

THEATRE, PEACE, AND GOOD GOVERNANCE: A PANACEA FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Theatre has long served as a vital tool for promoting peace, while peacebuilding remains an essential foundation for good governance in any society. This study explores the intricate interconnections among theatre, peace, and good governance, arguing that theatrical productions—whether written or performed—serve as powerful mediums for mitigating tension and fostering social harmony. Central to this discourse is the idea that audiences emotionally engage with theatrical expressions and, through this engagement, experience a sense of collective happiness. However, the study contends that such happiness is only meaningful when it translates into tangible human development. Consequently, theatre and peace are conceptualized as interdependent forces—akin to Siamese twins—that inherently support the realization of good governance. The research further posits that theatrical performances play a critical role in de-escalating conflict and fostering reconciliation, thereby contributing to societal peacebuilding. A government that encourages and invests in theatrical expression inevitably nurtures peace and unity among its populace, as demonstrated during the military administration of Captain Walter Feghabo in Ebonyi State. Drawing primarily from secondary sources, this study adopts a historical approach to analyze the synergy between theatre, peace, and governance in Nigeria. Preliminary findings suggest that integrating theatrical practices and peacebuilding initiatives into governance frameworks holds significant promise for advancing human development.

Keywords: Theatre, Peace, Good Governance, Panacea, Human Development

Introduction

Theatre, peace, and good governance represent a constellation of interlocking concepts, each reinforcing the other and contributing to societal well-being. The central premise is that theatrical performances—often humorous and cathartic—serve to ease societal tension. The alleviation of such tension fosters peace, and peace, in turn, is a prerequisite for good governance. As Eyeh, Molokwu, Uchime, and others (2023) observe, no government undertakes sustainable capital development projects in the absence of peace. Thus, good governance both requires and reinforces social tranquillity.

Theatre, peace, and good governance are interdependent—almost "trigonometrically" aligned—concepts that are vital to human development and social cohesion. They cannot be meaningfully separated, as each plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of human existence. Given their importance to social relations and communal development, it is imperative to explore these concepts individually before examining their interrelationship.

Theatre is a collaborative fine art that employs live performers—typically actors or actresses—to present real or imagined events before a live audience in a designated performance space, often a stage. Performers use a combination of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance to communicate their message. The incorporation of visual elements such as painted scenery, stagecraft, and lighting enhances the performative experience, reinforcing its physical and emotional impact. In many cases, theatre is deployed in a satirical or humorous way to critique governance—particularly when it lacks vision, direction, and fails to deliver tangible benefits to the people. Such performances often serve as a mirror, exposing the deficiencies of state leadership and prompting public reflection.

Theatre is one of the oldest and most resonant forms of live artistic expression. It thrives as a medium of entertainment, critique, and social commentary, performed in dedicated or improvised spaces often referred to as theatres. Its essence lies not only in its entertainment value but also in its creative, proactive, reflective, and constructive capacity. According to Molokwu and Uchime (2020), theatre can serve as an antidote to structural violence, offering an artistic response to social chaos, conflict, and disintegration. In times of crisis, theatre can help to neutralize tension, foster reconciliation, and promote healing and renewal. Its indispensability to every stratum of society underscores its enduring relevance. Indeed, many theatrical productions are designed to provoke critical reflection, exposing uncomfortable truths and presenting audiences with realistic portrayals of societal dysfunction. The power of theatre lies in its ability to evoke emotional responses—guilt, empathy, or moderation—and to function as a medium of critique. It is within this context that theatre is positioned as a powerful tool for illuminating the dynamic relationship between peace and good governance.

Peace as a Parallel of Good Governance

Peace is a fluid and multidimensional concept that extends beyond an individual state of mind to encompass structural, philosophical, sociological, political, strategic, psychological, environmental, materialistic, legal, and human rights dimensions. This implies that peace is not a static condition but one that can be understood and analyzed through various lenses. According to Nwasumba, Molokwu, Uchime, et al. (2020), peace is best conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon. This perspective highlights that the value and understanding of peace are enriched when approached from its multiple images, viewpoints, or frameworks. Due to these varying interpretations, conceptualizing peace in a universally agreed-upon manner proves difficult; rather, scholars and policymakers often adopt selective perspectives based on context and need.

From a philosophical standpoint, peace is often regarded by many thinkers as a natural, original, and divinely ordained state of human existence. As Ibeanu (2007, p. 5) notes, this view situates peace as the prelapsarian condition—an uncorrupted state established by God. In this sense, peace represents a form of earthly perfection and an expression of God's kingdom before the fall of man. It is the ideal state of human existence, devoid of suffering and conflict. This theological-philosophical interpretation is further echoed in the writings

of St. Augustine of Hippo, who distinguished between two symbolic cities: the *City of God*, founded on perfect heavenly peace and spiritual salvation, and the *City of Man*, driven by carnal desires and marked by corruption and strife (Sabine & Thorson, 1973, pp. 183–190). Many classical philosophers also posited that in the state of nature, human beings lived in peace as free and gentle savages. In this natural state, people had few desires and lived harmoniously. However, this idyllic existence was later corrupted by human greed and the desire for private property, leading to social conflicts and the disruption of peace. It can therefore be argued that it is the human pursuit of personal property and material gain that instigates violence and undermines social harmony. As Molokwu, Uchime, and Chukwudi (2021) observe, human beings are inherently inclined to seek happiness and avoid pain; violence emerges only when the natural order is disrupted by excessive desires.

From a sociological perspective, peace is understood as a condition of social harmony in which antagonisms are minimized or absent. It denotes a state in which conflict is either non-existent or managed constructively, allowing individuals and groups to meet their needs and fulfil their aspirations (Ibeanu, 2007, p. 6). Within this context, two major schools of thought offer interpretive frameworks for understanding peace: the structuralist and the functionalist traditions.

Structural-functionalism, in particular, views society as a system composed of interdependent structures, each performing specific functions necessary for the survival and stability of the whole. For a society to thrive, it must fulfil essential roles such as educating the young, producing goods and services, governing effectively, and ensuring security. These roles necessitate the existence of institutions such as schools, industries, courts, parliaments, and armed forces. These institutions are tasked with maintaining societal peace and cohesion by ensuring that each structural component performs its designated function effectively. When these structures operate optimally, the society naturally tends toward order, equilibrium, and stability.

Dialectical materialism is a tradition of social analysis associated with the renowned German philosopher Karl Marx. This conceptual framework suggests that the processes through which societies produce and distribute the means of material existence are inherently conflictual, particularly due to class-based struggles. In class-divided societies, the dominant classes often perform less labor yet appropriate the majority of social and economic rewards. This exploitative relationship gives rise to class struggle, which may manifest as overt or objective violence—for instance, violence perpetrated by state apparatuses such as the military or police against marginalized groups. More commonly, however, this struggle assumes the form of covert or structural violence embedded in societal institutions.

Peace, from a political perspective, can be defined as a contractual agreement wherein parties—especially sovereign states—mutually recognize and respect each other's sovereignty and authority. A classic example is the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe in 1648. A succinct and widely cited political definition of peace comes from the concept of "university peace," which frames peace as a political condition that enables the realization of justice (Miller, n.d., pp. 29–30). In this context, peace entails the institutionalization of political order, wherein political structures attain value, legitimacy, and stability. According to Uchime and Ewa (2025), institutionalization is essential for preventing the primacy of politics from leading to instability. Political peace thus involves the stability and functionality of all governance institutions. As such,

sustainable peace requires that politics be mediated through enduring structures and a secular political culture (Molokwu & Uchime, 2020; Uchime, 2025). A secular political culture implies citizen participation and the normalization of democratic values such as tolerance, negotiation, and compromise.

Beyond political interpretations, peace is generally understood as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, and violence. It emphasizes not only peaceful coexistence but also the promotion of a just and equitable social order through nonviolent means (Francis, 2006, p. 16). Peace scholars have identified multiple dimensions of peace, including: peace as justice and development (i.e., the absence of structural violence), peace as mutual respect and tolerance among peoples, peace as Gaia (ecological balance), inner peace (spiritual well-being), and peace as wholeness or holistic integration (Francis, 2006, p. 18).

Johan Galtung (1969) further provides a foundational typology of violence that is essential for understanding the conditions that give rise to "peacelessness." These include: (1) direct violence—physical, emotional, and psychological harm; (2) structural violence—systemic policies and institutional arrangements that cause suffering, death, or social marginalization; and (3) cultural violence—cultural norms and ideologies that legitimize or perpetuate discrimination and injustice. Structural violence, in particular, often stems from deliberate state policies that inhibit human development and social cohesion. In this regard, the failure of governments to institutionalize inclusive and developmental programs results in conflict-inducing conditions. Such failures reflect a transformation of governance into a source of structural violence, thereby impeding peaceful coexistence.

Peace and Good Governance: A Complementary Framework for Societal Development

It is important to assert that peace and good governance are complementary concepts essential for societal development. Peace, fundamentally, pertains to the mental and emotional state of individuals within a society. It shapes how citizens respond to the government and its policies, particularly those that impact their everyday lives. A peaceful society is often indicative of public trust and willingness to cooperate with governmental directives. Conversely, no government can achieve sustainable progress in the face of persistent institutional instability (Uchime & Molokwu, 2023). Good governance, therefore, plays a crucial role in diffusing tension and resolving emerging issues through effective and timely decision-making. When leaders act decisively and responsibly, they garner the support and confidence of the citizenry.

An Ontological Perspective on Peace and Theatre

The concepts of peace and theatre can be traced ontologically to divine origins. That is, their genesis may be located in the account of creation as recorded in religious texts. According to the Bible, prior to creation, "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (The Holy Bible, King James Version). This depiction suggests a state of primordial chaos—an absence of order and structure, which characterizes conflict. As Bakare (2016) suggests, from this biblical narrative, one can infer that God employed a form of theatricality to introduce the first instance of peace in creation. The act of saying, "Let there be light," and the immediate manifestation of light, can be seen as the inaugural staging of a divine performance.

In this context, God can be interpreted as setting the stage—creating a theatrical environment where light, space, color, and form converge to produce harmony and order. The partitioning of the earth, the addition of green vegetation, and the aesthetic

arrangement of natural elements all point to an intentional design akin to a dramatic set. This implies that contemporary theatre may have subconsciously inherited from the divine act of creation a fundamental tradition: no performance begins until the stage is fully prepared and illuminated. Light, as both a physical and symbolic element, remains central to both divine creation and theatrical expression.

Theatre and Good Governance: A Panoramic Analysis

Good governance is widely conceptualized as a fundamental prerequisite for sustainable democracy. In the Nigerian context, there exists both an analytical and intellectual gap—particularly in articulating how theatre and artistic performance can contribute to and promote good governance. This conceptual lacuna has led many, including scholars, to view theatre merely as a fictional and creative enterprise intended solely for entertainment. On the contrary, however, theatre has long been recognized as a vital societal watchdog—an effective medium for interrogating and communicating social issues.

While the efforts of scholars seeking to establish a connection between theatrical performance and governance have laid the foundation for alternative frameworks in peacebuilding discourse, the absence of a consensus on the definition of theatre remains problematic. This is not to suggest that theatre lacks meaning; rather, it is the multiplicity of its meanings that complicates its conceptual clarity. For example, within military parlance, *theatre* refers to a region where active combat operations are taking place—a usage evident in the ongoing operations in Nigeria’s Niger Delta and North-East regions, where the armed forces are engaged in counterinsurgency and anti-militancy campaigns (Uchime, Molokwu, & Ewa, 2024; Uchime, 2025). In contrast, the term *theatre* may also refer to a physical venue for dramatic performance or the broader art of dramaturgy and motion picture production (Hornby, 2015).

Across these forms—whether as written text, visual display, or stage performance—the ultimate purpose of theatre is often to inform and entertain, while also drawing attention to social realities and proposing solutions. A pertinent example is found in *Kongi’s Harvest*, a classical drama by Nigeria’s Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka. The play explores the theme of power and offers a scathing critique of tyranny and autocratic governance in post-independence African states (Apejoye, 2014, pp. 61–71). Nigeria, in particular, has endured prolonged periods of military rule and authoritarian regimes—beginning with the 1966 coup that precipitated the nation’s first civil war (Molokwu & Uchime, 2025). This historical context may have inspired Soyinka’s fictional portrayal of Isma, a lawless nation ruled by President Kongi, who ascended to power against the will of the people.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has experienced cycles of political instability, economic hardship, and authoritarian governance. From the regime of Major General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi in 1966 to that of General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 1999, successive military leaders imposed themselves upon the nation (Okonofua, 2013). Although Nigeria transitioned to democratic rule in 1999, the dividends of democracy remain largely elusive. Many argue that the political system has changed in form but not in substance; the shift from military to civilian rule has not led to meaningful improvements in governance or the quality of life. The pervasive culture of lawlessness, corruption, impunity, and underdevelopment is often attributed to the legacy of military rule, which entrenched undemocratic practices and weakened essential democratic institutions. Practices such as electoral fraud became normalized, undermining the rule of law, human rights, and

accountability—foundational pillars of good governance (Uchime et al., 2021; Uchime, 2025).

It is nearly impossible to envision good governance in any African state, including Nigeria, where many past and present leaders have undermined democratic principles, exploited the system for personal gain, divided the nation along religious and ethnic lines, and ruthlessly silenced dissenting voices. A notable example is the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was publicly humiliated and executed in 1995 by the authoritarian regime of General Sani Abacha for advocating the liberation of the Niger Delta people from the region's environmental degradation and socio-economic marginalization (Olowu, 1995). Apejaye (2014) asserts that Abacha's regime was more repressive than that of Idi Amin, famously describing Abacha as "Nigeria's Idi Amin." The Abacha dictatorship was widely condemned both within and beyond Africa for its egregious human rights violations.

The prevalence of corruption, tyranny, and systemic human rights abuses has inspired many playwrights and intellectuals—such as Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka—to explore and critique the crisis of leadership in Nigeria. Through their works, they not only interpret these challenges but also attempt to confront them by condemning the failure of successive governments to uphold democratic values and provide accountable governance. One prevailing interpretation is that many African leaders, particularly in Nigeria, who assumed power after independence were ill-prepared and lacked the administrative competence to transition from anti-colonial agitation to effective statecraft (Joseph, 2006).

Two dominant schools of thought have emerged in explaining the continent's persistent governance crisis. The first contends that colonialism disrupted thriving African traditional systems of governance, replacing them with alien and dysfunctional structures. The second attributes the failure to internal factors, such as elite greed, flawed leadership models, and the prioritization of personal power over institutional development (Molokwu et al., 2023; Molokwu & Uchime, 2025).

It is against this complex backdrop that George Orwell's *Animal Farm* becomes a compelling metaphorical lens through which to analyze governance in Nigeria. The allegory presented in the novel sharply mirrors the prevailing lawlessness, corruption, inequality, and injustice in the Nigerian political landscape. While Orwell's work may appear to be an imaginative and abstract creation, its symbolic narrative captures the grim realities of postcolonial African states. The story begins with a gathering of the animals—Boxer, Clover, Mollie, and others—except for Moses, who is conspicuously absent, perched behind a back door (Orwell, 2010).

The character "Old Major" symbolizes the archetype of revolutionary leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and African nationalists who resisted colonial domination. A recurring theme among revolutionary movements is the quest for freedom, which Major passionately articulates in his address to the animals. He urges them to recognize their common oppressor—humankind—who has reduced their lives to misery, toil, and brevity. This speech strikingly reflects the political and social conditions endured by many Nigerians, both past and present.

Major's vision and rhetorical fervor echo the determination of nationalist leaders who viewed colonialism as a violent theft of liberty and resources. For them, the colonialists were not merely foreign rulers but oppressors who replaced freedom with subjugation and prosperity with impoverishment. Those who resisted were often met with brutal

repression. Just as the animals in *Animal Farm* were denied autonomy in their own land, so too were Nigerians during colonial rule. Ironically, although the colonialists have long departed, many Nigerians remain unfree, now subjugated by leaders they themselves elect—leaders who plunder public resources and perpetuate the cycle of oppression.

It is both unfortunate and ironic that Nigeria's independence did not deliver the freedom and good governance envisioned and fought for by the nation's founding fathers. Rather than ushering in a new era of progress, the post-independence period, especially following the discovery of oil, marked a deepening of the crises of corruption, insecurity, and injustice. Instead of contributing to the restoration of Nigeria's battered dignity—eroded by colonial domination—independence and oil wealth have paradoxically become among the country's greatest undoings (Uchime et al., 2021).

For many Nigerians, happiness remains an elusive concept. The lived realities of the majority are defined by misery, hunger, and poverty. Basic necessities—food, shelter, clothing, and potable water—recognized globally as fundamental human rights, are denied to the populace through the actions and inactions of the country's political elite. These elites, rather than acting as stewards of the public good, often assume public office with the sole aim of personal enrichment. They do not contribute to productive enterprise; instead, they consume disproportionately, mismanage public resources, and misappropriate what little remains for the masses. They make empty promises of employment and development, only to deliver economic stagnation and social despair. In Nigeria, hunger and poverty are not the consequences of scarcity, but paradoxically, the outcomes of abundance mismanaged (Jacob et al, 2019).

One might ask, as the character Major does in the dramatic work under discussion: is this deplorable condition simply the natural order of things? Is it because Nigeria is too poor to afford a decent standard of living for its citizens? To this, Major responds emphatically: "No, a million times no!" Nigeria is endowed with fertile soil and a favourable tropical climate—conditions ideal for human habitation and agricultural production. The land has the potential not only to feed its population but also to produce surplus for export. Yet, the key indicators of good governance—food security, basic comfort, and respect for human dignity—are conspicuously absent.

This deficit is largely attributable to Nigeria's visionless and unimaginative leadership. Political leaders have failed to harness the country's vast resources for national development. Their poor governance has led to the systemic underdevelopment of Nigeria's economic, political, and social institutions.

Ultimately, Nigeria's developmental failures can be encapsulated in one word: corruption. While postcolonial African leaders often blame imperial exploitation for their nations' woes, it is corruption—more than any external influence—that continues to undermine Nigeria's progress. Corruption has eroded leadership institutions and led to the collapse of good governance. Indeed, it is the root cause of most of the nation's challenges.

Against this backdrop, it becomes increasingly unlikely that good governance can be attained in a polity plagued by corrupt leadership, institutional dysfunction, and pervasive insecurity. Sustainable peace, development, and public order require leaders who are accountable, transparent, and committed to the collective interest. Without such leadership, the vision of a prosperous Nigeria will remain unrealized.

Corruption is a fundamentally destructive force that significantly impedes development. In Africa, for example, it is documented that approximately 90 percent of the continent's generated revenues are controlled by a small elite comprising less than 10 percent of the population. In Nigeria alone, over \$400 billion in oil revenue has reportedly been siphoned off by private individuals—many of whom appear to wield more influence than the state itself. A striking example occurred in 2012 when the federal government attempted to remove the fuel subsidy; in response, oil marketers nearly crippled the national economy and ultimately compelled the government to reverse its decision (Igwe, 2010).

Such grossly inequitable, unjust, and imbalanced distribution of national resources breeds instability. Marginalized and disenfranchised groups, deprived of access to the nation's wealth, are more likely to engage in resistance or rebellion. This is already evident in the form of violent agitations in various parts of the country. In the South-South, for instance, the Niger Delta Avengers have taken up arms to demand resource control, while in the South-East, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) continue to advocate for secession.

It is therefore deeply ironic that Nigeria, a country that produces millions of barrels of oil daily, remains plagued by widespread poverty and misery rather than benefiting from the wealth of its natural resources. The oil boom has failed to translate into national prosperity or improved living standards for the average citizen.

These conditions reflect, almost prophetically, the concerns articulated in Major's revolutionary speech in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Major's depiction of exploitation and misrule resonates strongly with Nigeria's enduring challenges of corruption, elite dominance, and leadership failure. Major had aimed to motivate and sensitize his fellow comrades on the injustices Mr. Jones and his men meted out to them when he said:

You cows that I see before me, how many thousands of gallons of milk have you given during this last year? And what has happened to the milk which should have been breeding up sturdy Calves? Every drop of it has gone down the throats of our enemies. And you hens, how many eggs have you laid in this last year, and how many of those eggs ever hatched into chicken? The rest have all gone to the market to bring money to Jones and his men. And you Clover, where are those four foals you bore, who should have been the support and pleasure of your old age (Orwell, 1945, p.25)?

Characteristically, the above reflects the disposition and dominant ideological orientation of leaders who abhor corruption and bad governance. Such leaders often envision societal transformation through revolutionary means, as exemplified by Old Major in *Animal Farm*, who urged his fellow animals to revolt against Mr. Jones for his exploitation, oppression, and self-serving violence. True to his rhetorical style, Major typically commenced his speeches with thought-provoking questions designed to stimulate critical reflection. His ultimate aim was to inspire and mobilize the animals to rise up against their oppressor and reclaim their agency. In many societies, revolution serves as a direct response to oppression and that was what Major had in mind when he asked the listening crowd:

Is it not crystal clear, comrades that all the evils of this life of ours spring from the tyranny of human beings? Only get rid of man, and the produce of our labor would be our own. Almost overnight we could become rich and free. What then must we do? Why, work night and day, body and soul, for the overthrow of the human race! That is my message to you, comrades: Rebellion! I do not know when that rebellion will come, it might be in a week

or in a hundred years, but I know, as surely as I see this straw beneath my feet, that sooner or later justice will be done. Fix your eyes on that, comrades, throughout the short remainder of your lives! And above all, pass on this message of mine to those who shall come after you, so that generations shall carry on the struggle until it is victorious (Orwell, 1945, p.10).

The excerpt, as the author intended, powerfully evokes revolutionary thought through a highly persuasive and urgent tone. One can clearly perceive the agony, absence of peace, and the unprecedented determination of the animals to change their dire condition. Historically, major societal transformations—such as the 1917 Russian Revolution—have often been driven by similar sentiments of collective discontent. No meaningful change occurs in any society without the conscious and sacrificial efforts of its people to bring about transformation.

Throughout history, individuals have played pivotal roles in shaping their societies. For example, Martin Luther King Jr.'s iconic speech, *"I Have a Dream,"* envisioned an America transformed from a racially divided nation into one where all individuals—regardless of race—could coexist with equal rights and dignity. Although this dream appeared to be realized with the election of Barack Obama as the first African-American President of the United States in 2008, it came at a significant cost. The struggle involved immense sacrifices by King and countless others who championed civil rights for African Americans.

Similarly, in South Africa, Nelson Mandela waged a relentless battle against apartheid and the oppressive white minority regime that relegated Black South Africans to the status of second-class citizens. Mandela's lifelong dedication to justice and equality culminated in a democratic South Africa, where liberty and equal citizenship are now enshrined (Sampson, 1999).

In Nigeria, the idea of a revolution—particularly against corruption—resonates with many citizens, save for a minority who directly or indirectly benefit from the misappropriation of public resources. However, the courage to confront entrenched systems of corruption, as demonstrated by Mandela in South Africa or King in the United States, remains largely absent. The closest Nigeria has come to a political revolution was in 2015, when the electorate overwhelmingly voted out President Goodluck Jonathan, who was widely perceived as having presided over a corrupt administration. This electoral decision was rooted in a widespread desire for good governance and the expectation that President Muhammadu Buhari would sanitize the political system, curb corruption, and address critical issues such as hunger, unemployment, insecurity, and poverty.

Although President Buhari has made efforts to combat corruption—Nigeria's most persistent adversary—his perceived sectionalism and bias in appointments and prosecutions have significantly undermined these efforts. Fighting corruption cannot succeed through unlawful practices or actions that disregard the principles of the rule of law. Instead, accountability, fairness, and equity must be central to any anti-corruption strategy if it is to be sustainable and effective.

It is crucial to recognize that corruption has not only eroded good governance in Nigeria but also denied its citizens peace and development. To reclaim these, both the leadership and the citizenry must abandon divisiveness, ethnicism, and confrontational politics, and instead embrace unity of purpose aimed at national progress (Cosmas et al., 2022). However, an important question arises: how can President Buhari's ethnically skewed

appointments and selective prosecution of corrupt officials foster peace and good governance in a country already deeply polarized?

Indeed, since assuming office, President Buhari has demonstrated a strong passion and determination to combat corruption and reposition Nigeria's economy. However, it appears that he lacks the political will to fully execute this mission in a manner devoid of political, religious, and ethnic biases. His administration has been widely criticized for adopting a sectional approach in the implementation of certain policies and in the distribution of political appointments. Moreover, allegations of selective prosecution in the anti-corruption campaign have further undermined the credibility of the government's efforts. Specifically, the administration has consistently ignored public calls to investigate and prosecute some ministers and officials who have been accused of corrupt practices (Ekumaoko et al, 2021).

Nigeria has much to learn from George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, particularly its lessons on the abuse of power and the dangers of hypocrisy in leadership. A key insight from Orwell's work is the importance of collective solidarity and fairness in governance. If President Buhari's administration adopts a fair, balanced, and impartial approach to the anti-corruption crusade, it would help to foster national unity and eliminate perceptions of marginalization or political witch-hunting. Such an approach would ensure that the administration is not seen as replicating the very injustices it claims to oppose.

To paraphrase the words of Major in *Animal Farm*, President Buhari must always remember that the war against corruption requires a consistent moral posture: to avoid corruption in all its forms and appearances. Anything that resembles corruption remains an enemy to the Nigerian people. Those who promote good governance, equity, and justice are friends of the nation. In waging the war on corruption, the government must ensure that it does not adopt the tactics or vices of corrupt regimes. No public official should be allowed to misappropriate public funds with impunity. Above all, the President must avoid authoritarian tendencies and govern in a manner that upholds the dignity and rights of all Nigerians—regardless of ethnic origin, religion, or social status.

Whether Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, or from any other ethnic group, Nigerians are brothers, comrades, and citizens of one indivisible nation. The sanctity of human life must be preserved. The ongoing violence and loss of lives in the South-East and South-South regions are unacceptable. Every Nigerian is equal before the law and entitled to the right to life. It is the fundamental responsibility of any accountable government to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

The Importance of Theatre and Peace in Human Society

The economic, social, and political development of any society is fundamentally predicated on the establishment and sustenance of peace. It is, therefore, reasonable to assert that without peace, the realization of good governance becomes nearly impossible. Good governance, in turn, facilitates development by promoting accountability and transparency—attributes that foster public trust, enhance productivity, ensure security, and reinforce social harmony.

The deployment of theatre as a tool for promoting peace in human society is not a novel concept; however, it has gained renewed scholarly attention, particularly among researchers and practitioners in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Theatre serves a corrective and transformative function—it acts as a catalyst for change and a medium for expressing societal concerns (Bakare, 2016). Through its participatory nature and

emotional resonance, theatre becomes a dynamic agent in fostering dialogue and promoting reconciliation.

According to Bakare (2016), theatre possesses the capacity to be proactive, meditative, and constructive. In the wake of persistent civil and communal conflicts across Africa, contemporary African theatre practitioners have increasingly embraced the medium as a vital instrument for peace advocacy and the reengineering of communicative practices aimed at unity and coexistence. This engagement manifests in various forms—music, film, visual arts, and literature—as exemplified in the works of cultural icons like Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe.

The development of theatre as a credible tool for peacebuilding in Africa is particularly significant, given that many conflicts on the continent are rooted in cultural diversity, ethnic identity, and historical grievances. Theatre practitioners often explore these themes in their productions to forge emotional connections with audiences and stimulate critical reflection. Because of its ability to engage with people's emotions, interests, and values, theatre should be fully integrated into peacebuilding strategies for more sustainable and inclusive outcomes.

Peacebuilding refers to deliberate and strategic interventions designed to prevent the recurrence of violence by transitioning from a fragile state of peace to one that is enduring and developmental. Since the influential work of Johan Galtung, a distinction has been made between *negative peace*—the mere absence of direct violence—and *positive peace*, which encompasses the presence of justice, equity, and the structural conditions necessary for long-term stability. Studies have shown that peace entails more than the cessation of hostilities; it involves the pursuit of social justice, equitable distribution of power and resources, and the consistent application of the rule of law.

Consequently, peace should be conceptualized as a sustained condition in which individuals can thrive within frameworks of legality, public order, political stability, and economic opportunity. Peacebuilding, in this context, encompasses all efforts aimed at creating institutions and systems that facilitate the non-violent resolution of conflicts and support the long-term goals of social cohesion, justice, and development.

The importance of peace and theatre in any society cannot be overstated, as both have significantly contributed to the social, political, and economic development of numerous communities. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, for instance, Zelizer (2003) found that the artistic process in peacebuilding is underpinned by the idea that conflicts can be resolved by expanding the identities of disputants beyond their isolated, conflict-laden group affiliations. His work offers an early exploration of this field, supported by empirical data, though primarily focused on musicians.

In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, music frequently serves as a vehicle for addressing social and political issues. Youths in the region employ hip-hop to educate and raise awareness about unemployment, corruption, class disparities, HIV/AIDS, and other societal challenges (Zelizer, 2003). Similarly, in the war-affected Batticaloa district of Sri Lanka, both children and adults participate in music, painting, theatre, yoga, and sculpture at the Butterfly Peace Garden as a means of coping with and transcending trauma (Zelizer, 2003).

In Israel, the Peres Center for Peace facilitates collaborative theatre projects between Palestinians and Israelis to foster dialogue and mutual understanding (Lederach, 2012). In

Venezuela, José Antonio Abreu initiated a program that organizes orchestras and choirs for low-income youth, aimed at promoting social integration and enhancing self-esteem.

A review of existing literature further reveals that in the Philippines, theatre practitioners travel across the island of Mindanao, using performance art to advocate for peaceful coexistence among Muslim, Christian, and indigenous communities (Lederach, 2012). In Northern Uganda, reggae, rap, and R&B fused with traditional Acholi music are employed in conflict management. This hybrid genre produces an energetic dancehall style with lyrics addressing critical social issues such as stigma, children's rights, injustice, and sexual abuse. Nigeria is not exempt from these global trends, as various communities across the country have witnessed significant social improvements through peacebuilding, theatre, and cultural activities. A notable example is the Ikonpini Annual Dance of the Koko community, celebrated on the 27th of December each year. During this festival, community members are prohibited from holding grudges against one another. Consequently, individuals are compelled to reconcile their differences, as the festival involves the entire community. Moreover, it has been observed that such cultural festivals often encourage members of the diaspora to return home, providing a platform for resolving familial or communal disputes. Similarly, in the Opuma community, periodic events featuring drama and music concerts are held. These performances often convey moral teachings, contributing to the reformation of disputing parties' attitudes and fostering communal harmony.

While theatre and peacebuilding have demonstrated significant potential for societal development, several factors hinder their full utilization. Cultural and traditional constraints often limit the scope of theatre in some communities. Many theatrical productions are restricted to entertainment and cultural expression and are not permitted by cultural custodians to serve broader purposes, such as education or peace advocacy. Additionally, women are frequently excluded from participating in certain cultural activities. This exclusion persists despite international advocacy for inclusive peace processes that empower women to participate in cultural and peacebuilding initiatives. In Nigeria, the marginalization of women in these efforts has proven to be counterproductive. Financial constraints and widespread poverty also pose major challenges to the development of theatre and the sustenance of peace initiatives. As Uchime et al. (2021) argue, poverty has significantly contributed to the escalation of conflicts such as the Niger Delta militancy and the Boko Haram insurgency. Unemployed youths are especially vulnerable to radicalization and militarization. Furthermore, the high cost of participating in theatrical activities limits access for many Nigerians. Theatre professionals, in an attempt to recover the substantial investments made in productions, often impose high participation fees. Beyond financial barriers, theatre appreciation remains a relatively underdeveloped cultural norm in Nigeria. Consequently, practitioners are compelled to invest heavily in advertising, further inflating participation costs.

Additional constraints include Nigeria's deep-seated religious, social, and ethnic divisions. These divisions have grown to the extent that Christian audiences may be reluctant to engage with theatre that promotes Islamic values and vice versa. From an ethnic standpoint, individuals often prefer theatrical productions that reflect their own language, culture, and religious traditions. For instance, a Hausa-Fulani individual may be more inclined to appreciate theatre rooted in Hausa culture than one incorporating Igbo or Yoruba elements. Similarly, doctrinal teachings within some Christian denominations discourage participation in traditional cultural festivals or practices perceived as pagan. These

differences significantly hinder efforts to bring together Christians, Muslims, and adherents of African Traditional Religion under a shared theatrical platform aimed at promoting peaceful coexistence.

However, despite these constraints, events such as football matches during the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games, the Ofala festivals in Igboland, Christmas celebrations, and the Muslim observance of Ramadan have played significant roles in uniting people of diverse cultural, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. These events not only foster peace and social cohesion but also stimulate socio-economic activities with substantial benefits. For instance, Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, and Christmas celebrations greatly enhance economic activities in countries across the globe, including Nigeria. During these periods, individuals from different religious backgrounds share gifts, dine together, and collaborate to improve the welfare of their communities. Within the euphoria of these festive seasons, peace is often amplified, and divisive societal factors appear to recede—albeit temporarily—only to resurface afterwards.

Conclusion

This study has argued that the promotion of peace and good governance is central to the development of any society. Furthermore, it posits that theatrical works, when effectively harnessed, can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding processes. This suggests that sustainable peace is a prerequisite for the optimal realization of the dividends of good governance. Importantly, the contemporary dynamics of both national and international politics underscore how unequal power distribution can undermine peace and governance, rendering societies vulnerable to conflict. These conflicts are often destructive, and efforts to rebuild affected systems frequently rely on the creative interventions of theater practitioners—through music, performance, writing, and film—to transform public consciousness and cultivate a culture conducive to peace.

It is on this basis that theater underscores the interdependence between peace and good governance as essential to ensuring human dignity and well-being. This interrelationship highlights the intellectual and analytical synergy between both concepts. The core argument advanced in this study is that theater inherently offers proactive, creative, and transformative mechanisms for nation-building and human development. It provides a platform through which the imaginative capacity of theater practitioners can influence societal change.

Notably, African theater professionals, such as Wole Soyinka, have harnessed the power of the stage to critique and confront tyranny, corruption, and irresponsible governance across the continent. Additionally, theater has proven to be a powerful tool in the reconstruction of post-conflict societies, as seen in regions such as Bosnia, Tanzania, and the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

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