**Presentation Transcript**

**Title Card**
Hello, everyone. My name is Adza Tarka, and the full title of my project is *9jafuturhythmachine: soro soke*. My ongoing research is investigating interactive theatre as a tool for memorialising histories and futures of Nigerian protest and resistance.

**Introduction**
*9ja* is a slang word for Nigeria (Labaran, 2010), my home country. In his seminal work *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction* (1998), cultural theorist Kodwo Eshun defines the *futurhythmachine* through a mapping of Afro-diasporic culture that challenges the status quo. *Soro soke* is a Yoruba term which means speak up; a generational call that rose from the 2020 #EndSARS protests in Nigeria "to shatter the country's culture of silence" (Okesola and Oyebode, 2023, p. 291) in order to build "a culture of integrity and transparency" (ibid., p. 298).

Based on these ideas, the keywords for this research are: interactive theatre, memory, sound, rhythm, Afrofuturism, resistance, protest, and speculative design.

**Research Question**
My goal is to answer: how can interactive theatre be used as a tool to communicate the memory of the #EndSARS protests and explore alternative futures of protest in Nigeria?

**Table of Contents**
These are the contents of the presentation.

**Background - Slide 1 (#EndSARS Protests)**
On 20 October 2020, the Nigerian military opened fire into a crowd of peaceful protesters demonstrating at the Lekki Tollgate in Lagos, killing at least 12 people and injuring many more (Amnesty International, 2023).

This shooting was a suppression of decentralised, nationwide protests calling for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a notorious military-police unit known "to extort, rape, torture, and kill" (Amnesty International, 2021, no pagination) young Nigerians with impunity. The Nigerian government additionally suppressed knowledge of the shooting by fining news agencies for sharing footage from the tollgate (ibid.).

**Background - Slide 2 (#EndBadGovernance Protests)**
The SARS police unit was disbanded in 2020 (ibid.) and the Nigerian government was found guilty of human rights abuses as a result of the shooting in July 2024 (Busari, 2024). However, these responses do not address the systemic socio-economic problems in Nigeria that triggered the 2020 protests (Udenze, Telo and Pires, 2024), as young people once again took to the streets in August 2024 "protesting poor governance, corruption, and the increasing cost of living" (Salako, 2024, no pagination) endemic to the country.

These peaceful protests were also violently repressed by Nigerian authorities through "killings and mass arrests" (Amnesty International, 2024, no pagination). As of August 2025, no police have been persecuted (Amnesty International, 2025), while several peaceful

protesters have been convicted through “sham trials” (ibid., no pagination), highlighting the government’s continued lack of accountability to the people of Nigeria.

**Background - Slide 3 (9jafuturhythmachine: (re)sampler)**
I initially responded to the #EndSARS protests by using Kodwo Eshun’s concept of the *futurhythmachine* (1998) as a design specification for a DIY, wearable, electronic, musical instrument. This is an instrument of defiance and its functionality is characterised by the targeted features, such as body modification and dreadlocks, that the SARS officers used to profile young Nigerians as criminals (Orjinmo, 2020).

This instrument aims to highlight the protesters’ situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988) and embodied experience that the Nigerian government suppressed. Through the process of sampling and playback, it engages in ongoing intra-actions (Barad, 2003) with its surrounding environment.

I believe I was successful in creating an object that brought attention to the protests, but I missed including elements that would conceptually link this object to traditional Nigerian memory-based practices, and the wider history of protest and resistance in Nigeria.

**Background - Slide 4 (Eyo Masquerade & Adamu Orisha)**
To address these conceptual gaps, I began researching the *Eyo* Masquerade and *Adamu Orisha* festival, which is a funeral procession and set of rituals reserved for royalty and notable Lagosians (Olusola and Babatope, 2017). I’m particularly interested in this practice because it provides possibilities as a practice of resistance, as it survived colonialism and has roots in Ancient Egypt (Olumide Lucus, 1942).

This performance is entertaining, but also facilitates spiritual purification for participants (Olusola and Babatope, 2017); audience participation is key, particularly through call and response, and the performers interact with the public by blessing (or admonishing) members of the audience with their staffs (ibid.).

The practice has been long protected by initiates in a strict hierarchical order fostering hidden ritual elements (Oluwasegun and Oyenike, 2013). However, these qualities also make this practice inaccessible for adaptation to the needs of memorialising the #EndSARS protests and other contemporary protests.

This realisation led me to research interactive theatre theories, systems and practices to discover a process that would better meet these needs.

**Interactive Theatre - Slide 1 (Definition & Bertolt Brecht)**
Interactive Theatre is “a theatrical experience that gives [the audience] meaningful agency” (Moeung *et al.*, 2021, p. 197). For German theatre practitioner and playwright Bertolt Brecht, this agency is explored through “representing the political on stage” (Barnett, 2015, p. 3) as a means to give the audience “a radical insight into the way society and its citizens works with a view to changing both of them” (ibid.).

Brecht theorised the model of epic theatre, a dialectic performance practice (ibid.), described as epic because of the affective quality it has on the individual to will change in the world

(Brecht and Bentley, 1949). This will to change is achieved through a process called the *Alienation Effect* or *A- Effect* (*Verfremdugseffekt* or *V-Effekt* in German) (ibid.), which estranges “the social relationships prevailing between people of a given period” (Brecht, 2015, p. 187) making the audience “an active critic of society” (Brecht and Bentley, 1949, p. 432).

**Interactive Theatre - Slide 2 (Augusto Boal)**
Contemporary of Brecht, Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal similarly theorised theatre to promote social action through his system *Theatre of the Oppressed* (2008). However, Boal believed a dialectic performance is better achieved through intervention and enactment (2002). In his Forum Theatre technique, he asks the audience to take on the role of ‘spect-actors’ (ibid.), co-developing a “model of action for the future” (ibid., p. 270).

The goal of this transitive, pedagogical, artistic and intellectual technique is “not to win, but to learn and to train” together (ibid.). By engaging “in multiple (sometimes contradictory) forms of ideological struggle” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 209), spect-actors are pushed to “examine a reality in the process of modification” (Boal, 2008, p. 145) and identify themselves “as potential agents for [social and political] change” (Dwyer, 2004, p. 203).

**Interactive Theatre - Slide 3 (Morenean Psychodrama)**
Psychotherapist Jacob L. Moreno proposed the theory of psychodrama in 1921 (Cruz *et al.*, 2018) “to construct a therapeutic setting which uses life as a model” (Moreno, 1987, p. 3) to “explore the ‘truth’ by dramatic methods” (ibid., p.13). It focuses on enacting the complexities of individual experience at the intersection of different roles (Cruz *et al.*, 2018). The goal of the psychodrama model is not artistic expertise, but “living out a problem presently pressing, or testing oneself for the future” (Moreno, 1987, p. 14).

Inspired by Moreno’s theories, Jonathan Fox developed Playback Theatre (Salas, 2009), an improvisational theatre where “personal and individual experiences become a collective event” (Feldhendler, 2007, p. 47) through speech, music, and other dramaturgical forms. By cooperating with others to bring personal stories to life, participants engage in “a dynamic mirroring” (ibid.), leading to “processes of deepened understanding” (ibid., p. 53) of oneself and others. This mirroring enables “new, creative paths and processes [to be] called into existence” (ibid., 48).

**Interactive Theatre - Slide 4 (These principles applied in Nigerian context (Jelili Atiku))**
I will analyse the work of Nigerian performance artist Jelili Atiku to locate these theories and practices back to Nigeria. Atiku’s multimedia approach combines “Yoruba performance traditions with political activism… with the intention of provoking political change” (Oladimeji and Atiku, 2022, no pagination). He refers to his radical performance art as decolonising by spectacle (Artists on Africa, 2018), challenging the “sensibility of [his] audience” (Tewa, 2021, no pagination) as a means “to influence their consciousness” (ibid.) in a Brechtian fashion (Barnett, 2015).

**Interactive Theatre - Slide 5 (Jelili Atiku cont'd)**
Some of his works, such as *E Don Tey Wey We Dey* (Jelili Atiku, 2023), encourage audience contribution, but participation is closely under Atiku's direction, unlike the improvisational, reactionary model proposed by Boal's Forum Theatre technique (2002). However, Atiku combines his personal memory with the memory of the space the performance is held to "negotiate with the audience's memories" (Oladimeji and Atiku, 2022, no pagination), allowing them "to define their own experiences" (Tewa, 2021, no pagination) of his performance. This negotiation echoes "dynamic mirroring" (Feldhendler, 2007, p. 47) that Fox derived from Moreno's theory of Psychodrama (Moreno, 1987), and highlights the potential of interactive theatre as a vehicle for memory (Feldhendler, 2007).

**Memory studies - (Cultural and Communicative Memory)**
I decided to research the concepts of cultural and communicative memory (Assmann, J., 2008; 2013) to better understand how memory is stored in artefacts.

Cultural memory is a form of collective memory as it is shared by a number of people, and conveys to them a "cultural, identity" (Assmann, J., 2008, p. 110). This form of memory is based on fixed points in the past, or "a mythical history" (ibid., p. 117), and is "disembodied, exteriorized, objectified and embedded in cultural institutions" (Assmann, J., 2013, p. 37), such as rituals, feasts, texts and archives. This medium makes it stable and thus, "transmitt[able] from one generation to another" (ibid.). Participation in this form of memory is elitist and only shared with the public through ceremonial events (Assmann, J., 2008). Knowledge is often restricted to specialists, who "undergo long periods of initiation" (Assmann, J., 2013, p. 38).

Conversely, communicative memory "lives in everyday interaction and communication" (ibid., p. 37). It is based on the recent, autobiographical past; "memories that [individuals] share with their contemporaries" (Assmann, J., 2008, p. 112). Its media is "living, embodied memory" and "communication in vernacular language" (ibid., p. 117), such as "sounds of words or the sight of gestures" (Assmann, J., 2013, p. 37), so it is not formalised and stabilised through objects, giving it a limited time-depth "reach[ing] no farther back than eighty years" (Assmann, J., 2008, p. 111). It is non-institutional, non-specialist and "the participation of a group in communicative memory is diffuse" (Assmann, J., 2013, p. 38).

**Memory studies - (Mapping Nigerian Performance Practices)**
Mapping the long-standing traditional, hierarchical, and restricted practice of the *Eyo* Masquerade/*Adamu Orisha* festival (Olumide Lucus, 1942; Oluwasegun and Oyenike, 2013) with Jelili Atiku's public and estranging, yet specialist performance practice (Artists on Africa, 2018; Tewa, 2021; Oladimeji and Atiku, 2022; Jelili Atiku, 2023) between the poles of cultural and communicative memory presents the possibility for an interactive theatre practice to memorialise the #EndSARS protests.

Its storage prioritises embodied experience, situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988), and other modes of expression that may be excluded from the Nigerian canon (as evidenced by the government's response to the #EndSARS protests and other recent protests). This memory will be stored through accessible means of production and participation, non-specialist knowledge, and informal, everyday practices (Assmann, 2013).

**Rhythm studies - sonic fictions**
Kodwo Eshun theorizes sonic fiction (1998) as a methodology for music created by Afro-diasporic artists exploring new spaces for the imagination through the musical record; he conceptualises the *futurhythmachine*, which I previously mentioned, as being co-constructed by sonic fictions. Through his definition, he highlights the possibility to theorise social and cultural studies, separate from Eurocentric theories, “to make room for other systems to claim their space” (Vieira de Oliveira, 2016, p. 48). Design researcher Pedro J.S. Vieira de Oliveira applies Eshun’s theory as an asset for “diasporic subjects” (ibid., p. 47) to decolonise speculative and critical design, by “finding new ways of investigating sounds of a future (or futures) yet to come (ibid., p. 51).

**Rhythm studies - rhythming**
Similarly, Melissa Van Drie and Carla J. Maier define rhythming (2022) as a transdisciplinary practice that emphasises situated and embodied ways of sonic thinking that resist normative, Western knowledge making practices. Their manifesto is constructed from thinking through “audio walks, cooking sessions, art installations,[performances],[instrument-making], skateboarding, and honey collecting” (ibid., p. 3) as “a call…to engage in direct sensory experience” (ibid., p. 15) as a form of sonic knowledge production.

**Rhythm studies - protest and resistance in Nigerian music**
These methodologies provide a framework to connect my proposed interactive theatre practice to the history of protest and resistance in Nigerian music. Music has played a significant role communicating and transmitting the history of protest and resistance in Nigeria: from Afrobeat pioneer Fela Kuti’s charges against the Nigerian government in the 1970’s (Sithole, 2012) to the formation of the SoroSoke Radio station used to coordinate the #EndSARS protests in 2020 (sorosokeradio, 2024).

Through a Brechtian lens (Brecht and Bentley,1949; Barnett, 2015), I recognise these sonic fictions as calls to action, highlighting and mirroring a mutual alienation felt by those oppressed by the ruling class in Nigeria. I propose to expand this music to a larger creative practice, as a speculative design tool (Vieira de Oliveira, 2016) and through the process of rhythming (Van Drie and Maier, 2022), encourage a more embodied response to these calls to action, by giving the audience access to the production of musical knowledge.

**Conclusion - research summary slide 1**
To summarise my research, there is a need to memorialise the #EndSARS protests and other forms of protest in Nigeria to highlight the government’s continued impunity (Salako, 2024). Interactive theatre is a valuable medium for this need because of its ability to affect social and political change through estrangement (Brecht and Bentley,1949; Barnett, 2015; Brecht, 2015), enactment (Boal, 2002; 2008) and dynamic mirroring (Moreno, 1987; Feldhendler, 2007).

**Conclusion - research summary slide 2**
Additionally, there is potential for this medium to serve as a container for a participatory, non-specialist, informal, accessible form of memory (Assmann, J., 2008; 2013) in relation to other Nigerian performance rituals (Olumide Lucus, 1942; Oluwasegun and Oyenike, 2013)

and specialist art practices (Tewa, 2021; Oladimeji and Atiku, 2022; Atiku, 2024). Further, this practice will use a multimedia, multi-sensory and embodied approach, prioritising accessible means of knowledge production, to rhythm new sonic imaginations (Vieira de Oliveira, 2016; Van Drie and Maier, 2022) of resistance in Nigeria.

**My proposal**

Based on this research, the concept for this project lies in creating an adaptable interactive theatre practice, and speculative design framework, for Nigerian and diasporic audiences that blends multimedia and sensory approaches, and fosters accessible memory creation for present and future acts of resistance.

However, due to institutional limitations of the academic setting I started producing this work in, I condensed these goals for my proposed practice into an installation designed as proof of concept.

**9jafuturhythmachine: soro soke Installation**

*9jafuturhythmachine: soro soke* (Tarka, 2024b) is an interactive multimedia installation made up of a sculpture, a textbook and a performance video that invites the audience to reflect on how history is made through a process of intentional remembrance and intentional forgetting **(**Assmann, A., 2008**).**

Blending the aesthetics of the *Eyo* masquerade with repurposed materials, such as a wooden school desk, the installation is designed to evoke a dialectic response from the audience (Brecht, 2015), encouraging an embodied form of protest. By placing the audience in a classroom setting, I'm inviting them to roleplay as a student uncovering a new perspective on history by lifting up the desk.

Through this installation, I aim to present two histories of Nigeria.

**Two Histories of Nigeria - the textbook**

The first, institutional or cultural memory (Assmann, J., 2008; 2013), is represented through a self-censored textbook (Tarka, 2024b).

By incorporating redaction and blackout erasure, I encourage audiences to actively uncover narratives beyond the standardised accounts of Nigeria's history, particularly its legacy of suppressed dissent beyond the #EndSARS protests (Falola and Heaton, 2008; Amnesty International, 2024). I exclusively used content available in the public domain to underscore the challenge of accessing Nigerian history through accessible means, due to the legacy of colonialism (Igwe, 2024; Nigeria Imaginary, 2024). I chose a textbook format to emphasise the elitist and exclusionary nature of institutional knowledge (Assmann, A., 2008; Assmann, J., 2008; 2013).

**Two Histories of Nigeria - *Soro Soke* workshop demonstration**

The second history is embodied memory or communicative memory (Assmann, J., 2008; 2013) in the form of a demonstration for my proposed interactive theatre workshop, *Soro Soke* (Tarka, 2024b). Collaborating with my partner Kieran, the video depicts a narrative presented in the textbook using DIY wearable electronic musical instruments inspired by the *Eyo* masquerade and the #EndSARS protests. To maintain the participatory element of this

project, I repurposed found objects, everyday materials like duct tape, and accessible microcontroller technology to create context-dependent, culturally significant instruments. These components were intentionally left visible within the installation to signal to audiences the tools needed to reproduce these instruments.

The speculative performance in the video serves as an example of collaborative rhythming (Vieira de Oliveira, 2016; Van Drie and Maier, 2022), offering an accessible, participatory, non-specialist, and adaptable form of knowledge production.

**The living archive of *9jafuturhythmachine: soro soke***

As part of the installation's display, the audience is invited to leave a piece of graffiti, contributing to the growing and living archive of *9jafuturhythmachine: soro soke*. Presenting the work in three exhibitions in London in the past year, I have had meaningful discussions about migration, colonial violence and suppression of dissent with audience members. I have also noticed graffiti that resonates with specific themes presented in the textbook and performance video.

I believe this installation has been a successful commemorative object, which serves as an initial investigation into interactive theatre as a participatory memory making tool for the #EndSARS protests. However, as a static object, this installation limits the dynamic engagement and communicative memory creation (Assman, J., 2008; 2013) that would emerge from a performance and sound-based workshop.

From here, my goal is to develop the interactive theatre workshop I envisioned, where participants source materials, and co-develop performance tools to memorialise specific events in Nigerian history, thus transmitting future rhythms of Nigerian protest and resistance.

**Bibliography**

Here is my bibliography

**Thank you very much for listening!**

**Transcript Bibliography**


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