

# Dramatic and Persuasive Techniques in the Dissemination of HIV&AIDS Messages in Abule Oloke Merin Radio Soap Opera of South-western Nigeria

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## Abstract

*This paper evaluates the place of the media as a veritable outlet for fighting the alarming spread of HIV&AIDS in Africa. It places premium on the strategic role of radio in penetrating rural communities in Nigeria where the bulk of the country's population dwell. In so doing, it underscores the use of entertainment-education strategy in radio drama as a potent tool for creating and raising awareness on HIV&AIDS pandemic among rural dwellers relative to the peculiar socio-cultural contingencies of the their milieu. It analyses select episodes in the indigenous-produced radio drama series, Abule Oloke Merin, exploring how the deployment of dramatic-cum-persuasive techniques in the media text underlie its communicative essence.*

*Key Words: Communication, Edutainment, HIV&AIDS, Radio Drama, Rural Communities.*

## Introduction

In the 'Preface' to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) 'HIV&AIDS Research Report and Media Guide', Gabriel Ayite Baglo, IFJ Africa Regional Director, argues that the media have a crucial role to play in the battle against HIV&AIDS in Africa, because in the United States and India, for example, television, radio and newspapers have been key sources of information about HIV&AIDS. The 'Foreword' to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV&AIDS (UNAIDS, 2005, p. 5), explains the rationale for mobilising the media in combating the scourge:

*Knowledge is power in the struggle to cope with and contain HIV. People who are well-informed about the epidemic are able to assess the threat posed by the virus and to know how best to avoid infection, or, if they are HIV-positive, how to look after themselves and their partners and families. But for individuals to be able to act effectively on what they know, they need an enlightened environment. The mass media have a huge contribution to make on both fronts.*

According to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV&AIDS report (UNAIDS, 2004), there are a number of things that the media can do to stem the tide of HIV&AIDS. They include: talking about it; creating a supportive and enabling environment; challenging stigma and discrimination; putting HIV&AIDS on the news agenda and encouraging leaders to take action; promoting HIV&AIDS services; and educating and entertaining (UNAIDS, 2004, pp. 14-24). It is noteworthy that edutainment programmes on radio and television in some African countries like Botswana and South Africa have largely served to inform people about the pandemic.

Against this backdrop, this paper focuses on the use of *Abule Oloke Merin* radio drama as a media channel for fighting the spread of HIV&AIDS in southwestern Nigeria. Adedokun *et al* (2006) assert that *Abule Oloke Merin* is one of the HIV&AIDS promotion programmes available to rural dwellers in southwestern Nigeria. Following a study they carried out in Akinyele and Saki East Local Government areas of Oyo State, Nigeria, they reported that about 91.1% of rural dwellers composed of the subjects for their study had regular access to the programme. Besides, Sofowora (2008) carried out a study on *Abule Oloke Merin* with a view to investigating the effectiveness of the community radio theatre in promoting good healthy behaviour among the rural communities in Osun State, Nigeria. Accord-

ing to the study, 89% of the subjects studied said that the radio theatre had increased their knowledge about HIV&AIDS. More importantly, the result of the survey carried out, using the questionnaire, showed that 87% of the respondents agreed to the proposition that the drama series is highly motivating, interactive and participatory.

In order to validate Sofowora's (2008) hunch which his subjects positively reacted to above about the design and effectiveness of the radio drama series, it is germane that further studies be carried out to lay bare the dominant theatrics and discursive practices in the soap opera that could engender such reactions. Thus, this study examines *Abule Oloke Merin* radio drama with a view to achieving the following objectives: (i) to attempt an interpretation of the media text by bringing to the fore the dramatic and persuasive techniques that are used to relay HIV&AIDS messages; and (ii) to appraise the significance of such dramatic and persuasive techniques to the exigencies of on-going HIV&AIDS enlightenment campaigns in Nigeria.

With the focus of the paper now defined, we will, at this point, sketch out the rest of the study. After this introduction, we provide a review of literature on the role of radio and drama in disseminating HIV&AIDS messages. The next section following this sheds light on the media text – *Abule Oloke Merin* – analysed in this study and also provides information on the methodology. Thereafter, we try to explicate the concept of 'edutainment' in tandem with Bandura's (1977) Social Learning theory that provides its theoretical underpinning. Finally, the nucleus of the work where we identify and discuss the dramatic-cum-rhetorical strategies deployed in the soap opera leads us to the last section of the article which gives the concluding remarks.

## The Place of Radio and Drama in Intensifying HIV&AIDS Campaigns

Mass media are generally well defined as those channels of communication which are capable of reaching heterogeneous audiences simultaneously with uniform messages. They include radio, television, the press and cinema. However, the radio is globally acclaimed as the voice of the grassroots. In support of this assertion, Falobi *et al* (2002) observe that the radio is the primary communication medium for reaching the largest segment of the population in Africa. They argue that the radio is a constant presence on the streets, in homes, market places and workplaces. Assessing the place of the radio as the most effective for use in developing societies for public health campaigns, Benefo (2004, p. 3) writes:

*Arguments in support of the radio point out that its use of oral communication reduces access barriers arising from illiteracy. Low production costs for radio transmission and programming and the radio receiver's affordability and portability also enhance radio media's ability to penetrate poor societies.*

This view is supported by Oyelude and Oti (2007, p. 5) that, 'Radio sets can easily be operated and carried about, in very remote villages (even those without electricity) using batteries, and the information goes far and wide'. Thus, in the 'Executive Summary' by the International Federation of Journalists, radio is adjudged as taking a frontline position in the HIV&AIDS information dissemination.

Apart from radio jingles as a tool of creating awareness, 'radio serial dramas are one of the newly emerging means of HIV&AIDS preventive education' (Cole, 2005, p. 2). Why is the choice of drama considered so potent in educating people in this regard? Saunders (1979, p. 93) has this to say on the power of drama in educating:

*Drama is an active method of learning with a high degree of participation. Whether taking part or watching, you enter into the experience of the characters and become emotionally involved with the message. Drama communicates meaning beyond that which the human intellect can grasp. It communicates through feelings and emotions to the deepest places in a person's life.*

Commenting on the notion of Theatre for Development, which is a form of theatre that combines research, entertainment and education, and its relevance to addressing social issues, Nwansa and Bergman (2003, p. 10) explain: 'Performing arts have always been used all over the world for communicating political and social messages . . . Theatre succeeds in illuminating difficult issues in fragile societies'. With regard to spreading HIV&AIDS messages, Nwansa and Bergman (2003, p. 10) explain further:

*Apart from the existence of negative social and economic structures that favours the spread HIV, all communities are influenced by beliefs, myths and taboos that could contribute to the*

*spread of HIV&AIDS. They need to be raised, brought out into the open and challenged. Even in very closed societies drama has proved to be a useful and dynamic vehicle for bringing up sensitive issues – like stigmatisation, child abuse, how the church may play the lead role in "blaming and shaming" people living with AIDS. Drama has contributed to the breaking up of the silence.*

It is on this note that we now move on to cast light on the radio drama series analysed in this study.

## Data Source and Gathering

*Abule Oloke Merin* is a drama series broadcast on government-owned radio stations in Yoruba-speaking states of southwestern Nigeria. The stations are: Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State (BCOS), Ibadan; Ekiti State Broadcasting Service (ESBS), Ado-Ekiti; Ondo State Radiovision Corporation (OSRC), Akure; Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation (OGBC), Abeokuta; Radio Lagos, Ikeja; and Osun State Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC), Osogbo. It comes on air two times a week (the second broadcast being a repeat edition) and lasts for just fifteen minutes for every episode. The writer and producer is Kola Ogunjobi with the support of Society for Family Health, Department for International Development in conjunction with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and John Hopkins University.

Arising from the recurrent nature of the soap opera, the episodes used for this study were randomly selected to reflect central issues that revolve around the nature, control and prevention of HIV&AIDS. In all, ten different episodes on varied topics were chosen for analysis. The delimitation of the data to just ten episodes is informed by the fact that they are quite representative of the general contents and forms of the discourse in that they have the trappings of the recurring subjects and techniques that have become the defining characteristics of the soap opera. Also, we chose to limit our source of data to the radio service of the Ondo State Radiovision Corporation (OSRC) in view of the fact the same episodes are aired on all other radio stations, the only difference being that they may not come on air simultaneously. This is constrained by the respective programme schedule for the stations for each week or quarter.

While the previous studies carried out on *Abule Oloke Merin* (see Adelere *et al*, 2006 and Sofowora, 2008) used survey technique by sourcing information from respondents in certain rural communities in order to examine whether or not radio theatre is an effective method of promoting healthy living, the present study departs from the sociological approach adopted in these studies by applying a discourse-oriented approach towards interpreting and evaluating the soap opera. In this regard, we adopt a descriptive-analytical approach to account for the meaning-making devices that are carefully woven into the drama piece for dramatic and rhetorical effects.

## Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives

The soap opera incorporates the principles of 'edutainment' (also educational entertainment or entertainment-education). According to Mody (2008), 'educational entertainment' dramatic serial took off from Miguel Sabido's pioneering 'social content communication methodology' that was made famous in successful family planning serial dramas in Mexico. Mody (2008, p. 5077) explains further:

*Promoted by David Poindexter of the US Methodist Church's Population Communication International, "entertainment education" serials in radio, TV, and multiple media have addressed AIDS and sexual issues in South Africa (e.g., Soul City), India (e.g., the BBC World Service Trust's collaborative production of Vijay Detective), Kenya (e.g., Heart and Soul, Come With Me), Tanzania (e.g., Let's Go with the Times) and the Philippines (e.g., Interweaving Lives).*

Therefore, the concept of edutainment is not new in a learning environment and its purpose is to make the learning process more enjoyable. It is defined as the intentional placement of educational content in entertainment messages (Cole, 2005, p. 5, quoting Singhal and Rogers, 2002). Edutainment programming is a sort of entertainment designed to educate as well as to amuse. It typically seeks to instruct or socialise its audience by embedding lessons in some familiar form of entertainment. The essence of entertainment in such a text is encapsulated by Elkamel (1996, p. 4):

*... entertainment not only mirrors social reality, but also helps shape it by depicting what constitutes popular opinion, by influencing people's perception of the roles and behaviours that are appropriate to members of a culture, and by modelling specific behaviour. The strength of this approach is that short messages, embedded within dialogue, are casually presented by characters who serve as role models within a dramatic context, thereby facilitating social learning.*

The primary theory behind edutainment is Bandura's (1977) Social Learning theory. In Social Learning theory, human behaviour is explained in terms of a three-way, dynamic, reciprocal theory in which personal factors, environmental influences and behaviour continually interact. A basic premise of the theory is that people learn not only through their own experiences, but also by observing the actions of others and the results of those actions. Bandura identified three basic models of observational learning:

1. A live model, which involves an actual individual demonstrating or acting out a behaviour.
2. A verbal instructional model, which involves descriptions and explanations of a behaviour.
3. A symbolic model, which involves real or fictional characters displaying behaviours in books, films, television programs, or online media.

The theory holds that people learn new behaviour through four stages: attention, retention, reproduction and reinforcement/motivation. In the attention stage, the audience observe the modelled behaviour from media or real life. In the retention stage, the characteristic repetitions of edutainment media aid in helping the audience commit the behaviour to memory. Thereafter, the audience can go ahead to reproduce the behaviour. Finally, the audience's adopted behaviour is reinforced by seeing the behaviour of good characters rewarded and that of bad characters punished (Hamilton-Wray, 1992, p.4).

In the next section which analyses the soap opera, *Abule Oloke Merin*, we will bring to bear how dramatic and persuasive techniques in the media text give expression to the basic tenets of the Social Learning theory.

## Discussion

In this section of the article, we have identified for discussion six major techniques deployed in *Abule Oloke Merin* soap opera to relay HIV&AIDS messages.

### Symbolic Setting

Strategically, the setting of the drama is a typical village called 'Abule Oloke Merin', hence the title of the drama series. *Abule* in the Yoruba Language simply means a rural environment. That the drama piece focuses on the transmission of HIV&AIDS messages in the village is a pointer to the fact that that area and its inhabitants have for long been excluded from this all-important health issue, hence the imperative of shifting attention to them for participation and consequent liberation. Commenting on the prevailing situation of the dissemination of HIV&AIDS in Nigerian society, Mafeni & Fajemisin (2003, p. 16) say:

*Numerous small scale activities towards increasing the knowledge of Nigerians on HIV&AIDS occur daily. Small-scale public and private initiatives continue in different parts of the country. The major challenge is the tendency for most activities to occur in the urban areas. Recent surveys show that urban dwellers are more knowledgeable on HIV issues than the rural folk.*

Therefore, *Abule Oloke Merin* community is presented to the audience as a typical rural community to which attention has been shifted relative to the dissemination of HIV&AIDS messages. To raise the awareness of rural dwellers generally, the village is further portrayed as one where the people do not take health issues, especially HIV&AIDS with levity, as there are health counsellors who spiritedly educate the people, and the people, in turn, respond accordingly. As such, the people live in perfect harmony and speak in the language everybody understands so much so that no member is excluded from the goings-on there. Symbolically, the community becomes a microcosm of the envisioned African rural communities where people would be adequately informed of HIV&AIDS related matters.

As a matter of fact, the inhabitants of the village have come up with an anthem that summarises what the community and its inhabitants symbolise to the larger society in relation to raising the awareness of rural dwellers on the scourge of HIV&AIDS. The mantra that has become the anthem of the people reflects the atmosphere of peace, tranquillity and joy that pervades the community where every precaution is taken to ensure an HIV&AIDS-free society. It is relevant that we capture the anthem here:

Ire wole, ire ayo	Fortune has come, the fortune of joy
Omode pel'alagba, e teti e gbo	The young and the old, listen attentively
O tiya ka mi a ba faaji bo	Come on, let's have fun



Labule Oloke Merin	At the four-storey hamlet
Kajo mi a gbadun titi dale	Let's have fun till dusk
Ko siro n be	There's no lie in it
Ayo, alaafia ati suuru	It's in bliss, good health and patience
Ni gbogbo wa fi n gbe	That we all live together
Ore mi dakun sora	My friend, you'd better be careful
Pele pele laye fe	Life demands caution
Ma se fikanju lo'le aye re	Don't live a hurried and reckless life
Pele pele laye fe	Life demands caution
Ile aye gbege	Life is fragile
Aye yi dun joyin lo	Life is sweeter than honey
Pele pele laye fe	Life demands caution

The song is always the prologue and epilogue, or a kind of signature tune to every episode of the drama and serves as a potent psychological strategy of inviting the audience to show solidarity and partake of the gains of living in a community where the prevention of HIV is taken with the sense of urgency and seriousness it deserves.

From the foregoing, we can establish the relevance of the Social Learning theory which holds that people learn not only through their own experiences but also through the experiences of others. The symbolic setting of Abule Oloke Merin soap opera provides the audience with a community that typifies a rural setting that they can identify with and consequently imbibe their values and social practices in relation to HIV&AIDS issues. It is a model rural community that serves to change the behaviour of the individual through environmental influence.

## Plot Development

We need to shed light on the plot development of the soap opera so that we know how the sequential organisation of the media text is designed to achieve certain dramatic effects. One striking dramatic technique is the infusion of diverse social issues into the plot of the radio theatre. The episodes of the drama series almost always begin with the characters' discussing matters that relate to the culture and tradition of the people with skirmishes of national issues. The characters could touch on issues such as marriage, burial and coronation ceremonies and the usual flamboyant attitude of the Yoruba people lavishing wealth on such occasions partly with the use of special outfit popularly called *aso ebi* for the celebrants' relatives and well-wishers. Family related issues such as rearing the girl-child, sex education for children, the problems of polygamous families with attendant acrimonious lifestyle of rival wives and promiscuity are also central topics.

There are other issues such as leadership responsibilities, grassroots development and the problem of unemployment, all of which touch on national life. These and other related subjects which would sound quite familiar to the audience provide the pivot on which the development of the plot gradually dovetails into the discussion of health related issues such as exclusive breastfeeding, infant mortality rate, drug abuse, antenatal care, malnutrition, the scourge of malaria (a killer disease in tropical Africa), modern-day family planning methods and prevention and cure of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). What is interesting is that when any of these health issues are raised as familiar topics that the audience could relate with, the discussion is ultimately tied to HIV&AIDS issues in society.

For instance, the need for pregnant women to go for prompt antenatal care is emphasised not only to ensure the health of mother and child preparatory to delivery but also to ensure that if the mother is HIV positive, certain precautions have to be taken to monitor the foetus. Besides, in a situation where mothers are encouraged to give their children exclusive breastfeeding to build the immunity of such children against some common ailments at infancy, mothers are advised in the end to go and check their HIV status because a child can contract HIV from the mother through breastfeeding. The issue of malnutrition which arises from the ignorance of rural dwellers or in some cases from the prevailing poverty in African societies is also focused. While rural dwellers are enjoined to eat balanced diet regularly for healthy living, it is equally emphasised that an HIV infected person needs to eat balanced

diet to boost their immunity. With regard to family planning and prevention of STIs, condom is presented as a multi-purpose method of preventing not only unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) but also HIV infection.

The dramatic technique of delaying the target or central topic of the discourse, that is HIV&AIDS, till a climax is reached is a deliberate design to take the audience from the familiar to the unfamiliar or from the known to the unknown. The strategy is rhetorically significant in appealing to the target audience, as it would keep HIV&AIDS issues fresh, multidimensional and alive in the psyche the audience. The method of relaying the messages from diverse perspectives and not just treating them as purely health issues is geared towards ensuring that listeners remain engaged by a topic that never appears to grow old and that can breed information fatigue if not carefully handled. This informs why the drama is packaged in such a manner that it would rouse the emotions of the audience, create suspense in them and sustain their interest.

## Use of Archetypes

Every drama piece is designed in such a way that characterisation is a major dramatic device to look out for in a bid to understand its motif. In this regard, the audience is presented with characters whose values, actions, beliefs and practices are true to life such that the audience would be able to see trap-pings of what they see around them in real life situations in such characters. This brings us to the notion of archetypes in understanding the theatrics of disseminating HIV&AIDS messages in *Abule Oloke Merin*.

In this sense, we will try to analyse the composition of the characters in the soap opera, paying attention to their statuses/roles and actions/reactions. It is intriguing that there are two major classes of characters in the drama: the enlightened (health counsellors and other surrogate characters) and the ordinary village people who are not yet aware of HIV&AIDS pandemic or who deny outright its existence. These two classes of participants engage in constant interactions with the overriding goal that the former would liberate the latter from their ignorance. Thus, the goal of the social interactions between the two classes is to create awareness about HIV&AIDS.

In order to make the awareness drive a forceful one, the drama engages a prominent physician-character, Dr Ayi. She handles the counselling sessions and in some cases other surrogate physician-characters help to transmit the message to the rural dwellers. It is instructive that the health counsellors assume the posture of friendly and trustworthy characters that can be confided in by people with health challenges. As such, the health workers show good will, offering themselves as being in the best position to offer useful and safe health tips to the rural dwellers. In addition, they display a lot of practical intelligence about how to prevent the spread of HIV. This is a rhetorical strategy referred to as *ethos* in Aristotelian conception of rhetoric. It derives from the character of the speaker. According to Rapp (2002, p. 6),

*The persuasion is accomplished by character when the speech is held in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence. If the speaker appears to be credible, the audience will form the second order judgment that propositions put forward by the credible speaker are true or acceptable. This is especially important in cases where there is no exact knowledge but room for doubt.*

Further, the health counsellors admit the people's ignorance in time past and do not seek to crucify them but harp on a change of attitude now that they have been sensitised. Due to the didactic essence of the drama, the affected characters appreciate the health counsellors and agree to part with their bad old habits and embrace a new lifestyle that ensures maximum protection from contracting or spreading HIV. With regard to the reproduction stage of Bandura's (1977) Social Learning theory, the actions of these characters relative to their old ways of life and subsequent resolve to change their attitude and behaviour serve as prescriptions that the audience should reproduce in their own behavioural patterns and attitudes towards HIV&AIDS.

## Language Style

It is necessary that we pay attention to how the characters in the radio drama handle language. It is instructive that the choice of language used to transmit HIV&AIDS messages to the people of the rural community is the indigenous language of the people (Yoruba). In view of the fact that the English Language is the language of the elite in Nigeria, to reach out to people in the rural communities, their local

languages become the effective communicative tool. Therefore, by creating HIV&AIDS awareness essentially in the people's local language, the communication practice in the radio serial drama resonates with the view of Bamgbose (2003, p. 84) that 'The test of the efficacy of the media for empowerment should be how far they can reach the widest audience possible, and obviously, this must involve an intensive use of African languages'. Oluwabamide and Jegede (2008, p. 108) corroborate Bamgbose's (2003) view thus:

*The people's acceptance of the HIV&AIDS message is dependent upon their understanding of its contents. A proper understanding of the message can therefore, be enhanced only when Nigeria's indigenous languages, which tend to give deeper meanings of issues to the people, are used.*

Osundare (1982, p. 104) sums up the whole argument, saying: '...the people's language is the shortest and clearest way to their ears and their minds'. As such, the choice of language would enhance the people's comprehension of the information being passed to them.

In relation to cases in which medical jargons are used, the physician characters try to find equivalent expressions in the language of the people and where they are not readily available, they attempt to describe the workings or the processes of the related medical equipment, device or antidote. While doing so, the rural dwellers could interject to seek further clarification on issues at stake. So, we find out that the interactions among the characters are orchestrated in such a manner that the atmosphere is made conducive to effective teaching and learning. In case there are some members of the community who have been practising the health tips that the physician characters are trying to sell to the people, they are the ones that offer personal testimonies to corroborate the counsellors' views or expert testimonies. In some instances, characters evoke anecdotes which are dramatically relayed through gossips on women's ways to the market or stream, or at men's recreational spots. Recourse to gossip as a mode of information dissemination here would amuse the audience, as it is a common social practice that they are familiar with particularly at such strategic locations mentioned here. It is noteworthy that although gossips are more often than not despised in society, the information relayed through them in the drama is yet vital.

## Appeal to Cultural Sensibilities

A major challenge in the dissemination of HIV&AIDS messages in Africa is that of tackling certain cultural beliefs among rural dwellers that could precipitate the spread of HIV. Obioha (2008, pp. 269-270) argues:

*... one of the major issues that bother us is the high rate of HIV among the various and specific culture areas, which also need some culture tailored examination. The assumption is that some aspects of culture of particular areas are more conducive for the spread of HIV/AIDS when compared to some others. The focus of the government and other non-governmental agencies should then be on how to develop a culture specific focused HIV&AIDS preventive and control programme in Nigeria.*

Obioha's view above corroborates the report of Program of African Studies (2005), and Luboobi and Mugisha's (2005) view on how to rise to the challenge of tackling specific cultural practices in a bid to control the spread of HIV. Consequently, aspects of the people's cultural practices and prejudices that bear upon how to curb the spread of the disease, and how to de-stigmatise them take the front burner in the soap opera.

Due to the fact that some rural dwellers share the primordial sentiment that HIV is a white man's disease and that the black man is supposedly immune to it, the people are sensitised that HIV is no respecter of colour, race, tribe or class. In some cases, women are often stigmatised due to the chauvinistic nature of African societies. In numerous African cultures, women are not in a position to question their husbands about extra marital affairs, to refuse sexual contact or to suggest safer sexual practices. Rural dwellers are, therefore, sensitised that it is not only women that infect men; men as well infect women.

In order to dispel the people's prejudice that HIV is contracted only through unprotected sex, the people are made to realise that apart from unprotected sex, blood transfusion and the use of objects that are not sterilised could serve as other modes of transmission. In particular, a strong note of warning is sounded on the use of blade and other sharp objects because of the symbolic environment of the rural dwellers where cultural practices such as tattooing, tribal marking and other religious rites

involving making incisions on heads and other parts of the body for supernatural protection are common.

Furthermore, it is sometimes believed by rural dwellers that an HIV&AIDS patient is supposedly suffering from the attack of diabolical forces. This is because in Yoruba ontology there is always the tendency to blame unfortunate occurrences in life on principalities and powers which are referred to as *aye* in the Yoruba Language. In most cases, the illness may be blamed on witchcraft, and help may be sought from witch doctors instead of going for HIV test. Further de-stigmatisation and demystification messages bear upon how to relate with HIV&AIDS patients. Such patients need to be loved and cared for. They are not to be ostracised or sentenced to solitary confinement, believing that they have invoked the wrath of certain gods or that they are suffering from the vicious unfolding of their own destiny referred to as *ayanma* among the Yoruba.

It is noteworthy that the evocation of these cultural issues helps to achieve a high level of lifelikeness in the drama series, as the rural dwellers are presented with issues that lie within their cultural purview. Ultimately, their knowledge would be reinforced fast enough in order to have change of attitudes and behaviour towards HIV&AIDS matters.

## Use of Humour

The overriding effect of humour in relaying the diverse messages discussed so far is noteworthy. The witticism of the gentle stroke of humour in the comedy to relay down-to-earth messages on the nature, prevention, and control of the deadly disease is compelling. Such humorous strokes are usually orchestrated through character portrayal, hilarious actions and utterances, and patterns of elocution woven around events and circumstances that are within the purview of the perception and experience of the audience. In this respect, there is the preponderance of verbal humour (arising from words) and referential humour (arising from facts and actions) in the communication event. From a rhetorical perspective, humour becomes a potent tool to rouse the emotions of the audience and to spice up the communicative event. The strategy is reflective of that deployed in advertising. Baker (2005, p.1) argues:

*Many of the most memorable campaigns around tend to be funny. Ads use this strategy to attract customers to their products. Audiences like to be entertained, but not pitched. People will pay more attention to a humorous commercial than a factual one, opening themselves up to be influenced. The key to funny advertising is assuring the humour is appropriate to both product and customer.*

It is instructive that such a heart-breaking issue as contracting HIV cannot be discussed in an atmosphere that is tense or strained. Therefore, there should be some strategy to downplay fear, which could psychologically put off the audience from getting emotionally involved in the programme. The use of humour to mellow the tone of the communication event brings to bear the relevance of the Release theory about the effect of humour on the recipient. According to the theory, humour releases tensions, psychic energy, or that humour releases one from inhibitions, conventions and laws.

Given that humour could sometimes have counterproductive results in communication events, it is handled in the media text with such dexterity that the primary communicative goal of educating the people is not lost after all. In this sense, the humorous stroke could be tied to some form of ironic sarcasm or satire. In this sense, there is a 'key shift' from humour to satirising certain characters whose foibles could precipitate the spread of HIV. For instance, the incidence of men in rural areas getting married to underage girls who are young enough to be their grandchildren, thereby exposing the teenage girls to health hazards attendant to teenage pregnancy could be a topic for discussion. While such an issue is humorously introduced, the affected characters are piqued by the attendant derisory presentation and consequently made to realise the repercussions of their reckless actions on the victims and the general well-being of the whole community. The condemnation of such actions and concomitant benefits not only for individuals but also for the whole community serves to motivate the audience to emulate good behaviour that would ensure curbing the spread of HIV.

So far, we have discussed the dramatic and rhetorical techniques deployed in *Abule Oloke Merin* soap opera to relay messages on HIV&AIDS. At this point, we will give the concluding remarks for the study.



## Conclusion

We have attempted in this paper to interpret *Abule Oloke Merin* radio drama series of southwestern Nigeria relative to the mechanics of the media text in packaging and delivering HIV&AIDS messages to rural dwellers whose symbolic environment and socio-cultural milieu demand that special attention be paid to reaching them in a captivating style. The study demonstrates that the drama takes into account considerations of audience (the most significant variable in communicative context), focusing on the contingencies of a given place and time, and the opportunities within this specific context for verbal and nonverbal signs to be effective and appropriate to that moment. The theatrics discussed in this study go a long way to justify the place of the discourse analyst in reading discourses on pressing social issues not only to aid the understanding of the audience but also to verify and complement the views of other scholars whose approaches of evaluating such discourses differ. In all, the dramatic-cum-rhetorical techniques authenticate the pedagogical implications of using radio drama to communicate HIV&AIDS messages as underscored by the Population Media Centre (2003, p. 1) that, 'People don't change behavior when they're told how to act. Rather, people are likely to listen when they are presented with accurate information that depicts a situation they can relate to and touches their heart'.

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