

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Interrogating Abdurashheed Abiodun Adeoye's 'Neo-Alienation' Directorial Style in the Productions of *The Smart Game* and *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Abstract

This paper interrogates Abdul Rasheed Abiodun Adeoye's 'neo-alienation' directorial style' as a viable directing technique on African theatre stage. The 'neo-alienation' style is an offshoot of Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre that enhances the total theatre aesthetics and encourages actors'-audience's relationship. It is a directorial style that has been tested severally on the Nigerian stage and proved worthy of exploration. Using the participant-observation and the deductive research methods, the theory shall be examined in relation to its usage in the production of Adeoye's *The Smart Game*- (A Neo- Alienation Script) and Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* as directed by Abdurashheed Abiodun Adeoye in 2002 and 2004 respectively. Thus, the study aims to archive and document the 'neo alienation' directing theory because of its immense aesthetics values to African plays and theatre directors. The study also showcases Adeoye as a conscientious theatre director, in whose works, other directors can learn from. The study concludes that the 'neo-alienation' aesthetics has been found to be a unique style full of theatrical spectacles that are capable of adding aesthetics and enhance African productions if explored. It is, therefore, recommended that Nigerian and African directors should work towards propounding at least a directorial style each which will add value to African theatre; the study also suggests that directors who have evolved their own directorial styles should endeavor to have them documented for posterity.

KEYWORDS

The Smart Game, *The Lion and the Jewel*, neo-alienation' style, African theatre.

INTRODUCTION

Professor Abdurashheed Abiodun Adeoye is the current Head of Department of The Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria; where he bagged his Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1997. He also holds two Master's Degrees from the same University; and a Ph.D. degree at the Theatre Arts Department, University of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Adeoye as a dramatist, scholar, playwright, theatre director has carved a niche for himself in the academics and theatre scholarship. His directing prowess is admirable, some of the plays which he has directed include Wole Soyinka's *Lion and the Jewel*, Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams*, Kola Ogunmola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* amongst others.

As a theatre director, one of the beliefs of Abdurashheed Adeoye is that a director should evolve a directorial style. This he makes known in an interview session with Nwadiigbo, when he suggests that a play director should evolve a directorial approach. He says "without an approach, the director is not contributing anything to knowledge" (Nwagbo, 2011). He emphasises the need for creating directorial styles by saying "the question is if you are directing, what production style are you using?(Nwagbo, 2011). Adeoye further establishes his concern about play directing, especially in Nigerian by urging directors to think of the philosophy and theory behind their directorial styles. He enlightens the general public on the art of play directing and the need for a director to adopt a style, he explains that

directing is divided into two-the theoretical and practical frameworks. A lot of people these days tend to forget the theoretical framework. If you have not succeeded in foregrounding yourself in theoretical aspect of directing your script at the level of practical realization will fail. Under theoretical framework, issues such as genre of the play-tragedy, comedy, and satire, burlesque-should be determined. Issues of language,

issues of plot structure, plot development, what type of plot? Why is it cyclical plot structure? Why is it episodic? You have to determine all these. What is your production style? Are you working towards realism? Is it symbolism? Are you going through the Brechtian style?(Nwagbo, 2011).

Hence, this paper interrogates the directorial style of AbdulRasheed Adeoye, a theatre director whose frequent directorial endeavors on the Nigerian theatre stage have brought forth a directorial style tagged 'neo-alienation aesthetics'. Adeoye's 'neo-alienation' aesthetics is a hybrid of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect and the African total theatre idiom, a style full of theatrical spectacle which is capable of enhancing African productions if explored. The directorial style is Adeoye's contribution to the improvement of play directing and the theatre at large.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Directorial style is the artistic creation of theatre directors who have been experimenting with it over and over again. It is the skills, creative ingenuity, dexterity and dexterousness exhibited by the artistic director in the process of play directing. Directorial style is also a theatre director's unique way of directing his plays. Having been tested severally on the stage, they are conferred upon directing terminologies or tagged a name that best fits its features, such as Gerzy Grotowski's poor theatre, Efua T. Sutherland's anansesem anansegoro, TundeAwosanmi's theatrical space animation, Ayo Akinwale's straight-take theory and so on. Awosanmi in Adumati (2012, p.83) opines that

the director is a load of experience from over time... he comes across a lot, a time element, a space element, he moves in time and space and that forms him, develops him and that is what he brings out when he has the opportunity to do so. The case of style... is a complex strife – so far as he is moving he is keeping up a profile. Each work he does is a landmark in his style. Style therefore, has to do with the consistency of a director's work.

Directorial style is, therefore, a key factor to successful play interpretation. Nwadiwe (2012, p. 38) posits that "the dynamic character of the theatre presupposes that its forms and approaches change with social trends and realities. By implication, theatrical conventions are not static and the flux is quite evident in the technology of production..." This is the reason why there should be different directorial styles theatre repertoire, hence, the continuous creation of directorial styles by ingenious theatre directors.

Hence, play directing scholars like Johnson (2003), Adeoye (2011), Emasealu (2010) and so on, encourage African directors to evolve their directorial styles. Johnson (2003, p107) claims that it is their responsibility to have "one whose workability has been tested with several experiments". Thus, the making of directorial style can be achieved through experimentation which is key to ingenious innovation in the art of play directing while documentation is the watchword for lasting relevance of such creative artistic invention. While discussing on the need for documentation, Johnson (2003, p. 107) avers the director has

the more demanding responsibility of having it documented for the benefit of mankind. This helps in more ways than one. It helps situate the practice within a paradigm and bestows upon it professional reckoning. It helps establish the fact that one has an independent creative acumen. It helps expose the African theatre aesthetics outside the local shores, and also provides a reference base for the study of theatre practice in Africa, both within and outside African shores.

However, for some directors in the African theatre, in spite of their hard work, the results of their creative activities cannot be traced and their efforts have been in vain due to lack of documentation. For instance, in the Nigerian theatre, Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of Nigerian theatre, Duro Ladipo, John Ekwere, Kola Ogunmola, Ade Afolayan, Moses Olaiya, Zulu Sófolá and so on, have little or nothing recorded about their directorial styles, only their performances' techniques can be found. Unfortunately, many of these theatre directors are no longer alive. These were thespians who worked enthusiastically, giving all their energy, zeal and passion to the development of African theatre practice. However, their directorial styles have long been buried with them due to lack of proper documentation, especially in the area of play directing.

Because of continuous enlightenment acquired by the African dramatists on the need to document their works in the last four decades, there has been tremendous change as regards the subject of documentation amongst African theatre directors. For instance, Ododo (2000, pp. 82-83) states that our awareness of the concept of poor theatre today is borne out of the faithful records of Jerzy Grotowski's experiment in his theatre laboratory since 1959. It is instructive to note that the theatre works of some other practitioners before him helped to shape his theatre experiments, which would not have been possible without sufficient records. Ododo's comment above reveals the importance of documentation in the theatre especially when it comes to creative inventions. Therefore, the issue of documentation cannot be jettisoned in the area of play directing and directorial styles.

Therefore, in order not to allow the creative inventions of the Nigerian theatre directors to perish, there is need for proper documentation. It is in light of the above, that it becomes essential for Adeoye's 'neo-alienation' aesthetics to be discussed in relations to its exploration in the productions of Adeoye's *The Smart Game (A Neo-Alienation Script)* and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*. This will enable us discuss how viable the directorial style is on the African play and stage.

THE INFLUENCE OF BERTOLT BRECHT'S EPIC THEATRE (ALIENATION EFFECT) ON ADEOYE'S 'NEO-ALIENATION' AESTHETICS

Bertolt Brecht's ideology, philosophy, writing and directorial style have become strong driving forces for many dramatists across the world today. His epic theatre was propounded in 1926. It has over the years been a great influence on actors, audience and most importantly, theatre directors. This is because of Brecht's creative invention of the "distancing devices" which characterises the epic theatre such as actors detaching themselves from the roles they play to some degrees while the audience is made to relax as the actions are not real but a play. Hansen (1991, p. 146) explains that

Brecht trained his actors to develop a sense of detachment from the character to some degree, the Brechtian actor stands outside the character so that everything the character does becomes hypothetical rather than inevitable; at every decision point the actor allows the audience to see that the decision made at this juncture is inevitable only because of circumstance which are clearly understood by actor and audience alike.

Brecht's alienation effect is convenient for theatre performance. It is an invention that intends to make theatre more interesting for the audience with a lot of songs which give more meanings to the storyline of the play. A narrative technique is also employed. Apart from the "distancing devices", other devices that characterised the epic theatre according to Hansen (1991, p. 146), include the following:

- i. reinterpreting classic plays in ways which would force a better understanding of the sociological forces at work.
- ii. narrators may accompany mime passages;
- iii. the use of masks and the symbolic changing of masks underscore the use of roles in everyday life;
- iv. signs and loudspeakers may comment of the action,
- v. audiences are never allowed to forget that this experience is taking place in a theatre;
- vi. lights may remain up, and
- vii. stage rigging might be openly used...The aim is to prevent the audience from becoming emotionally involved in the dramatic action.

In fact, the Epic theatre is a great contribution to the theatre and interestingly, many theatre directors today cannot but apply this unique style in their works. A lot of directors have borrowed one or two features from it to develop their own directorial styles. For example, in Nigeria, many dramatists like Femi Osofisan in *Morountodun* (1983), Ayo Akinwale in *Mountain of Wealth* and so on explore the writing style of Brecht. Biola Fasoranti in the production of Femi Osofisan's *Restless Run of Locust* on the 11th of November, 2017, *Many Colours Make the Thunder King* on the 6th of December, 2017, AbdulRasheed Adeoye in the production of Bode Sowande's *Tornadoes Full of Dreams* in 2015 and so on, have all explored the Brecht's epic theatre in their works.

While some adopt Brecht's writing or directing style, others share his philosophy and ideology. AbdulRasheed Adeoye is one of those dramatists who have been inspired by the works of Bertolt

Brecht, as an artistic director; he has continuously adopted the alienation effect of Brecht until he became inspired to propound his own theory- the ‘neo alienation’ aesthetics. Although, Ola Rotimi (1990, p.254) argues that the epic theatre is not an invention of Bertolt Brecht since most of its features have been noticed long before 1898 in the African theatre. In his words, he claims that

most of the features which define epic are not singularly of Brecht’s genius, as they are being glibly made to appear in the African World. Rather it is clear that those features had existed in our African theatre tradition, long before Brecht was born in 1898, let alone when he paired up with Erwin Piscator (in the early 1920s) to experiment with the ideas.

The African theatre has always been an embodiment of all the features of the epic theatre listed by Hansen (1991) as quoted earlier in this paper; also, in the indigenous African theatre tradition. In fact, Adeoti (2001, p. 56) submits more lucidly that “Brecht borrowed epic theatre concept from Piscator who used the term to designate plays that departs from Aristotelian theatrical principles and dramatic codes of naturalism/realism”. Whether borrowed from Piscator or not, or it has long existed in the African theatre or not, the epic theatre has been so beneficial to directors in both Western and African theatre worlds. This is why it has become so convenient for many theatre directors to borrow one or two features from it to develop their own directorial styles, hence, the ‘neo alienation aesthetics’ of AbdulRasheed Adeoye. In an interview with Nwagbo Nneyelike, a correspondent of Vanguard Nigeria on the 6th of February, 2011, Adeoyediscussed his Neo-Alienation Aesthetics thus, “I have used severally, the Brechtian style. It is the Brechtian that I have re-interpreted into the neo-alienation aesthetics”www.vanguardngr.com/2011/02/a-stage-director-must-adopt-production-style.

THE FEATURES OF ABDULRASHEED ABIODUN ADEOYE’S ‘NEO-ALIENATION’ AESTHETICS

In 2004, Adeoye propounds his directorial style which he tagged ‘neo alienation’ aesthetics. The style came to the fore from his Ph. D. practical play production, in which he directed and realized Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* as a comic play. While discussing his ‘neo-alienation’ aesthetics, Adeoye (2009,p. iv)explains that the directorial style

relies heavily on the *theatre of performance* rather than the *theatre of literature*. The Neo-Alienation’ theatre is a realistic reworking of the robust African festival theatre, which aesthetically celebrates the total theatre idiom while benefiting at the same time from the Aristotelian empathy. It is also a theatre of multiple actions...

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye’s ‘neo-alienation’ aesthetics is a style which has a blend of African flavour, Nigerian indigenous features and the total theatre aesthetics. The style is important as it focuses on sustaining the interest and attention of the audience. This approach is defined by the use of alienatory devices like episodic structuring of events, trado-modern dance aesthetics, critical recalling, curtain call aesthetics, and multiple roles playing. The following are the features of neo-alienation effect:

- a. the aesthetics of theme song of audience and players’ systematic fraternization,
- b. multiple role-playing aesthetics,
- c. the aesthetics of artistic deconstruction
- d. the aesthetics of human props
- e. the multiple narrators’ aesthetics,
- f. the aesthetics of de-technicalisation,
- g. on-the-stage make-up and costuming aesthetics,
- h. the aesthetics of complete instrumentation on stage,
- i. photoramic-caption’s aesthetics,
- j. the modern operatic aesthetics,
- k. trado-modern aesthetics
- l. and the critical recalling curtain call aesthetics.

‘Neo-Alienation’ Style in the Production of Adeoye’s *The Smart Game (A Neo-Alienation Script)*

Adeoye explored his neo-alienationa esthetics in the direction of the play, *The Smart Game* in 2002. Like the typical African theatre productions, there were blends of the total theatre idioms of

dancing, drumming, singing and so on, in the production. The beginning of Adeoye's *The Smart Game* in production was very exciting as some actors were already planted in the midst of the audience while some took their cues from different parts of the auditorium, the drummers rolled the drums and the actors came out, singing from different directions, giving the audience leaflets with the following song written on them:

Theatre is the house of truth
And what you are about to see
To see and to watch
Is nothing but the truth and the essence of our being
Bury your head in deep thought
Learn greatly still
Do not alienate yourself (2ce)
From this artistic experience

They sang and danced, all at the same time; the audiences found this very interesting and began to sing along with the actors. This scenario created an opportunity for the actors and audience to engage in a theme song which Adeoye (2009, p. vii) refers to as the "aesthetics of theme song of audience and players' systematic fraternization". At a point, the drummers mounted the stage to beat their drums for the dancers. They stayed back on stage while all actors also ascended the stage after singing the first theme song.

Some of the actors played more than five roles, this falls within the 'multiple role-playing aesthetics.' Some players acted as stage props, this is in order to 'de-technicalise' the production. The most astonishing and interesting part of the play was that actors were on stage from the beginning to the end of the play, they took their cues from the stage and returned to upstage centre to join others in either plaiting of their co-actors' hairs or helping with make-up application on actors' faces. The beauty of neo-alienation' aesthetics is that, many things can be done on the stage at the same time, while the make-up artist is busy with his/her work, the costumier is helping an actor who has just finished with a scene change his costume for the next scene. Some actors are reacting to the actions on stage, while some may be busy playing in the corner of the stage. These different actions are usually beautifully placed on stage by the director without clash.

In the production of Abdulrasheed Abiodun Adeoye's *The Smart Game*, the narration was done by three actors. While they took turn one after the other, they also at a time narrated, all at the same time. The beauty of their joint narration rented the stage and gave the performance a glamour that appealed to the ears and eyes of the audience. Costumes were worn on stage and the make-up was applied in the presence of the audience, on stage, this falls within the 'on-the-stage make-up and costuming aesthetics' of the neo alienation aesthetics. Photographic-captions' aesthetics was well harnessed as some of the lines in the play was written on cardboard for the audience to see. This was an attempt to emphasise the important message(s) of the play and for the audience to remember it/them for so long. Another interesting part of the play was the scene where lines were sang as if the play was a musical theatre production; the audience enjoyed this scene as they sang along with the actors.

The reactions and comments from most of the audience at the end of the production testified to the fact that Abdulrasheed Abiodun Adeoye's 'neo alienation' directorial style enhances an African theatre production and makes a play to be enjoyable. Many of the actors wanted the play to be repeated so they can bring their family and friends to see it next time.

'NEO-ALIENATION' DIRECTORIAL STYLE IN THE PRODUCTION OF WOLE SOYINKA'S *THE LION AND THE JEWEL*

In Adeoye's Ph.D. practical production, Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, which was staged on the 10th and 11th of March, 2004 at the Africa Hall of University of Ilorin, Mini Campus, Ilorin, this researcher happened to be one of the actors in the performance. The play was reproduced at the French Cultural Centre, Alliance Francaise, Ilorin on the 31st of July, 2004 to mark Wole Soyinka's seventieth birthday.

While directing the play, Adeoye explored the neo-alienation aesthetics. Like the production of *The Smart Game*, some of the actors played more than five roles, some players acted as animals while some acted as props. In the scene of the sexual intercourse between The King and Sidi, the director

created a human bed of about six actors, while some of them covered the scene from the audience with their bodies. The director also explored the aesthetics of theme song of audience and actors' systematic fraternization because most of the songs were popular traditional songs that the audience was familiar with and they sang along with actors. One of the unique features of neo-alienation aesthetics is that costumes and make-up are worn on stage before the audience. The costumiers and make-up artists brought their kits on stage with a mirror which was placed at the up-stage-left. The idea of making up and costuming on stage helped both the actors and the audience to detach them from the performance. The director made some of the storylines narrated by more than four players (the multiple narrators' aesthetics) while some were in operatic forms- this falls within the modern operatic aesthetics. In fact, there were many plays-within-play in *The Lion and The Jewel*, Sidi (The Jewel, Lakunle (the Village Teacher) and Sidi's friends acted the role perfectly.

In the scene where the school pupils force Lakunle to play game with them, they chant the following lines:

You are dressed like him
 You look like him
 You speak his tongue
 You think like him
 You are just as clumsy
 In your Lagos ways-
 You'll do for him (p.12)

The director had written each line of the chants on a cardboard, some actors raised the cardboards up for the audience to see while others were busy chanting and singing the lines, this is what the director called the 'photoramic-caption's aesthetics' The actors and some audience chorused Lakunle's big grammars when he is reacting to the idea of bride price raised by Sidi:

A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated,
 Rejected, denounced, accursed.
 Excommunicated, archaic, degrading
 Humiliating. Unspeakable, redundant
 Retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable (p.7)

This added beauty and colour to the scene as everyone, including the audience felt like an actor. This is why Adeoye (Nwagbo, 2011), in the Vanguard interview with Nwagbo Nneyelike describes his neo alienation aesthetics as a directorial style that gives everyone in the theatre a sense of belonging, he avers that

it is a theatre where there is no place to hide. It is an exposition of Brechtian style, the Brechtian alienation effect. You do not distance yourself. If you change your costume you do so in the glaring view of the audience. If you make-up it is in the presence of the audience. It is a theatre where anybody can play any role. One person can play up to six roles.

Findings and Recommendations

Having observed in the course of this research that the 'neo-alienation' aesthetics of AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye is a directorial style that is of immense benefit to African theatre directors, this researcher recommends that

- i. Nigerian directors should not relent in raising the art of play directing to the peak by continually carrying out experiments on the Nigerian stage in order to evolve innovative, productive and enviable directorial styles.
- ii. proper documentation of the new directorial styles must be done for posterity.
- iii. AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's 'neo-alienation' aesthetics as a directorial style that should be adopted on the Nigerian Stage, explored and taught to the upcoming directors for further experimentation.
- iv. Nigerians' play directors should adopt at least a directorial style which will stand as their identities;
- v. that proper documentation of the various unknown but ingenious directorial styles must not be taken with levity so as to leave them behind as legacy for upcoming theatre directors; and to make them known and embraced by dramatists all over the world.

CONCLUSION

This study has been able to study and interrogate Abdulrasheed Abiodun Adeoye's 'neo-alienation' aesthetics. The study identifies and examines the elements of 'neo-alienation aesthetics' which are listed as the aesthetics of theme song, aesthetics of multiple role-playing, human props' aesthetics, aesthetics of on-the-stage make-up and costuming, aesthetics of the modern operatic and so on. The paper concluded that AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye is a seasoned, vibrant and well-grounded theatre director and artistic scholar which prospective directors can learn from. His neo-alienation aesthetics, a hybrid of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect and the African total theatre idiom has been found to be a unique style full of theatrical spectacle that is capable of adding aesthetics to; and enhances African productions if explored. The directorial style is a unique and functional theory for the African theatre stage; hence, this paper has been able to document it. I therefore, conclude, in this research work that experimentation is the key to ingenious innovation in the art of play directing while documentation is the watchword for lasting relevance of one's creative artistic invention.

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