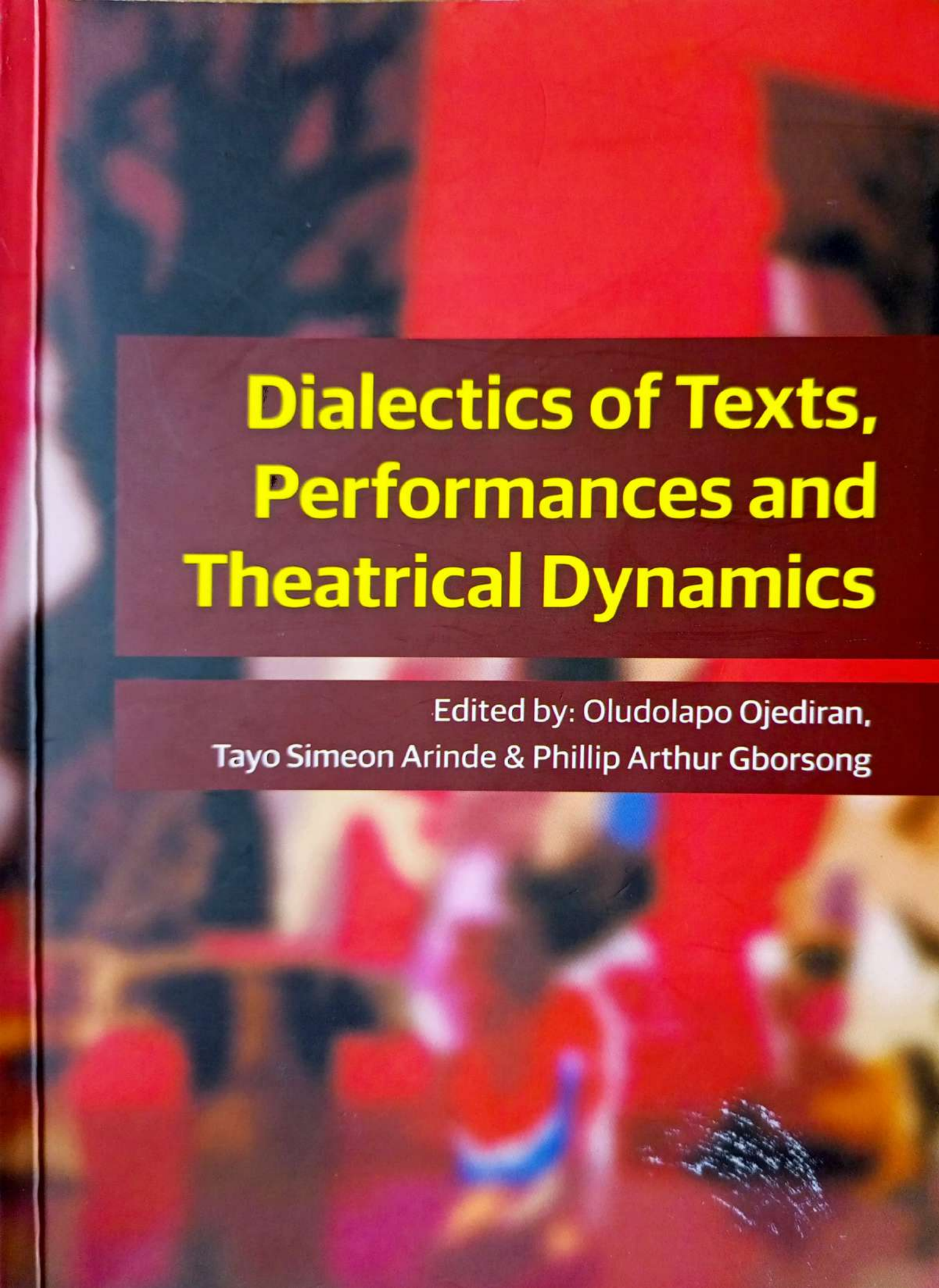




Dialectics of Texts, Performances and Theatrical Dynamics

Edited by: Oludolapo Ojedian,
Tayo Simeon Arinde & Phillip Arthur Gborsong

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THREE

EXPLORING THE THEATRICAL ELEMENTS AND THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS IN MOHAMMED SANI WASSAN'S BONE-HEALING ART

Tayo Simeon ARINDE

Abstract

Africa, from time immemorial has been the cradle of multifarious arts, most of which are enacted in performances such as drama, music, painting, dances amongst other. Amongst them is the indigenous art of bone-healing. Although fast becoming an endangered art in view of the fact that modern medical care is drifting it into extinction. Nevertheless, it is identified that abounds in the art are; therapeutic, psychological and economic benefits which was analysed in the study. However, an attempt was made to explore not only the therapeutic benefits, but the theatricality involved in the healing process. Consequently, Mohammed Sani Wassan's art of bone-healing seems to have made both the artistic and therapeutics benefits of the art to the advantage of mankind, in a recessed economy like that of Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive and deductive methods of research complimented by the tool of participant observation and interview to draw our primary data while our secondary data are sourced from academic journals, articles, books and internet. Also, the study used the theory Shammanism to buttress the art in the healing process. The study finds that the process of bone-healing is a performative art in Africa with abounding health benefits that have eluded many national and international economies. Consequently, the study concludes that in all indigenous art practices, there are theatrical elements, bone-healing. Therefore, it is recommended that all performances; medical, engineering, science amongst other fields, the artistic quintessence should be given prominence so that the

aesthetics of the art as the precursor of all accomplishments will not go into oblivion.

Key words: *Performance, theatrical elements, bone-healing, therapeutic benefits.*

Introduction

In Africa, there are different kinds of arts ranging from liberal arts, literary arts, visual arts, performing arts and healing arts. The latter is regarded as an art when its performance progression is explored. Each of these art platforms has different kinds of benefits it provide for the society that embraces them. Notwithstanding that all of these art forms are prevalent in Africa, the christening of the arts as; liberal and literary arts are traced to the Ancient Greek around 387 BC. Academic findings reveal that their designation and christianisation were credited to the philosophical contributions of Plato, a Greek philosopher, and Isocrates, a Greek Orator. Oakley (2009, p.1) who captures Plato and Isocrates philosophical descriptions of liberal arts states that Plato enumerates the art as: "pursuit of knowledge and understanding through scientific discovery, critical originality, and the overthrow of accepted assumptions" while Isocrates who prefers to call it literary arts, describes it as: "educational method of teaching students moral virtue, power of judgment and ability to make prudent decisions in public life." In Africa, they exist as indigenous arts not christened in any name, but revered and practiced.

There has since been an expansion of the description of visual arts to include; painting, sculpture, architecture, performing and healing arts. The healing art is included in visual art because all these art forms feature the elements of performance which include the use of skills and creativity. This is why in the study; bone-healing is referred to as an art.

The art of bone-healing has been in existence long since our fore-fathers have had cause to treat dislocations, fractures and other

various degrees of injuries that they sustained in the cause of carrying out their daily activities; like farming, hunting and tree felling, which are danger prone. However, due to civilisation and modernity, the traditional art of bone-healing became an art that was categorised as an endangered art. This, perhaps, is because; it is regarded as a performance, but not the one that should be shared or showcased before an audience. In revealing that the art has taken a leap from the hitherto secretive approach of its healing method, this study makes concerted effort to expound the performative embodiment and the theatrical elements that are inherent in the process as well as exploring therapeutic benefits in the art of bone-healing. The display of artistic skills and creativity when the healing is carried out makes the process theatrical, a beneficial and appreciated art in a recessed economy like Nigeria.

However, the researcher came across Mohammed Sani Wassan from Lufari, Niger State, Nigeria. The dexterity of Mohammed Sani Wassan master craftsmanship in accomplishing his bone-healing art and the artistic skills he uses endeared us to find out more about his healing process. Apart from how he goes about performing the healing, the artistic approach, the theatrical elements he employs and the aftermath therapeutics benefits to mankind in an economy like that of Nigeria that is obsessed with avoidable death occasioned by inability to pay medical bill in hospitals held us spellbind to embark on this exploration.

Review of Related Literature

Researches have shown that world over and especially in Africa, bone-healings that are carried out through orthodox means have witnessed various degrees of complications. Many of the patients have ended up having either their fractured arms or legs amputated or have the patient died after surgical operation. Thus, from the artistic angle, we observed that this is due to the exclusion of the touch of the master craftsman (the Supreme deity) in the healing process using the art of divination. Art of divination, which is important traditional art, according to Chanda (2009, p.5): "is the art of receiving hidden knowledge or insight from supernatural

sources. Diviners attempt to uncover problems, determine their cause, and provide solutions, and they may use objects to aid this process."

The above lends credence to the fact that acquiring knowledge before engaging in any kind of life endeavour is an art, which further buttresses the fact that living is an art. Historical antecedents gave credence to the fact that the advent of the art of bone-healing in Africa and Nigeria especially was said to have been in existence, for centuries, before orthodox medicine was introduced to the developing world. (Omololu, Ogunlade and Gopaldasani 2008, p.1). Consequently, Omololu et al (2008, p. 2) in alluding to that fact submit that the art is "a highly specialised form of traditional medicine...usually passed from father to son but some outsider also receive their training via apprenticeship." This unequivocally concurs to the fact that bone-healing is an art.

The art of bone-healing is an art that is considered by the orthodox practitioners as very difficult and cumbersome. Perhaps, due to the fact that the outcome of the healing, when compared to the healing results gotten from patient treated, the result, using orthodox medical approach usually ends in luck; probability without a guarantee assurance of perfect healing results. This is why when one considers all the research efforts that were made by medical personnel, their results reveal that many of the patients treated using orthodox medical approach leaves patients thereafter completely incapacitated or partially put out of action in one way or the other. Consequent upon this, the justification that bone-healing is an art and therefore is better left in the hands of traditional art practitioners as acquiesced by an orthodox medical expert, a cancer specialist and a one-time director of oncology for the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Centre in Seattle, Washington, E. Donnall Thomas. Thomas in an interview with *Encarta Encyclopedia* retrieved from *Encarta* (2009, np) submits that:

I worked on that topic from 1950 to 1955. And it proved to be a very difficult area of endeavour. I set up cultures of bone marrow, and tried to study factors that would stimulate in vitro growth. The follow-up on that story is

that other people tried to do this, and no real progress was made for 20 years.

In another candid submission of some orthodox medical experts, culled from *Encarta* (2009, np.), the art was described again as a difficult process thus: "The repair process requires the interplay of several processes." What perhaps is described as "interplay" here is the traditional approach that the orthodox medical practitioners often view as fetish, unclean and uncivilized. In another submission, experts at the Biophoto Associates/Science Source/Photo Researchers, Inc agree that barrage of complications trail the process of bone-healing handled by orthodox medical practitioners. Their acquiescence, retrieved from *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2009, np.) reveal that: "Rickets can result from insufficient vitamin D in the diet or from insufficient exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun. Rickets can lead to skeletal deformation, such as vertebral or leg curvature." This and many more are reports of complications, which have arisen from healing fractured bones using the orthodox approach.

It is arising from the above enumerated impediments, that this study explored the art of performance, identified the theatrical elements and the therapeutics benefits inherent in the art of traditional bone-healing approach of Mohammed Sani Wassan, a traditional bone-healer from Lufari, Niger State, Nigeria with a view to exploring the benefits in particular to mankind.

Theoretical Framework

Every practice and approach to research usually has theories upon which they are rooted. Consequently this study is interrogated by the *theory of Shamanism*. Shamanism, in *Wikipedia.org* (2017 np), is described as a set traditional development and defined as: "a practice that involves a practitioner reaching altered states of consciousness in order to perceive and interact with what they believe to be a spirit world and channel these transcendental energies into this world". However, we could not locate who propounded the theory hence we agree with the fact that the concept is a set of traditional development.

Stevens (2018, np), in illuminating on what shamanism is all about submits that: "When you leave the beaten path of civilization, you enter the world of primal and mysterious forces—and encounter wonders you never thought possible. This is the territory of the shaman." Intriguing is the fact that shamanism is a complex phenomenon as Mircea, (nd, np.) a Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, a Philosopher and a Professor at the University of Chicago expounds the complexity of the art thus:

A complex phenomenon, and perhaps the least hazardous, will be: shamanism = 'technique of religious ecstasy'. Shamanism encompasses the premise that shamans are intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds. Shamans are said to treat ailments/illness by mending the soul. Alleviating traumas affecting the soul/spirit restores the physical body of the individual to balance and wholeness.

Shamanism according Stevens (2018, np), is hinged on the fact that: "Power is everywhere—encounters with power can happen any time...power can destroy us or it can raise us up by teaching us and nourishing us."

In consideration of the features enumerated above we find it appropriate underscore the artistry in this study with the theory of Shamanism. Hence, this researcher beams his research light on Mohammed Sani Wassan who by the approach of his healing art is referred in *wikipedia.org* (2017 np) as a 'folk healer' describes thus:

A highly trained person who pursues his/her specialties, learning by study, observation and imitation. In some cultures a healer might be considered to be a person who has inherited the "gift" of healing from his or her parent. The ability to set bones or the power to stop bleeding may be thought of as hereditary powers.

A Brief Biography of Mohammed Sani Wassan

Mohammed Sani Wassan is a young traditionalist born some fifty years ago to a traditional medical practitioner father in Lufari, Niger State, Nigeria. Wassan was initiated into the art of traditional medical practice at age ten and has since been in the practice. He has travel far and wide; locally, nationally and internationally to many African countries such as Benin Republic, Togo to mention just a few. He is married and blessed with children, some of who took after him in practicing what he inherited from his father.



Figure 1:- Mohammed San I Wassan, the Traditional bone-healer. (Source: Researcher)

Bone-healing among Traditional African Dwellers

As earlier stated, the traditional art of bone-healing has been in practice since our fore-fathers who dwell in the forest, in the caves and among rocks have learnt to take care of themselves whenever they are involved in one kind of accident or the other. So, the art of traditional healing, bone-healing inclusive has subsists since man's existence. Little wonder why the art has remained one of the virile arts that has not gone into extinction in the traditional African setting in spite of many technological innovations. An attestation to the virility of the art brought us face to face with a practitioner that we understudied his bone-healing practice in this analysis.

Mohammed Sani Wassan, has been in the practice for well over forty years. This researcher took interest in the dexterity and the artistic approach, using various theatrical elements in his bone-healing business during his encounter with him on four occasions in 2015, twice in 2016 and 2017. In this study, my 21st May, 2017 encounter with the practitioner shall be the focus.

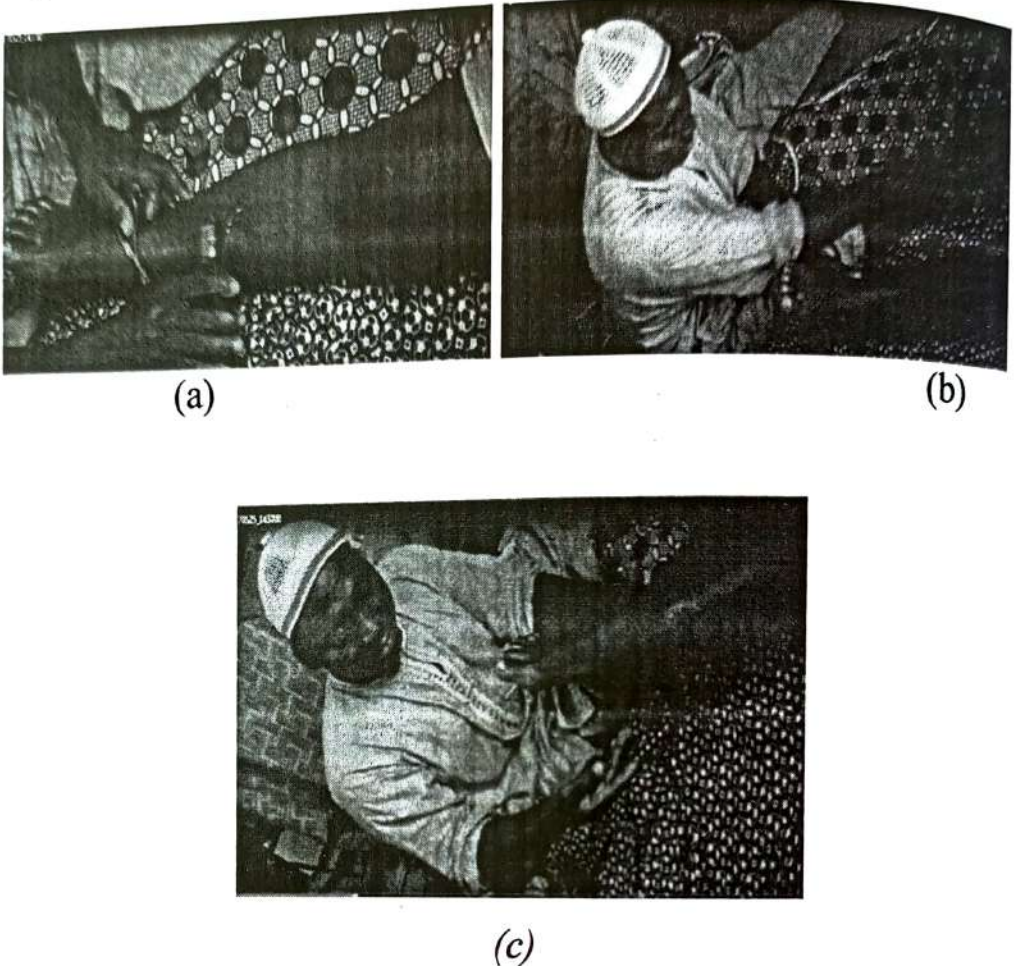
Unlike other bone-healers, Wassan's bone-healing approach is not done in secret, he does his healing in the full glare of the patient, family members, neighbours of the patient and any passerby who cares to witness it (without the use of any anesthetic device).

Mohammed Sani Wassan's Bone-healing Approach

Wassan is a bone-healer who performs his healing art almost singularly except when he occasionally asks an apprentice who follows him, to bring some of the materials he uses from his kits bag to treat his patient. One of his numerous bone-healing expeditions of Wassan that thrilled the researcher was the one he performed earlier, on a patient who sustained clavicle injury. The healing was instant. He even asked the patient after the healing to use the hand to carry a bucket of water and walk about 150 meters distance. Another one that was witnessed was his healing of the fractured leg (tibia and fibula) bone of a patient in 2015. It was observed that except when he applies a medicinal substance on the fractured area (picture (a) in figure 2 below), reveals how he treats his patient without touching. Rather, he touches either his own arm, or leg similar to the area he treats on the patient as contained in the pictures in figure 2 (b) while picture in (c) shows how he uses his finger to direct the movement of the fractured bone back to the normal position, using the shamanic approach as enumerated by Mircea, (nd, np.) a Romanian historian of religion, fiction writer, a Philosopher and a Professor at the University of Chicago enumerates that it "encompasses the premise that shamans are intermediaries or messengers between the human world and the spirit worlds. Shamans are said to treat ailments/illness by mending the soul. Alleviating traumas affecting the soul/spirit restores the

physical body of the individual to balance and wholeness” as it is shown in the picture (c) below:

Figure 2



The healer healing the fractured bones, using his fingers to direct the dislocated bones back to its normal position without touching the patient in pictures (a), (b), (c) and (d) above. Picture:- courtesy of the researcher

Although, he applies some medicinal substance, which according to him he mixes with honey which he applies before he begins the bone re-alignment process. After the bone must have re-aligned, he would then brace the areas with rulers, which are cut to his desired sizes and tied with a shred cloth (in most cases Ankara fabric) before he ties it with crape bandage. Even though the healing process is instantaneous, he still uses the above enumerated

properties to brace the fractured area, which we describe as 'bracing system'. On enquiries, he said it is to keep the bones intact and prevents it from shifting when the parts are involuntarily moved by the patient.

It is interesting to note that the healing process does not take hours; it is completed in less than fifteen to twenty minutes. The patient, if he or she is fearless and strong enough can begin to perform activities with the part (walking, if it is leg and carrying objects if it is hand). In addition to this, he also performs a post healing treatment, which he carries out from his base as it was explained as one of the sterling features of *Shamanism*, which wikipedia.org (2017np) described thus: "a practice that involves a practitioner reaching altered states of consciousness in order to perceive and interact with what they believe to be a spirit world and channel these transcendental energies into this world". Hence, he usually inform the patient that once in a while, when he/she feels any sharp pains, it was due to the fact that he was giving it a post treatment touch from his base in Lufari, perhaps, using incantations and other traditional method of supernatural communication.

The Theatricality in the Bone-healing Process of Mohammed Sani Wassan

What makes any creative disposition to be so referred to as a performance are the theatricality involved, as well as the theatrical elements that are prevalent in the act. This, as Goffman (1959) cited in Schechner (2013, p.29) describes performance looks apt. He states that: "All the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." In a more elaborate description, MaAuley (2009) cited in Schechner (2013, p.38) posits that:

There is a tendency in performance studies to cast the net wider, accepting an ever-expanding range of performance practices as legitimate objects of study...for an activity to be regarded as performance, it must involve the live presence of the performers and those witnessing it...as well as what can be described as the performance contract

between then, whether explicit or implicit.

Consequently, for any theatrical performance to be so referred to, elements of theatre such as: space, costumes, properties, make-up, chants, incantation, songs, dances and so on, will be conspicuous.

Nevertheless, drawing from the procedure involved in the bone-healing process in this study, we make bold to infer that it is indeed a performance. This is in view of all the theatricalities involved, which manifest in the overall display of skills and creativity as well as in the use of all elements of the theatre; such as properties, space and incantation. The picture in figure 3 (a) below shows the property bag of the healer, from which he brings out his performance tools. The picture in (b) below also shows other properties i.e. rulers that he uses during the performance of his bone-healing art.

Figure 3

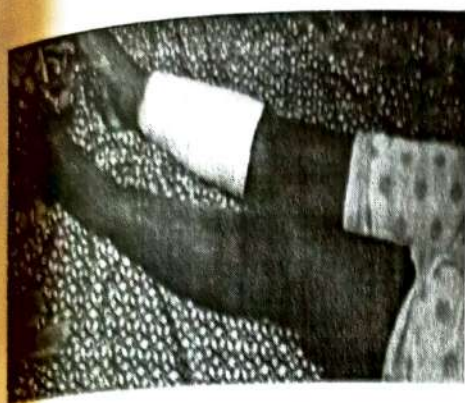


(a)

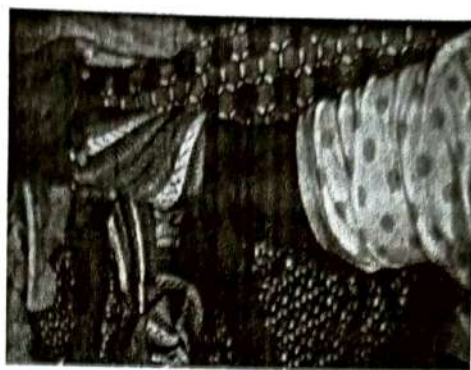
(b)

Picture in (a) above is the property bag while picture (b) shows other property (rulers) that the healer uses to aid his healing process.

Other properties used include; pieces of cloth and crape bandage, as shown in the pictures in figure 4 (a) and (b) below:



(a)



(b)

Space of Performance

Space is of essence in artistic exploration. For a work of art to be described as a performance there must be use of space. Space required in any performance does not necessarily have to be vast or elaborate, nevertheless, its availability, as an element of the theatre is germane to any performance. This may not be far from why Peter Brook in his work; *Empty Space* (1968) submits that: "Give me a space and I will give you the theatre." One of the theatre elements that Wassan explores during his bone-healing work is space. He ensures that he has an unhindered space, though not large for his healing expedition. He normally request that either a big mat or a mattress is provide where his patient will sit or lie down as the case may be, to enable him have a comfortable working atmosphere for his healing work.

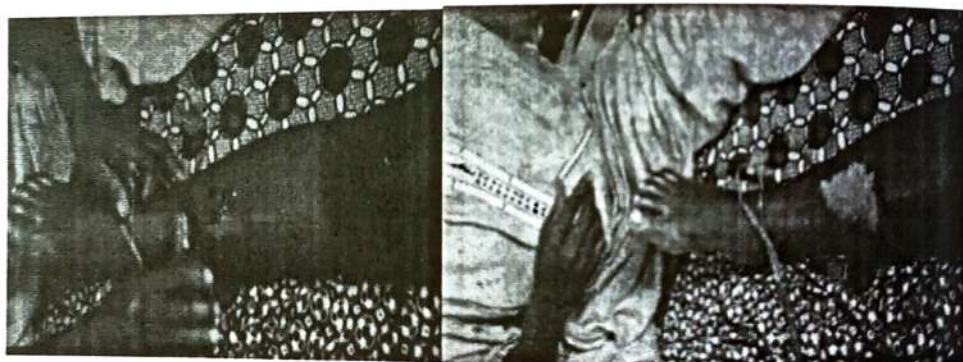
In term of Audience participation/presence, he does not mind if people are around as he allows people to witness what he is doing. He rather sees them as spectators or members of the audience when performing his healing. It is this approach that excites us, hence the reason why we describe his bone-healing as an art, a performance, and a theatrical expedition that explores all elements of the theatre.

Make-up

Another element of the theatre that he makes use of is Make-up. Make-up is a substance that is applied to any part of an artist,

which brings out the intended message that an artist should pass across to the audience. Although, in the case of Wassan, the make-up he applies to his patient are for the purpose of aiding the healing of the patient. The liquid and other substances that he applies on the patient leg or arm as the case may be is what we describe as make-up. The application is in two layers; first is the liquid make-up as shown in Figure 5 picture (a) while the second layer is a substance in powder for as shown in picture (b). Like, it is said, the application of these make-up substances are to aid the healing process and particularly to remove any form of blister that may be formed around the injury area. On enquiry from Wassan, on how and where he sourced the materials he used as make-up from, he did not disclose the components of the elements of the materials he uses rather he simply told us that they were sourced from local materials.

Figure 5



(a)

(b)

Application of make-up on the fractured leg of a patient. Picture:- Courtesy of the Researcher.

Costume

The bone healer did not require wearing of any particular costume for either himself or for his patient. From the pictures taken during this study, he used his personal costume, which is the cloth he wore. He did not also requests that the patient wear another costume. This shows that he uses his day-to-day wear as his

costume. This perhaps is to make natural his healing process.

Use of Incantation

Another theatrical element that the bone-healer uses during his bone-healing process is incantation. It is a known fact that the healing process in the traditional African societies use of incantation is sacrosanct. Incantation according to Doniger (2009, p.1) is: "Supplication to the god to give the desired blessing...believed to have the power of magic and to work directly on a friend or enemy... invoking the gods while conjuring up magic powers directly through the power of the word"

Just as chant, incantation and songs are elements used in dramatic performances to invoke the gods when conjuring powers through the power of words as Doniger states above, we realize that Wassan also uses the same approach during his bone-healing process on his patient. Although, he does not chant out the incantations, but he uses it effectively.

Therapeutic Benefits of Bone-healing in a Recessed Economy

It has been observed that in traditional bone-healing arts are lots of therapeutic benefits. Therapeutic benefits otherwise defined as "significant improvement in the treatment diagnosis, or prevention of a disease" (www.fda.gov) is found to abound in every healing process. Arising from this, we found the benefits to range from relieve from physical discomfort to restoration of functional ability to the disable area through therapeutic chanting or sound therapy.

In most traditional bone-healing process that the researcher has been privileged to witness, the healing of patients in Wassan's treatment case is almost instantaneous. Aside from this, we also chronicled all other benefits to include the followings:

- Shortness in the duration of the healing (as shown in pictures in Figure 7 (a), (b) and (c) below:



(a)



(b)



(c)

The pictures above show in order of chronology, the state of the patient's duration of healing. In (a) is her sitting, (b) is her standing unassisted while (c) shows her standing on her full legs.

Another benefit is low treatment charges, apparently because limited time was spent on sick bed. The latter of the benefits enumerated above is the one that adequately addressed the advantage that patient stand to enjoy in a recessed economy like Nigeria. This is because of the low treatment charges and instant healing, which are epitome of the enduring economic advantage that we emphasised.

The need for the healer to use orthodox materials, gloves especially may be advanced, but our interaction with the healer reveals that COVID-19 virus cannot withstand the potency of the traditional make-up used on the patient.

Conclusion and Recommendations

So far, in this study, we have explored process involved in traditional bone-healing. The study concludes after taken a cursory look at the traditional bone-healing approach of Mohammed Sani Wassan that the process is a performance, there are displays of theatrical and artistic skills as well as use of theatrical elements in the process. All these are the reasons why we describe the act as an art. Drawing from these, we have a clearer picture of what one may agree qualifies bone-healing as an art, giving all the skills and creativity that are embedded in the process. No doubt, in traditional expositions and practices abound multifarious benefits. Therefore, rating recent technological expositions and relegating our indigenous practices is an aberration. If we must get more benefits and improve our economy, we must explore more traditional practices, most of which are drawn from indigenous knowledge, for the benefit of our Nation's economic buoyancy.

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