Seeing It in History, Seeing It Whole,‖ Third Bishop Adegbola Memorial Lecture, *Orita: Ibadan Journal of Religious Studies* 40 (2008), 1–24.

Soyinka, W. (1975) *Death and the king's horseman*. London: Eyre Methuen.

Soyinka, W. (1986) ―This Past Must Address Its Present‖. Nobel Prize Lecture. 8 December, 1986 https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1986/soyinka/lecture

Soyinka, W. (1991) *The Credo of Being and Nothingness*. 1991 Oluforoye Public Lecture on Religions

Wilson, D. (1988). *A survey of traditional-modern communication systems in old Calabar province (1846-1986)* (An Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis; University of Ibadan)

Windschuttle, K. (1996). *The killing of history: How literary critics and social theorists are murdering our past*. New York: Free Press.