

Satire of Homosexuality in Nigerian, South African and African-American Stand-up Comedies

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Abstract

Stand-up comedy, a new subgenre of comedy, is largely a product of the sociological realities of national and global societies. Its lucrativeness and patriotism by its audiences reveal its popularity among its audiences over other forms of theatrical performances across the globe. Its dramatic shows bring succor and mirth to its target audience. When it is performed before its live audience, the stand-up comedians stylistically draw the attention of their audiences to social realities. Previous studies have drastically examined its entertaining significance and theatrical shows without considering its deeper satirical significance. Therefore, this paper deeply investigates how the selected stand-up comedians from Nigeria, South Africa and United States of America use their stand-up performances to lampoon inordinate ambition of homosexuality in their various societies. This is a bid to significantly show how stand-up comedy plays other social functions of social criticism besides its entertaining and theatrical functions in the given societies. The selected stand-up comedians are Godwin Komone (Gordons), Ayo Makun (AY), Nigeria; Trevor Noah, South Africa; Richard Pryor, United States of America. Schechner's Performance, Freudian and Jungian psychoanalytic theories were used to analyse the embodied behaviours of the stand-up comedians. The data were subjected to performance and literary analyses.

Keywords: Homosexuality, Stand-up comedy, Criticism, Audience, Satire

Introduction

Stand-up comedy, as a solo or duet performance, is a social interaction that is conventionally bound (Adekunle 2017: 68). This is because it is culturally, socially, regionally, and globally bound. Its subject matter treats universal and local topical issues. These are sociological issues that permeate every society or threaten human existence (Adekunle, 2009:12; 2014:96; Auslander2004: 197; DasyIva, 2004:57). Stand-up comedy is the product of its society. It is an oral material that showcases the realities of its given society. Society determines the nature of its performance. Stand-up comedians often use dialects that their target audiences are

familiar with as a means of communication on the theatrical stages (Tofaya 2009: 12). The means of communicational low people at the grassroots to identify with the stand-up performers and, at the same time, have a feel of realities around them. The comedians use these dialects to convey their messages to their audiences. Only members of the audience who belong to the linguistic community will understand the contents of the performance. According to Harbidge (2001: 128), stand-up comedy is a live performance that explores the comedian-audience relationship and intra-audience communication dynamism through a pleasurable medium that would appropriately gratify to a point of laughter. On the other hand, the fact that other members of the audience could not discern any intelligibility can also provoke laughter. Its primary aim of stand-up comedians is to provoke laughter in the audience (Nwankwo 2014:10). Laughter is used to ratifying and evaluating the degree of the success of a performance (Norrick 2003: 1344). The feedback or response from the audience is laughing, and other paralinguistic features, such as vocal dexterity, mimesis, zig-zag movement, subject-constrained facial and bodily gestures, audience-dependent improvisation, and interactivity (Adekunle 2017:68).

The language of comedy is always verbal and it derives a lot from the use of puns (Oyewo 2006:161). As Cinthio (1543: 124) puts it, “in comedy, the dialogue of the characters should be so like a familiar conversation that it seems exactly like the speech of friends and relatives” while Trissino (1549: 131-138) believes in the use of maxims which are sententious, moralistic, conclusive and quickly understandable. The language of a comedian must be friendly and closely related to the socio-cultural background of his/her audience. Gassner (1941: 49) affirms that the performance of a comedy is like a life that is regarded in a manner that becomes comparatively light and playful which includes smiles, if not laughter. The performance requires an audience’s observation, instead of the audience’s emotional involvement. These features of the language of comedy are also applicable to stand-up comedy in its stage performance.

The idea behind stand-up comedy goes beyond physical acting on the stage. It takes a lot of wits and creative intelligence, and this is enhanced by persuasive communication skills that compel a hilarious response from the audience (Adekunle 2014: 69). The acquired skills of the comedians prepared them enough to face the assuming terrifying faces of the audience before them. They are always emotionally eager to do something creative, and the audience laughs when they perform on stage. Therefore, stand-up comedy is meant for those people that can step back and see that what the comedians are demonstrating on stage are actual realities of their lives, and, at the same time, stand-up comedy also helps the comedians to examine lives through their performances. Based on this philosophical assumption, Oyewo (2006: 160) believes that the motivation of a comic character is derived in such a way that, although he is aware of the absurdity and stupidity of his actions, he still insists on doing them. This is the reason Oyewo says “these and absolute watchfulness for other human incongruities and contradictions are crucial to the comic spirit” (2006: 161). Comedians have a special way of creating an atmosphere of laughter and joy that eases their audience of

bottled emotions. Bergson (1900: 19) calls “AUTOMATISM-purely mechanical movement.” Automatism is a theoretical framework in which the comic character acts like a machine, that is, the attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are comic in the same proportion as the body makes us think of a simple machine.

According to Bell (1987:12), Ostendorf agrees with Bergson’s automatism by regarding comedians’ performances as a coherent play world that provides a cognitive and emotive alternative to an oppressive social system, both therapy for incipient pathology and emancipation of the senses.

On the other hand, satire is a form of literary art that practically lampoons or ridicules the social vices and follies of the society in a bid to correct and transform the society through humour that evokes laughter (Adekunle 2014: 21). According to Abrams (1967: 167), satire is a literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward its attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation. Its satirical dexterity makes use of hyperbole, burlesque, farce, irony, caricature, mimicry, grotesque, parody, sarcasm, metaphor to mock societal vices. Satire, through caustic wit, iron, and burlesque, satirizes individuals, groups, communities, and nations in order to evoke laughter from its audience. Its invective humour draws the attention of its readers or audience to what the satirists ridiculing in their works of art. Elements of satire are revealed in literary works, such as music, comedy, drama, songs, and other literary forms and performative arts. Besides, its humour is a blend of criticism that provokes laughter from the audience and, at the same time, lampoons and corrects the ills of any given society.

In the above literature review, the critics largely examined stand-up comedy from the perspective of the entertainment and theatrical shows that provoke laughter from the audience. Besides, they also investigated the paralinguistic devices employed by the stand-up comedians at the neglect of its satirical significance. Therefore, this paper investigates how the selected stand-up comedians from Nigeria, South Africa and the United States of America use their stand-up performances to lampoon the inordinate ambition of homosexuality in their various societies. This is a bid to significantly show how stand-up comedy plays other social functions of social criticism besides its entertaining and theatrical functions in the given societies.

Analysis

Satirical Display of Homosexuality in Nigerian Stand-up

Gordons’ stand-up comedy has drastically assisted to create a mor sense of values and ethical norms in his society. In the excerpt below, he aggressively decries some contemporary activities of humans, such as homosexuality: “But women make I ask you na you people you have started something that is provoking me, nowadays women are falling in love with women.” The practice of gay marriage and lesbianism is a form of anidea that goes against

the natural law of procreation. This is a device where humans try to change the natural order to suit their lustful desires against the natural law of God, the Creator. This has become an open practice in the Western world and the act has subtly crept into the African society. This anti-cultural practice is what Gordons sees as an inordinate ambition of human beings in a global society. It is an inimical way of eradicating human existence on the surface of the earth. The unwholesome act has largely caused discord, hatred and societal relegation of human status between the opposite sexes. Each sex believes that it does not need the bilateral agreement of the other sex for human growth: “when you ask girl say why you are tripping for fellow woman? Him (she) go tell them say I no need a man.” This is why Gordons emphatically satirises this inordinate practice by saying: “Shut up! You need us 24/7. God wey do am like that no be deaf and dumb.”

Gordons:

But women make I ask you na, you people you have started something that is provoking me. If God does not punish this generation, God must apologise to Sodom and Gomorrah, yes oh! God did not create Adam and Steve. He created Adam and Eve but nowadays women are fallen in love with women. They are helping us in our own ministries. Ladies and gentlemen, we no tell you na say it tire us oh! Leave our properties for us, please, please leave them for us is very important and when you ask girl say why are you tripping for fellow woman? Him go tell them say I no need a man. Shut up! You need us 24/7. God wey do am like that no be deaf and dumb (Appendix NG1).

This irritable act of same-sex marriage has reduced the human race to the level of an animal. By this, the human race is gradually erasing and losing touch with the realities of life. In the book of Genesis chapter nineteen, God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah because of sexual immorality between the same sexes. A man marrying a man or a woman marrying a woman is a great sin before God. It is also a grievous sin to God to have sexual intercourse with the same sex. This is why Gordons lamentably says: “If God does not punish this generation, God must apologise to Sodom and Gomorrah, yes oh!” It means that this generation has committed worse sins than these of Sodom and Gomorrah. God has wonderfully made it from the beginning of earth’s creation that human beings should marry the opposite sex (Genesis 3:16). Both beings are meant to complement each other.

In the Bible and Gordons’s excerpt above, God created Eve for Adam not Steve for Adam. This is the reason he says: “God did not create Adam and Steve.” “Steve” here symbolically represents another male counterpart of Adam. To convey this message properly, he metaphorically uses a comparative analysis of men’s character logical traits in women’s affairs to lampoon women below:

Gordons:

If you don't need a man, you are going to spell a woman without a man or a female without a male or spell she without he or spell a miss without a mister, madam without an Adam. You na need our ministries you can't run away from it. Every problem wey woman face man dey inside, manicure, man-mental breakdown, men-mental stress, men-menopause, men-menstrual pain, men even gynaecology men still dey inside the issues. You see am you na need us, the ministries must move together, together forever (Appendix NG1).

Gordons's performance is rational-emotive behaviour. This is a form of cognitive behaviour is based on the above assertions, God has made the sexes complement each other. One cannot do without the other. This is the main reason that Gordons metaphorically says: "If you don't need a man, you are going to spell "a woman" without "a man" or "a female" without "a male" or spell "she" without "he" or spell "a miss" without "a mister," "madam" without "an Adam." He also goes further to show that men are involved in every problem women face. For instance, Gordons says: "every problem wey woman face man dey inside, "manicure," "man-mental breakdown," "men-mental stress," "men-menopause," "men-menstrual pain," "men even gynaecology men" still dey inside the issues." The comic concept portrays godliness as a part of everyday living, an important dimension in the quality of human lives.

Gordon's performance is rational-emotive behavior. This is a form of cognitive behavioural therapy in which people are encouraged to carryout self-examination, change irrational thought patterns and beliefs to reduce dysfunctional behaviour (Encarta Dictionaries, 2009).

In the same vein, AY ridicules Western life of homosexuality, although If a (Yoruba divination poetry) talks about same-sex relationships in Yoruba culture and orature (Ajibade, 2013:965-983). In the African community, gay is an aberration. There is a severe punishment for such persons or groups of people that go into such a practice. Men and women are meant to procreate. Therefore, homosexuality is an abnormal practice that goes against the natural order of the law of creation and procreation. Many Africans are now trying to import this gay culture into African society. This imitation of gay culture by Africans is seriously condemned by AY and some African leaders. This is the reason why AY brings this obscenity of homosexuality into his stand-up comedy to publicly condemn it. It is a practice that should not be seen or heard of among humans.

AY:

And one other thing I dey note for industry now; many people done dey practice "gay." You na now dey hear for news? Them done dey go into gay. Men, full grown men, last year, you na go deceived me, dressed like woman. No be small trouble I enter. After I finish say I entertain na finish say I dress like woman. I enter club, na so one guy, fresh guy come my side (demonstrating how the guy looks at him seductively and lustfully,

before the guy talks to him). The guy says: “Can I buy you a drink? You look good” (Appendix NG2).

Audience: Hahaha ah (laughter)

AY runs into trouble after his comedy show, where he dresses like a woman to entertain his audience. AY intends to bring creativity into his performances. This is the reason he dresses like a woman to entertain his audience, but to his amazement, his mode of dressing turns out to mean a different thing to the audience. Men start seducing him at any social club he goes to, even when he does not dress like a woman. Those men sometimes dress as women to deceive him, until he discovers that they are men: “Men, full-grown men, last year, you na go deceived me, dressed like woman. No be small trouble I entered.” This act of homosexuality is purely an aberration in the African community, and, if not quickly eradicated, it can provoke the wrath of Supreme-Being on humanity through natural disasters. This is why Olanisebe (2012: 20) affirms that “homosexuality is absolutely unacceptable to the Nigerian or African mentality.

Also, AY’s professional adventures in the field of stand-up comedy have given him exposure to several societal vices. The act of immoral decadence of homosexuality is the product of the society in which he lives. For this reason, stand-up comedy does not only elicit laughter or lampoon, but it is also a social way of making value findings, or discoveries about some sensitive issues in society. Here, through stand-up comedy, the practice of homosexuality among men is made known to his audience. In this regard, stand-up comedy is a social system in which research can be carried out as shown in the excerpt above.

Same-Sex Relationship in South Africa

Trevor Noah also lampoons the act of homosexual practice among the South Africans, non-South African Black nationals, and the White South African nationals. He completely sees the act as an inordinate ambition of humans against the natural law of procreation among humans. He sees the abnormality as an aberration in African society. This is the reason he decries this obscenity by bringing it into his live performance. Furthermore, his intra-continental travelling, within African society, has given him more food for thought, to see that homosexuality is a profanity. Every society in Africa condemns it and disallows its members from engaging in such a profane act. When he made a visit to Zambia, in Southern Central Africa, he was seriously warned by the citizens, from such practice, being a Coloured person from South Africa. The Zambians see this act as unlawful and provocative. Any offenders of such act shall be heavily penalised or jailed. It is an act that should not be heard or seen among the Zambians.

Trevor Noah:

Have you gone to Zambia, a fantastic place, Zambia? I went there visiting the place having a nice time when I was there at Chapel Room, really made my trip, his name is Ali Nani, a sweet guy, and his job is to get me accustomed to the Zambian Culture and every day, he gives me pieces of information. One day, he looks at me and says: “Trevor, you know Zambia is a very, very conservative nation, eh, please, stay away from profanity...And the second Ali gave me was even stranger. We drove through the capital and Ali looks me in the car (says): “Trevor, you know here in Zambia, we are a very God-loving nation,” “Trevor Noah: “Okay, Ali, is a good thing to know”, “Ali: “Yes, so while you are here, don’t be gay. I know it can be tempting, sometimes, but don’t do it, eh, don’t be gay.” Crazy warning to get, but I found out why Ali was warning me. In Zambia, being gay is illegal. If you are found to be gay, you would be arrested and sent to prison for more than 30 years, yea, which is a beautiful way of punishment, when you think about it...if it be like you are going to jail. Don’t be gay. I wouldn’t believe this; gay is a crime in Zambia. If it comes thinking if gay is a crime that means the police have to monitor it (Appendix SA).

In the performance above, Trevor employs an interrogative gesture as a prologue to sarcastically display how offensive homosexual practice is in Zambia: “Have you gone to Zambia, a fantastic place, Zambia?” He uses this narrative technique to colourise the coded message as “suspense” and, at the same time, to prepare the audience for a “surprise.” To unfold his message, he says: “I went there visiting the place having a nice time when I was there at Chapel Room.” “Chapel Room” connotatively signifies “a place of worship.” This paradoxically shows how godly the Zambians are. Also, the use of the contextual statements “his name is Ali Nani, a sweet guy, and his job is to get me accustomed to the Zambian Culture and every day, he gives me pieces of information” critically shows cultural contradictions between Africa and the Western world. “Ali Nani, a sweet guy”, a Zambian, stands for Africa and “Trevor”, a Coloured, represents the Western culture. This pragmatically reveals the cultural intrusion of the Western world into African cultural life.

To show how grievous homosexual offence is and how conservative the Zambian nation is, Trevor, says: “Trevor, you know Zambia is a very, very conservative nation, eh, please, stay away from profanity...” The law against gay is a cultural thing in Zambia; and it must be respected. The law against homosexuality is monitored and protected by the country’s law enforcement agents, such as the police. Anyone that is caught in this illicit activity will be jailed for “thirty good years.” This is done to stop the Zambians from practising this illegal act. The Zambians see their country as a God-loving nation; therefore, they want to preserve their godly characters. They do not want anything that can contaminate their god-like characters in any respect. Any attempt to flout this established law against homosexuality shall be seriously rejected. To the Zambians, the breach of this law is a crime against God, and humanity: “We drove through the capital and Ali looks me in the car (says): “Trevor, you

know here in Zambia, we are a very God-loving nation,” “Trevor Noah: “Okay, Ali, is a good thing to know,” “Ali: “Yes, so while you are here, don’t be gay. I know it can be tempting, sometimes, but don’t do it, eh, don’t be gay.”

Also, the use of “I”, as a first-person narrative point of view, shows how Trevor Noah deeply involved in the actual scene of stand-up narratives and risking his life among people and culture different from his. This shows that narratives are actual scenes of personal experiences. The use of an interrogative question, “Have you gone to Zambia, a fantastic place, Zambia? Shows how beautiful and paradisiacal Zambia is. It is a performative technique used by Trevor Noah to draw or arrest the attention of his audience to salient narratives. Besides, the use of “sweet guy” displays how accommodating Zambians are aside from the aberrant act of homosexuality which they sarcastically frown at.

In the general sense, Trevor Noah sees the punishment meted out to the offenders as a welcome development. He sees it as a form of deterrent to others and a beautiful way of discouraging others, from engaging in such act: “If you are found to be gay, you would be arrested and sent to prison for more than 30 years, yea, which is a beautiful way of punishment, when you think about it.”

Profane Act of Homosexuality in the United of States of America

In the Richard Pryor’s Stand Live at West Hollywood [360] below, Pryor also shows how he and MBC mockingly turn down the invitation of the homosexuals for a stage show. They see the invitation as offensive and insult against their personalities: “the guy MBC got mother fucker call from the Gay Liberation, call up the feign expert, they call him and say: “why are you used to be offensive?” and MBC says: “I think that is why I am offensive. And they call me and tell me: “you can’t do that.” Gay Liberation appeals to Pryor not to turn down her invitation the way MBC does.

Pryor:

I was really comfortable white folks take everything from here, small-time they will be rejoicing... they will be telling Negro like: “you can’t do bad,” Pryor reacts: “say what a fuck you mean?”... The guy MBC got mother fucker call from the Gay Liberation, call up the feign expert, they call him and say: “why are you used to be offensive and MBC says: “I think that is why I am offensive. And they call me and tell me: “you can’t do that”. I say oh! Who is the Negro you call on, white Bowel!” They reply: “oh, we arehmmm”. I say what is the Negro’s name is up when she is round”, She is a funky boy! (They reply): “OH, WE, IT DOESN’T MATTER REALLY, WE NEVER CARE ABOUT COLOUR PEOPLE. WHY SHOULD WE TALK NOW? IS COLOURED PEOPLE GAY?” (Appendix AA).

Pryor makes a mockery of the Gay Liberation by probing further that the gays should give him the actual name of the Negro that refuses to accept their offer. He believes that Negroes can never take part in such gays' show for any reason: "I say oh! Who is the Negro you call on, white Bowel!" They reply: "oh, we arehmmm." I say what is the Negro's name is up when she is round." He reveals the actions of gay people as irrational and senseless. The gay guys are ashamed of themselves based on the question Pryor poses to them. They answer him reluctantly that "OH, WE, IT DOESN'T MATTER REALLY, WE NEVER CARE ABOUT COLOUR PEOPLE. WHY SHOULD WE TALK NOW? IS COLOURED PEOPLE GAY?" The gays' response shows that the "Coloured" or Blacks cannot be gays. Homosexuality is not a part of the culture of Black people. This is because all black people have their origins in African culture and homosexuality is not part of African culture.

Again, the use of "mother fucker," a noun phrase and "what a fuck you mean? an interrogative question by Pryor is to ridicule the obscenity of the Gay Liberation. "Mother fucker" satirically shows how unacceptable the Gay Liberation is to him, while "what a fuck you mean? Symbolically displays how aggressive he is to the request.

In conclusion, the four stand-up comedians comically narrate the personal experiences and interactions with gay people in their different societies through the use of "I," the first-personal narrative techniques. Besides, they mockingly show their personal and societal detestation toward the act of homosexuality within their societies. This shows that homosexuality is an evil practice among humans.

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Appendix

Electronic Format Sources

A. Nigerian Stand-up Comedies' Video Digital Discs (NG)

NG1. Komone, G.2009.*Gordons halleluyah volume 1*. Lagos: Obaino Music.

NG2. Makun. A. 2007. *AY live* vol. 2 [VCD]. Lagos.

B.South African Stand-up Comedies' Video Digital Discs (SA)

SA. Noah, T. 2015.*Trevor Noah African - American Full Stand up_ it's My Culture Full Show [360P]*. Retrieved November 13, 2015 from hdking.pro/video/trevor-noah-its-my-culture-full-show.

C. African American Stand-up Comedies' Video Digital Discs (AA)

AA. Pryor, R. 215. *Richard Pryor Live at West Hollywood (Standup)[360P]*. Retrieved July 18, 2015, from humormillmag.com/stand-up-spotlight-richard-pryor-live-at-west-hollyw.