

Interrogating the Theme of Social Activism in Selected Collage Works from Three Nigerian Artists

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Abstract

Collage is basically an interdisciplinary and cross-media approach in the art that entails cutting and pasting mostly soft and flat materials such as; paper, fabrics as a way to reference humanity's collective visual memory and context. Invariably, activism aims to bring substantive social, political or economic change[s] through the conscious effort of concerned individual[s]. Beyond the creative repurposing of materials and methods to create new experiences for the contemplation and understanding of our era, collage can be directed purposefully to impact positive changes in the society. This necessitates a system of visual semiotics for scholars in the cultural fields to access significant changes and milestones within the society. Consequently, the study adopts a qualitative research approach with a bias for iconographical-iconological interrogation of selected collage paintings by Chike Obeagu, Tony Nsofor and Bob Nosa Uwagboe. Its objectives among others are to show how these artists had used their collage paintings as culture-based activism to create empathy on the socio-political and cultural realities in contemporary Nigeria. It also establishes the significance of collage art as a research approach that metaphorically provides a visual handle to the understanding of our contemporary zeitgeist.

Keywords: *Activism, Collage art, Contemporary, Nigeria*

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Background to the Study

Originally, collage is a visual art term which refers to an art form that primarily entails the layering of soft and flat materials such as; papers, photographs, newspaper/magazine cut-outs, cloths/fabrics, feathers, and other materials to create two dimensional artworks. Materials for collage are obtained from a miscellany of sources as mentioned above but can be combined with traditional artist's materials. These are stuck on artistic support(s) of; paper, mat, canvas, board or any other backing. Basically, collage materials are mostly improvised alternative to applying important elements of art such as; colors, lines, texts, textures, shapes and forms in art making. The goal of activism can be achieved through the visual art when an artwork serves as a tool to raise social, political, economic consciousness about the state of affairs or environmental condition of a place or people. Through conflating the conceptual features of art with those of activism in order to effect change for the betterment of the society, the collage artist is veering into the domain of activism. The collage artist consciously uses the detritus of the society as things to think with to create empathy, memory and even influence our psychology, and thereby function as an activist in all ramification of the word. As an agency for socio-political changes, the collage artworks evoke and convey information about the artist's intentions pertaining to the issues of change from the government and even the people. They also point us to institutionalized policies, malfeasance from people in government and the desired positive changes. For this reason, the collage artist is conscious of the need of balancing acts of impactful activism with the aesthetic appeal of visual art. This makes it easier to present raw truth to the society where both the culprits and victims can appreciate and open their imagination to the possibilities of change.

In this essay, the collage expressions of Chike Obeagu, Tony Nsofor and Bob Nosa Uwagboe as culture-based activism centered on socio-political realities of the Nigerian people will be interrogated. Interrogating collage as an alternative form of activism advocates an affirmation of artistic thinking and making as cognitive processes of creating empathy and enriching the field of enquiries into the human condition. It becomes imperative to look into some of their collage works with a view to discerning how these Nigerian artists had viewed their country through the prism of; cultural, political and social aspects while combining improvised and traditional materials and methods. The consideration for selecting these artists and their works is premised importantly on the fact that irrespective of their international exposures, they are all Nigerians and mostly resident in their country of origin. Importantly also is their foray into using the collage medium as an innocuous means for social and political activism in Nigeria. Through the interrogations of these collage works, the coronary of collage as a socially contextualized medium which in the control of a socially and politically conscious artist will suffice.

Historically, one of the greatest modern artists, Robert Motherwell had noted that collage is “the twentieth century's greatest innovation”, the coinage of the word from the French verb “Coller” refer to the process of gluing or sticking things together. This art form is ascribed to Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso who emerging from their earlier analytical cubism saw the synthesis of materials and paints to be in tandem with their creative feelings of the time. They pasted colored papers, newsprint from magazines and dailies with topical texts alongside

charcoal drawings and colors on large canvases to reflect the politics of the time. According to Wallach (2012), the above feat was “considered at the time to be audacious intermingling of high and low culture. It revolutionized modern art. Notwithstanding that many Western scholars have traced the history of collage to the 20th century due to its popularization by Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso. Scholars such as (Archaya 2007; Lubin 2015), had broadened the history of collage beyond its basic understanding within the fine art of painting and outside the Eurocentric provenance. Explicating on this broadened scope and universal outlook, Archaya (2007, p. 91) had traced the technique of combining bizarre materials back to ancient times. Observing that “Hindu God Ganesh is a collage of elephant's head and human body; Sati's father, Dakshya Prajapati, is a collage of he-goat's head and human body”. Nonetheless, it is not the objective of this paper to delve into the polemics of provenance of the collage practice since this is the purview of art historians and critics. It is pertinent to note that around the 1920s, these two Modern artists had started combining, layering and juxtaposing materials with paints to make visual meaning in France. It can be adduced that they reintroduced collage to humanity as a popular way for recording time through experiential and exploratory approaches of cutting and pasting old paper stuff in their process of creating art.

The Intersection of Art and Activism

The subject of art and activism is surely critical and salient to our contemporary era; this is important considering the unifying role of art. The alignment of art with activism offers viewers the opportunity to simultaneously experience beauty, truth and possibility of connecting different interests of the society to a platform where dialogue can occur. For artists creating from the detritus of the society, especially in our contemporary time, the demands of traditional skill, imagination or talent are only the beginning requirements to creating empathy through the use of materials in their art. Such artists need to balance these attributes with awareness of the sociology of the people, time and place in order to raise relevant issues on their conditions. Thus, art has been deployed for the support of social and environmental change; telling us who we are, our relationship to others and checking tyranny in the society. This is significant to the understanding of the World's political and social systems, and a great step to making changes for the future. Art significantly becomes a tool that blurs the hard-edges in socio-political conditions so that both the politicians and other citizens accept its overt or covert contents irrespective of the direction of its arrow. At a time when more information is open to the masses through ubiquitous information media and technologies, art assumes the role of harnessing the goals of activism (politically, socially, environmentally and otherwise) with creative power of the artists and bridges the polarities that arise thereof. In the opening session of Emily Wilcox master's thesis on the subject of the Intersection between Art and Activism, she wrote that:

If there is one thing that unmistakably validates the impact of visual media and arts upon a society, it is the way in which it is handled by those who seek to gain domination. “Art...unites whereas tyranny separates. It is not surprising, therefore, that art should be the enemy marked out by every form of oppression. It is not surprising that artists and intellectuals should have been the first victims of modern tyrannies, whether of the

Right or Left. Tyrants know there is in the work of art an emancipatory force, which is mysterious only to those who do not revere it. (2009, p. 1)

Art thus serves to connect the different strata and leanings in the society and should be given critical attention. The famous quote (though ascribed to Queen Victoria of England but subject to ongoing debates for its authorship) warning the elites to, “beware of artists: they mix with all classes of Society and therefore the most dangerous” attests to this important role. The artist through the visor provided by art had been able to speak truth to the authorities as well as ridicule some antisocial attitudes of the masses. Beyond the issues of censorship, nature and the significance of art, artists through history had used art not only for art sake but as a way to raise consciousness of the people about their realities. It is through applying the collage method and materials to the theme of socio-political happenings in Nigeria, that these works have triggered this writer's interest on the key aspects of this essay. The artworks would not merit their place if not for this underlying framework of using the collage method and materials to focus on socio-political commentaries about their immediate environment.

Notwithstanding the age long debates on 'art for art sake' and 'art for other ends', art is a potent tool in the hand of the artist against tyranny from the rulers. Wilcox (2009, p.23) notes that, “the aesthetic sensibilities that are cultivated within fine art have the potential to expand their boundaries and be applied to conditions on a larger scale, as part of a holistic response”. The sub-heading on 'art and activism' demands a full essay considering its depth and scope. However, for the purpose of this study, I will focus on the way these three Nigerian artists deployed its unifying potentials to interact with elements of art and materials and created collage artworks for understanding a contemporary Nigerian society. This does not downplay the importance of the subject above but takes an aspect of it that directly impacts the subject of this essay.

The role of the artist in a typical African society benefits the public and is appropriated by same as a communal property. Chinweizu et al in Nolim (2009, 88) aver that “The artist in the traditional African milieu spoke for and to his community. His imagery, themes, symbolism, and forms were drawn from a community accessible pool. He was heard. He made sense, and again...demands that ...as a public voice, assure a responsibility to reflect public concerns...and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego.” It is in line of this responsibility to assume the conscience of its society and not to interfere with partisanship while presenting the internal dynamics of the society that the artists' voice speaks for the people. The substance of the artists agitation therefore is appropriated by the public in such a way that Achebe (1987) observed in 'Anthills of the Savanna' that “the cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the whole neighborhood”.

Metaphorizing Nigeria as a Cultural and Geographical Collage

Currently the whole world is going through a transformative process which definitely will redefine our perspectives and interpretation of things around us. From the openings of knowledge occasioned through postmodernism, to its technological twists in the contemporary era of blurred boundaries and currently, the Covid 19 global pandemic era

(with its myths and facts), the need for sensitivity to issues of governance is imperative. This is most significant now considering that culturally; Nigeria fits into what can be termed a collaged contraption of ethnicities, religious leanings, economic, demographic and other forms of cultural manifestations due to its diversities. A Worldometer statistics as at June 8, 2020 rated the Nigerian population at 205,766,196 which is equivalent to 2.64% of the total world population. This statistic placed the country on the top 7th population among countries and dependencies of the world. Within this large population and geographical expanse, there is not yet any comprehensive linguistic data on the number of languages in Nigeria. Depending on one's definition of language, Nigeria boasts of over five hundred distinct languages spread across an expanse of 923,768 square kilometer. According to Emenanjo (1990, p.vi), Nigeria "is a classical multilingual mosaic in which minority languages, which are very many in number, live cheek-by-jowl with major languages which, at a micro level, are only three in number or, at a macro level, are nine or twelve in number". The import of this demographic and geographical data of Nigeria highlights the vastness and diversity of categories within its landscape.

At the heel of its Independence in 1960 were a series of coup d'état with a long history of kleptomaniac military and political regimes. This left the country as a behemoth of infrastructural dysfunction and pervading systemic corruption. Osoba (1996), observed that mostly all the subsequent military and civilian regimes in Nigeria had been enmeshed in corruption. This according to him culminated to, "a combination of scandalous wealth among the ruling class with growing poverty, misery and degradation among the mass of Nigerians". The downward slide is more apparent currently as it is investigated and shared by the millennial generations on non- traditional media platforms. The implication is that while the evils of bad governance are shared on formal and informal journalistic media, the masses are not impervious to their influences such as; inordinate desire to flaunt wealth notwithstanding the means, and/or seeing untrammelled tyrannical elements as role models. It is these experiences that inform Chike Obeagu, Tony Nsofor and Bob-Nosa Uwagboe use of the collage approach to perform the liberating and social activism roles of art.

In Chike Obeagu's interventionist strategy with the collage medium, he addresses the complex matrix of power play that pitches the political class and others into complicit and conflictual relationships. Works such as "*Cock and Bull Story*" (fig 1), "*When Two Elephants Fight*", "*National Cake*" (fig. 2), and "*Battle Ground*" just to mention a few derive from the Nigerian political experiences. Intervening on collage aesthetics from cut-out magazines, he harnesses the elements of lines, textures, colours, forms as well as texts from the source materials as signs of visual grammar to evoke feelings and images in support of his subject. Russo-Zimet (2016 p.803) observes that, "Visual language contains signs in the form of combinations of components such as dots, lines, spots, surfaces, colors, textures and images – in other words, signs of visual grammar [3; 9]". Obeagu applies these signs of visual grammar meaningfully to affirm the socio-political condition of Nigerians. The process and outcome of organizing these elements of art from cut-out magazines provides a visual and pedagogical handle for learning about some contemporary socio- cultural praxis in Nigeria. His deft management of materials and content becomes a transformative symbol of time to present a

progressive way of thinking about the contemporary society. He dissects the fabric of the Nigerian society in very objective manners and transforms specific or place-based narratives into global relevance. Through the formal and metaphorical possibilities afforded him by his choice of materials, he captures the information and disinformation emanating from the government typified in elite impunity, imprudence and malfeasance of those at the helm of affairs.

His themes share and confront common concern about the national heritage of corruption exemplified by the profligacy of people in government and its consequent systemic decadence in Nigeria. '*Cock and Bull Story*' (fig 1) shows shape-shifting images of two central figures of humans dressed in what had become typical politician attires of traditional *Agbada* for the figure with a cock-head on the left and Western Suit for the Bull-headed figure on the right. There are also depictions of expressive faces of the masses at the background that aid the interpretation of incredulity as being germane to the theme of cock and bull story. Using the symbolism of shape-shifting images for subversion, pun, irony and humor to express critical concerns through an all- paper-cut-and-paste has become the creative forte for this consummate artist. This painting metaphorizes the senseless looting of the state treasury by politicians and administrators in the likes of; Abdulrasheed Maina, Diziani Alison-Madueke, Babachir Lawal, Yusuf Usman and a host of others which had been investigated and reported in credible local and international print media. The Nigerian public had been inundated with cock and bull stories such as, python swallowing N35 million (\$100,000) reported in BBC news of 12 February 2018; Monkeys carting away N70 Million (\$200,000) from a senator's farm house all in 2018 reported in the Punch newspapers, Daily Cable all of 21 February 2018; DailyPost of February 22. Incidence concerning the staff and management of Nigeria's Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) squandering over N6.8 billion on illegal allowances in 2017 reported in Premium Times of January 14, 2020.

Other such incredulous incidences include the recent chief of the anti-corruption agency Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) enmeshed in corruption scandals, the gutting of fire at the country's 'Treasure House', several billions of Naira spent for feeding children. All these happened at a time when citizens were advised to remain at home as a way of combating the Covid 19 pandemic. Unfortunately, these incredulously reported looting has always ended up in non-transparent investigations that eventually legitimize the looting and the culprits adorned with newpolitical appointments. These episodes had turned known felons to national heroes because they belong to the political class and especially the political party in power.



Fig. 1: Chike Obeagu. *Cock and Bull Story*, 2018, Paper Collage, 193cm x 193cm. (Photo credit: Chike Obeagu).

Notwithstanding the abundance of untapped natural and human resources, Nigeria runs a mono-product economy based entirely on oil exportation. With the discovery of oil in 1956 at Oloibiri located in present day Bayelsa State, oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the country in 1958. With its focus on oil virtually all other wealth generating sectors from agricultural products to solid minerals were overlooked and sometimes left in the management of cartels to the detriment of national development. The clandestine manner of running the government turned the country's blessing to the beginning of its woes:

For Nigeria, available daily production data shows that the nation has equally earned over \$760 billion from export and sales of crude oil. Paradoxically, this huge revenue profile has not positively impacted upon the lives and environment of majority of Nigerians as is the case in Kuwait, Libya and other, rather most of it have been siphoned into foreign account by corrupt government official. (Dode, 2012, p. 41)

Its popularity as an avenue for quick and easy cash earned the oil exploitation in Nigeria the nicknames such as 'Black Gold' or 'Liquid Gold'. For Nigerian politicians, looting from the treasure is akin to getting one's share of a national cake. It is this background that undergirds Obeagu's other collage painting with the title '*National Cake*' (Fig.2) to which Gbaden and Irokanulo (2015, p.6) notes are the "crux of the matter in Nigeria: Oil/Bad Leadership". By splicing expressive eyes, lips and tilting of heads, Obeagu was able to evoke the posture of greed and ineptitude on his subjects. The four figures are symbolic of the three major tribes and the fourth for other minority tribes with their gaze in round a bowl containing different ounces of gold bearing suggestive inscriptions. This collage piece had earlier attracted the attention of fellow artists/scholars that:

The painting is an illustration of how the country's leaders share the people's commonwealth, each with different tools of greed. The bowl filled with gold bars is a metaphor for black gold (crude oil). Written on the bars of gold are such words as only gold is divine, only gold is treasured, which points up the leaders' attitude towards other areas of revenue generation and their greed for the fast wealth which oil readily provides. Meanwhile behind them is a devastated background where the gold is harvested - a

picture of what is obtainable in the Niger Delta and the Nigerian society at large. (Gbaden & Irokanulo 2015, p.6)



Fig. 2: Chike Obeagu, *National Cake (Divide and Loot)*, Mixed Media Collage, 2009, 62 x 75cm, (Photo credit: Chike Obeagu).

In a bid to weave greater poeticality with threads of the Nigerian socio-political realities, Tony Nsofor wraps incisive and haunting truth with lyrical lines, vibrant colours, pulsating texts, and textures. These are presented simultaneously as elusive and allusive forms of dotted *aletheia* for viewers to encounter truth as ripped pages of fashion magazines accentuated with acrylic colors. I would have simply mistaken Nsofor's collage paintings with the Indian Nidhi Agarwal's painting as they share similarity in approach, form and content. I connect the styles of these two artists not only for the similarity in their forms or the shared commonality of the Global South experience but because they problematize our consumerist attitudes and paradigms of viewing our contemporary sensibility in lieu of the systems we create and are entrapped within. Though Nsofor and Agarwal are yet to meet each other, their works go beyond mere ornamentations to speak about the human conditions that do not operate at the levels of cliché. Let me now focus on three works from Tony Nsofor that is contextually located within the frame of this essay. The works are all part of his new series called “Songs of a D:bAA”.

Working in series for Nsofor has been his strategy to attempting exploring inexhaustible scopes, so that when he began to create a collection of works revolving around the theme of racial discrimination, government, gender and other autobiographical issues, it is easy to build a body of work that address the Nigerian socio-political condition. Under this series he expresses his frustration against the systems that precipitate the different nuances of existentialism as a negative national attribute and necessitates discrimination and profiling by the other. In an e-mail interview with me on his recent work as he was caught up in the United States of America with the lock- down of Covid 19 pandemic he narrates thus:

My latest series Songs of a D:bAA is a conclusion of the fate of people who are black, African, and artists- death (or a sort of annihilation and erasure from history) D:bAA is an acronym for Dead, black, African artist. It is also meant to be pronounced 'Dibia' (the Igbo medicine man,

soothsayer, griot, magician, and healer). This alludes to the power of Art which when used in discussing everyday matters has an affective, transformative power. I become that person who answers the ultimate call- a victim at the hands of a system that pervades and stifles my very existence in so many ways. So the new series is a song. I enter the place of Death where nothing stops me, when one becomes numb to any physical limitations of Time, Space. It is easier to speak from this point about existential issues of Race, Government, Sex, and to tell other autobiographical stories... This series has an ambitious reach and capacity to be inclusive and stretch as far back to the very origins of Man. I chose the acronym to further hide away from the public, to lace my voice while screaming out loud. The works in this series will be easily 'read' alongside my journey and story. That is, in the hope that someone is interested in knowing why I say these things.

The D:bAA series call our attention to topical issues of governance and its profligacy in Nigeria. This has induced complacency as the only options for the masses. Subtitles such as; “*What We Fear Makes an Enemy of the Rest of Us*”, “*The Situation Calls for Unfamiliarity*” fig. 3 and, “*Would that Eyes said it All*” are all responses to the same socio-political conditions. He observed that “the materials one uses can become a powerful guide to convey meaning” (Oluwajoba 2019). There is also symbolic use of texts such as 'Guide, Bold' (and others defaced with paint) derived from cut-out magazines and laced with thick layers of acrylic paints adding textures to the composition. Could this be the powerful guide he referred to in the above interview which “convey meaning” and also the “formal beauty” in the manner fonts is written in the magazines to contribute multiple reading of a collage piece? The crux of the matter remains that materials used by Nsofor for his collage lend significant meaning to the interpretation of the work.

His works function in the realm of visual memoir on the current Nigerian situation where amidst failed promises by politicians and deepening amnesia by the citizenry, hope is in quandary for the common man. These subtitles under the D:bAA series are referencing the same issues of concern expressed by Obeagu in Figures 1 and 2. In this shared context of flagrant abuse of trust by politicians whose modus operandi is the extirpation of civility where Obeagu explore through stylized forms, Nsofor yield his impassioned lines and colors to the abstraction of open-ended and subjective interpretations. Nsofor leaves an opening for viewers through allowing the phenomenon of form to peep through his work. On the above he explains that, “the initial brushstrokes are a guide and charge up my memory. It takes a while before I start seeing some of the forms. At other times, there is just an emotional response, of joy or rage” (Oluwajoba, 2019).



Fig. 3: Tony Nsofor. *The Situation Calls for Unfamiliarity*, 2020, Paper Collage, 63cm x 63cm. (Photo credit: Tony Nsofor).

The body of works contained within the D:bAA series meaningfully affirms the people's disillusionment and resignation. It shows litanies of absurdities emanating from the political class as the reason why the masses lament the irony of their representatives becoming their stumbling block. With systemic corruption becoming systematically the norm in a country, the victims never get used to the unfamiliarity of novel antics employed by the politicians to excuse their looting. The effect is some kind of pervasive paranoia and distrust on the people. The above is the core issues raised by Nsofor under the visor of D:bAA assuming presence; as an eye for the blind, a voice for the voiceless and an activist sounding a precognition of our possible antithetical future. The above narratives bring us to another phenomenal piece by the artist under review titled, “*The Lights in Her Eyes Died, For the Sun Seemed Distant*” (fig. 4) created in 2017.



Fig. 4: Tony Nsofor. *The Lights in Her Eyes Died, For the Sun Seemed Distant*, 2017, acrylic on canvas, 123 x 89cm. (Photo credit: Tony Nsofor).

Bob-Nosa Uwagboe's, collage paintings reify the Nigerian experience as subset of a systemic and systematic asphyxiation of Nigerians through the complicity of the Nigerian people. Considering that both the political class and the valorization of illegalities in Nigeria are all reflections of what the public accommodate shows complicity of the citizens and their rulers, he is directing his quivering creative arrow to the people for their collective fate in bad governance. So, when he uses his collage painting as a tool for 'art activism' to address societal issues, he is within this context, an artist and an activist using his medium of art as a force for social change. His conceptually simple themes are as explosive as his graphic representations are provocative to the mind. Uwagboe's collage works also support the position that the function of art is not merely for decoration but to a large extent involving socially engaging issues that catalyze changes on people by inspiring them to think and act. In *Man Drowning* (2019, fig. 5), '*Poisoned Tea*' '*Poisoned Meal*', and '*Stranded People*' (2019, fig. 6) just to mention a few, he demonstrates a holistic response of his subjects. His focus is encompassing in its apportioning of the blames of misrule to the generality of the Nigerian people.

Based on this underlying factor, the artist's works selected for this review are mostly his collage paintings focused on bad governance and complicity by the masses. *Man Drowning* (2019, fig. 5), is a painting with two figures, one lying horizontally and the other in an upside-down vertical position. From the formal arrangement of colors and forms to iconographical issues explored in the painting, the symbolism of impending self-destruction emanating from complacency or suicidal tendency of the victim is evident. A diminishing area with arid colors sits atop nuances of pale blue colors with a schematic depiction of a horizontally placed carcass of a dead human. His dark decomposed flesh reveals parts of the human skeletons of the rib cage, tibia and femur regions. Under the form is a more intense and deeper shade of blue with a figure that curiously has a third foot ornamented with computer motherboards and colorful motifs strategically connecting the three-color sections.

Symbolically, the aridity of colors depicted in the diminishing landscape refers to the current state of the nation where devastation of the environment through irresponsible exploitation of the natural resources is endangering our environment and endowment. The blue areas in the painting suggest the sea which implies the off-shore extensions of the country's natural resources. However, just as the land turns arid due to irresponsible exploitative attitudes by the people, the sea assumes intense hues and becomes a cesspool where our inactions to global standards endanger our continued existence. The intensity of color and spatial direction of the third leg ornamented with the computer motherboard implies our contemporary era and hints of hope of survival. Suffice it to say that the fabric collage is a wake-up call to all stakeholders in Nigeria on its suicidal and possible imminent defacement against its resources-turned-curse, the oil-based mono-economy.



Fig. 5: Bob-Nosa Uwagboe *Man Drowning*, 2019, Acrylic, Fabric, Spray paint on textured Canvas, 183cm by 153cm, (Photo credit: Bob-Nosa Uwagboe).

'*Stranded People*' (2019) is a large mixed-media, mixed-technique painting of acrylic, spray paint, fabric collage on 183cm x 153cm dimension. It consists of standing figures within an environment of dark frame of colors. This is accentuated with bright yellows at the top right corner and bottom base of the painting. His signature motif of an exposed male genital organ is evident on a central figure dressed in brightly spotted multicolored shirt and white long pants. This central figure unites the painting's diverse elements and attracts the viewer's gaze to the centre from where other images are engaged. The depiction of phallus in this painting is symbolically a metaphor of power and control. This is more so when we consider the gestures of this central figure and the other surrounding figures. Among the standing figures is an ominous and shadowy form that suggests a military presence due to the silhouette of a military beret. There are also threatening vertical bars created from sprayed paint evoking the image of the prison. Beside these two significant figures are other post-gendered figures appearing vague and seemingly in limbo.

His prevalent use of the phallus motif draws a corollary with the South African artist Ayanda Mabulu and his pervasive use of provocative nude depiction of public leaders of his country. Uwagboe presents another perspective of the phallus motif from Mabulu's, however, there is a significant commonality in using genitals for socio-political comments about the ills of their societies. Suffice this to say that the political class implicated on the central figure had succeeded in welding enormous power and control over the country which consequently asphyxiated the country's military to the level of complacency or complicity. The masses are left with no other option other than to accept what is left of their existential resolve to be alive notwithstanding the conditions of living.

It may sound hyperbolic to some people to refer to Nigerians as a stranded people, but considering the experiences of its citizens against unending ineptitude emanating from its leaders and untold hardship of its citizens, this statement gains literal validity. Most

unfortunately, there are the lacunae created by different levels of leadership epitomized by family, religious and political leadership. Almost all the spheres of sovereign existence appear to have failed; from the most intimate family setting to the presumed sacred domain of religion, from the formal educational sector to the informal systems of mentoring, the narratives of failure persist. The effect is a stranded people who against all odds try to eke their living from legitimate and other unethical means.



Fig. 6: Bob-Nosa Uwagboe. Stranded People, 2019 Acrylic, Spray paint, fabric collage on textured canvas. 183cm. x 153cm. (Photo credit: Bob-Nosa Uwagboe).

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that materials for collage do not only reflect their sources, they also become transformative symbols of time; through the interweaving of a considerable number of forms into meaningful pictorial content. What the artist contributes to the world by using materials from the society to reflect the society is not merely ornamental rather; it is an experiential handle through which a visual representation of our world is arrived at. The created forms from the detritus of the society become a metaphor that simplifies complexities and differences in our society. They therefore, instigate new interpretation based on connections to the artist's creativity in his/her harnessing of materials, methods and thoughts which present a progressive way of thinking about the contemporary. These works extend beyond traditional modes of artistic expressions and justify Chinweizu's assertion (mentioned earlier), to the effect that the artists through their works have spoken for the public. The diverseness of situations and experiences is transmuted as diversity of materials used by the artist to deliver his message. Against this backdrop, it becomes clearer to see the collage expressions of these Nigerian artists as signs of activism against perceived unethical living conditions in Nigeria. Thus, it becomes semiotic handles that facilitate the understanding of the contemporary Nigerian situation. The study had shown how these artists had used their collage arts as alternative tools to drive the subject of socio-political activism in a country with diverse interests such as Nigeria.

The collage paintings reviewed in this essay had shown an important aspect where the art of collage becomes a tool for social activism and raises the consciousness of the people towards national healing and awareness of their reality. Typical of the artist whose art has become community property, these artists through their works had assumed their responsibility for their community by not joining partisan politics and destroy their society through complicity with evil. Reading from Chike Obeagu's "Cock and Bull Story" (fig. 1), "National Cake" (fig. 2), to Anthony Nsofor's "The Situation Calls for Unfamiliarity" (fig. 3), "The Lights in Her Eyes Died, For the Sun Seemed Distant" (fig. 4) and to Bob-Nosa Uwagboe's Man Drowning and Stranded People, (figures 5 and 6 respectively), a reader can discern certain narratives about the contemporary Nigerian. Their voices presented through the collage materials and methods become the voice of conscience, touching the epicenter of our consciousness as a call for the reassessment of our value system.

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