

THE DRAMATURGY OF A THEATRE SOCIOLOGIST:

**FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF
AYÒ AKÍNWÁLÉ**

**EDITED BY
ABDULRASHEED ABIÓDÚN ADÉOYÈ**

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Festschrift in Honour of Ayò Akínwálé**

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CHAPTER THREE

Aesthetics, Dramaturgy and Directorial Poetics of Ayò Akínwálé's Theatre

AbdulRasheed Abíódún Adéoyè

On Aesthetics, Dramaturgy and Directorial Poetics

Aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics have many seas of faces in literary discourse which are dialectically related. Because of their relationship in the making of the theatre, therefore, a preliminary note on aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics is considered necessary so that the subject of discourse in this chapter can be foregrounded.

Contextually, aesthetics gives room for the dual interpretation of life. This is extended to mean man's fruitful search to understand the reality, fallacy, illusion and the borderline between the good and the bad, the ugly and the beautiful in his culture, and in the cultures of other people that he has to interact with. Linked to aesthetics is dramaturgy which ties the knot within the material and immaterial cultures for the physical interpretation of life. In the African theatre, aesthetics has been confirmed "as a product of performance" (Kofoworola, 2004, p. 1). However, the process of realising the product of all forms of performances can be located in dramaturgy; the dexterity, skill and technique used in theatricality.

Though, a borrowed word from Greek's *dramatourgia*, dramaturgy "is the art of dramatic composition and the representation of the main elements of drama on the stage" (Cardullo, 2005, p. 4). It has also been confirmed that the term dramaturgy "was created by the German dramatist, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing". On the other hand, the aesthete is "someone who loves and understands beauty, art, music e.t.c" (Shovel, 2007, p. 25). Also, the dramaturge "specialises in play analysis and theatre history" (Huberman, Pope and Ludwig, 1993, p. 495).

Between aesthetics and dramaturgy lies directorial poetics which encapsulates the director's style, method, approach and concept for the interpretation of his play, and in his theatre generally. The endless nature of creative or artistic imagination thus makes one theatre director to be radically different from the other. Even if two theatre directors are given the same play to direct, and through the same convention, the result; through the outcome of the two performances can never be the same. Hence, aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics are ingeniously tied to the particular artist, and or, the particular director involved. This radical difference should be noted because contemporary director "are expected to be able to see the world in pictures and so create images and stage dynamic pictures that provide lasting impact"

(Reilly and Phillips, 1998, p. 117). The artistic responsibilities of the director are thus numerous especially in a world of globalised multi-media aesthetics such as the one we are now.

This chapter, through the participant-observation method and the functionalist approach, which Anderson (1979, pp. 26-51) says “supports the multifunctionality of aesthetics within the psychological, social or cultural need of the society, group or individual” is, therefore, the examination of aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics in the theatre of Ayò Akínwálé.

Experimental Theatre in Nigeria

Experimental theatre in Nigeria can be strategically located in the four dominant theatre traditions in Nigeria. These four theatre traditions, although not adequate enough to capture the total essence of the Nigerian theatre are the indigenous/traditional theatre, the popular theatre, the literary theatre and the postmodern theatre. The continuous social interaction of the theatre and its functionality in Africa, nay, Nigeria has made it incumbent for any researcher in aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics to consider the contextual, as well as the thematic preoccupation of the works of dramatists as central to the proper evaluation of the Nigerian experimental theatre.

Finding meaning into the contextual and thematic nomenclatures will, however, lead us to a simple linear historical progression in the annals of our theatre history. This is because the anti-African contextual instruments of retrogression designed by the Western power are constantly changing but within a single motif. These well-designed instruments of retrogression are slavery, colonialism, imperialism, neo-colonialism and globalisation. The progression and checks on these instruments of retrogression can be located within the aesthetics of black art and theatre in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods in which the rebirth of African nationalism, cultural emancipation and promotion and other important revivalist's instruments have been creatively deplored or reactivated to fight the burden of the Blackman. This burden is caused by the Whiteman, and partly caused by the Blackman himself through error of judgment.

As a continent of numerous customs, traditions and festivals, the African theatre has had its fair share in the promotion of Western culture due to accident of history. Interestingly, the continent's dominant cultures are now dwarfing local cultures (a pastiche for low culture) within the space of *glocalisation* which should be seen as a binary opposition to Western hegemony and a search for the aesthetics of re-living through African major cultures. In the Nigerian theatrical landscape, for example, Asian, European and American cultures have locked horns with the socio-cultural engagements of Hausa, Igbo and Yorùbá within the perspectives of re(writing), re(performing) and re(branding). It is important, therefore, to note that the

Nigerian theatre has been consumed within the divides of multicultural and ethnic identities.

We can then proceed to ask some pertinent questions: What has the Nigerian theatre done in the propagation of the philosophy of globalisation and the mantra of *glocalisation*? How has the Nigerian theatre fared in the face of the challenges of leadership in Africa? What is the role of the Nigerian theatre in the management of change? The questions above, we are certain, have been partly answered through *conventional* and *experimental* performances. This can be extended to mean the contention between ‘the theatre of literature’ and ‘the theatre of performance’ critically housed by the changing pattern in the interpretation and re-interpretation of African theatre.

Experimental theatre should thus be seen as a platform for theatrical invention. It is the ability of the creative dramatist (the author of stage action) to do it differently by departing from the norm, and by radically changing the existing convention. The imposition of a new aesthetic or a special style which is unique in content and context, and inherently saturated with new stage icons and codes, also housed experimental theatre. To this end, it has been reflected several times, in the Nigerian theatre scholarship that the Nigerian theatre is a conglomeration of many experimental theatres. Most of these experimental theatres also celebrate the richness of the Nigerian multicultural aesthetics. Notable Nigerian dramatists have also played significant roles in the Nigerian experimental terrain. Chief among them, in the last fifty years, are the Hubert Ôgúndé’s operatic theatre experiment, Wolé Soyínká’s supposed ritual aesthetics, J.P. Clark’s neo-classical theatre and ritual aesthetics, Olá Rótímí’s festival theatre (a module for theatre – in – the – round) and Dàpò Adélùgbà’s *Daoduism* – a password for excellence in theatre directing. Others are; Fémi Ôsófisan’s “fabulous”, “malleable” and “theatre of poverty” in the Grotowskian mode, Sam Ukala’s successful poetics of folkism, Olú Obáfémi’s socialist’s reformation’s contextual aesthetics, E.O. Kòfowórolá’s unity integrative model, Steve Abbah’s popular theatre style, Àkànjí Nasiru’s Marxist symphony with total theatre idiom, Ségún Oyèkúnlé and Túndé Fátúndé’s theatre on the wheel of pidgin – a motif for the aesthetics of mass appeal, Ahmed Yerima’s demythologisation, factionalisation and multicultural theatre, Irene Salami-Agúnlòyè’s shade tree dramaturgy, S.E. Ododo’s *facekuerade* theatre – a new experimental theatre that expands and celebrates the masklessness of the masquerade theatre, Inih Ebong’s cosmo-human theatre, Effiong Johnson’s theatre of poverty, Chuks Okoye and Rasaki Òjó Bakare’s total theatre performativity, A. A. Adéoyè’s neo-alienation style and recently too, Felix Emoruwa’s *choreoclecy* are particularly worthy of mention.

Certainly, the primary face value of documentation is preservation. The historification of the Nigerian experimental theatre can also be seen as our continuous search for the promotion and development of the theatre industry. This will also prevent our experiments on the living stage from going into extinction. Since “experiment has implied something very different” (Roose-Evans, 1989, p. 1), and in the submission of Constantin Stanislavsky, “the experimentalists are revolutionaries”, and while making reference to himself and his contemporaries, Stanislavsky also concludes that “we broke the old and exaggerated the new” (8). The artistic skill and gift to wanting to do it radically, uniquely, differently and specially lie the essence of experimental theatre even though the artistic interconnection of one experimental theatre to another cannot be over-emphasised.

The fact remains that much attention has been devoted to dramatic theory and criticism in the Nigerian theatre, while little attention is paid to the documentation of the works of the directors. This is what Effiong Johnson calls the directorial challenge to the African directors. He demands, very passionately too, that we must create a style and document such for posterity:

Are you an African director? This concerns you. You have a responsibility, both professional and cultural to evolve an approach which guards the aesthetics of your practice. Having had one whose workability, has been rested with several experiments, you have the more demanding responsibility of having it documented for the benefit of mankind (Johnson, 2003, p. 107).

Even though theatre directors in the Nigerian theatre are now fighting hard to document what they considered experimental in their various theatres for posterity, more still need to be done. However, we must give credit to scholars such as Oga (1998, 1999, 2000 and 2010), Uka (2000), Ukala (1996 and 2007), Arinde (2005), Adeoti (2007 and 2010), Oyewo (2007) and Akinwale (2010) among others, who have documented their theatrical experiments, and the ingenious theatrical experiments of others in the aesthetically saturated Nigerian theatre.

Ayò Akínwálé and the Nigerian Theatre

Born on the 30th April, 1951 to the Máto’s family of Òrànyàn, in the ancient city of the gallant and consistently dependable warriors, Ìbàdàn, Òyó State, Nigeria, Ayò Akínwálé’s humble example in the Nigerian theatre practice has helped us to separate the grinder from the incisor. He has directed numerous plays on the Nigerian stage such as Zulu Sófolá’s *Song of a Maiden*, Wálé Ògúnymí’s *Langbodo*, J. P. Clark’s *Ozidi*, Wolé Sóyínká’s *The Trials of Brother Jero* and others within the aesthetics of total theatre. His romance with theatre sociology is a critical and rewarding investment in theoretical exploration. Akínwálé, a dependable and professional actor started the art of acting in 1965. He took his acting skills and techniques on the

living stage to New York, Philadelphia, Amsterdam, Germany, Los Angeles, San Francisco and so on, while his baritone voice, laced with admirable rhythm and impeccable delivery necessarily echo on the Nigerian Nollywood industry. This rounded artist is also a playwright and a man of the media.

The contribution of Ayò Akínwálé to the development of the Nigerian theatre can be located in the theory and practice of the theatre. As a famous face on the Arts Theatre at the University of Ìbàdàn, Ayò Akínwálé obtained three important degrees from the University of Ìbàdàn between 1976 and 1998. He obtained the Diploma in Theatre Arts in 1978, B.A. Theatre Arts (Second Class Upper) in 1981, M.A. Theatre Arts in 1983 and his Ph.D in Theatre Arts in 1998. Certainly, these certificates and degrees made him a pure UI bred.

On the theoretical plane, Akínwálé has contributed significantly in the areas of Theatre Sociology as a Theatre Sociologist. In his own words, he recalls that:

Theatre Sociology became an acceptable area of the discipline in 1986 at the Annual Conference of Pure Sociologists who have taken interest in Theatre Sociology. The conference which took place at the University of Rome led to the emergence of Committee B37, a Committee that is dedicated to Research in Theatre Sociology worldwide (Akínwálé, 2010, p. 11).

Little wonder then, that Ayò Akínwálé's Ph.D. thesis is on Theatre Sociology with the title, "The Impact of the Theatre on Contemporary Nigerian Society: A Study in Theatre Sociology". This Thesis has brought to the fore; the cultural, social, political, religious and economic impacts of the theatre on the contemporary Nigerian society. Audience choice of genre, regional acceptance of the theatre, or otherwise, also form part of the sub-themes of this important thesis.

The controversy surrounding the classification of the Nigerian theatre also drew the attention of Ayò Akínwálé in 1993 through an article entitled, "Theatrical Traditions and Political Culture in Post-Independence Nigeria". Though, Obáfémi (1988, p. 54) has argued that, "attempts to classify drama in Nigeria along developmental stages have yielded an avalanche of contradictory and inconclusive details", Akínwálé classifies the Nigerian "Theatrical Traditions" into three. They are:

1. The Indigenous Theatre Types. He further divides this into; (a) Festival and ritual theatre, (b) The masque dramaturgy drama", (c) Story telling theatre in which he has also written another article that predates the one under discourse, "From Compound Space to the Living Stage" to critically elucidates on this classification.
2. The Popular Theatre Tradition. Here, Akínwálé concedes to Olú Obáfémi's initial classification done in 1981 through Obáfémi's Ph.D.

Thesis titled, “Cultural Heritage and Social Vision in Contemporary Nigerian Theatre” from School of English, University of Leeds in which three basic categories of artists have also emerged. These are; (a) the works of the artists whose plays reveal the society as a world in search of harmony and social order; (b) those whose plays content reveals the playwright as “The Watchman for the Watchword” and; (c) the comedians who can be classified under the theatre of farce (Akínwálé, 1993, pp. 14-16).

3. The Literary Tradition or Theatre of English Expression. This, Akínwálé also divides into four categories. These are; (a) the classical category/pioneers, (b) those whose plays aim at a recreation of history, (c) the protest phase/group and, (d) the innovative group of community theatre category (17).

In year 2000, Kalu Uka classifies the Nigerian theatre and drama into five schools by adding two other schools to the well-known three schools. Ukala (2000, pp. 16-72) sees these schools as Evolutionists, Referentialists, Evolutionists, Alienistics and the Diasporans. Musa (2003, p. 39) in the *Legon Journal of Humanities*, and in continuation of the classification, identifies another five traditions in the Nigerian theatre. These are the Pre-colonial, Colonial, Post-colonial, Neo-colonial and Postmodern Theatre Traditions.

Away from the above, is Ayò Akínwálé’s “Production Styles on the Nigerian Stage: A Historical Review” in which the Nigerian theatre of “The Pre-Independence Era”, especially the Alárinjò Travelling Theatre’s Ésa Ògbín, is seen as “one of the earliest theatre directors” (Akínwálé, 2002, p. 118). Wolé Sóyínká, Olá Rótímí, Wálé Ògúnymí, Báyo Odúnéye, Dàpò Adélùgbà, Zulu Sófolá and Fémí Òsófisan’s directorial exploits are also explored in the article with a conclusion that “the style of producing Nigerian plays will become quite clear if theatre scholars begin to engage in a dual method of creation and analysis of their plays” (137).

Ayò Akínwálé’s Inaugural Lecture delivered on 29th April, 2010 at the University of Ilorin with the title, *And the Journey Begins... The Travails of a Theatre Sociologist* in fact, captures his achievement and contribution to the Nigerian theatre practice and scholarship. Here, his theatrical interventions in media arts, playwriting, acting and play directing are clearly articulated. On play directing, for example, Akínwálé’s (2010, pp. 35-6) three theories on the method of blocking a play for the stage; “The School of Outer Technique”, “The School of Inner Resources”, and the third which he says is a combination of the two schools are articulated. His major style is the “Straight-Take Theory” which is used to check the audience’s unruly behaviour and radicalism in the theatre. This theory implies that when the play opens, there is no blackout from the beginning to the end of the

performance and this is better achieved through the smart and artistic use of the overlapping dramatic technique.

Perspectives on Ayò Akínwálé's Thematic Concern

A critical examination of three major plays of Ayò Akínwálé and their subsequent performances will show that politics, and the vicissitudes of life define his theatre. These three plays, *This King Must Die* (1998) though crafted in 1986, "Hello Prisoners" (1988) and "Mountains of Wealth (2001) are written to showcase the sociological problems inherent in Nigeria through man's inhumanity to man, bad leadership, bad follower-ship and the promotion of individualism in a place where collective struggle is needed. Like most African playwrights, dramatising politics is an obsession with the obvious in which colour, culture, literatures are intertwined (Ojo-Ade, 1989, p. 1). This is the often repeated Ngugian political slogan that, "every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?" (wa Thiong'o, 1981:NP). We should not forget that the genesis of politics of literature and the theatre, and the literature and theatre of politics has also been discussed two years earlier before Ngugi wa Thiong'o in 1979 by Augusto Boal, who contends that "all theatre is necessarily political because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them. Those who try to separate theatre from politics try to lead us into error and this is a political attitude (Boal, 1979, p. xiii). From the four great Greek Dramatists: Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides and Aristophanes (even when they used myths and transformed them into functional aesthetics), politics and social issues in the State of Athens, and the place of the individual heroes, heroines and gods are never relegated. The same scenario of politics and the theatre is re-lived throughout most of the important periods in the annals of theatre history. Theatre and politics have also enjoyed wider intellectual debates on the Nigerian theatre through the works of Sóyínká (1976, 1981 and 1991) and Òsófisan (1981 and 2001), Obáfémi (1981 and 2009), Nasiru (1978 and 1987) and Gbilekaa (1993, 1997, 2002 and 2010) among others.

Ayò Akínwálé's three plays mentioned above have been performed several times and they are essentially rooted in political theatre. Their sub-themes extend to include man's innate romance with love, conflict, crisis, corruption, greed, selfishness and other vices engineered within man's social process.

Before we dwell on the aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics of Ayò Akínwálé's theatre, it is important for us to also profile the three plays within their contextual motifs. First is *This King Must Die* (1998). Structurally, this episodic play is divided into five cyclical parts consisting of the Prologue, Movement One, Movement Two, Movement Three and Movement Four. The play is about the revenge, betrayal, dictatorship and

obstinacy of the past in Oyo Empire during the reign of Aláàfin Aólè which are still being re-lived in the contemporary Nigerian politics, representing what the playwright called “The Immediate Past” of the Second Republic of Nigeria, where elections are rigged with impunity leading to selections and, consequently, maladministration. The future projection of the play is anchored on the deconstruction and the refusal of Òrúnmìlà and the Odus not to honour Fádélé’s request for solution to the man-made problems afflicting the land. This is the playwright subtle demystification of the gods, a grand rejection of “animist metaphysics” and of course, a clear radical revolutionary poetics meant to tell man that he is the architect of his fortunes and misfortunes, and he stands tall to make or mar himself.

Through allegorical characters such as Unemployment, Corruption and Bribery, the playwright sets the stage for a resolution of a play laced with the best of Yorùbá traditional idioms and aesthetics in which Comrade Newbreed and Major Mohammed are united to rebuild the nation. The temporary unity between Comrade Newbreed and Mohammed may be interpreted as diarchy, a political marriage of inconvenience between the military and the civil class as once propagated by Late Nnamdi Azikiwe, when it dawned on him that men of the Nigerian Army are not ready to quit the political environment. The last words of Comrade Newbreed may still agitate the minds of those who want a truly prosperous Nigerian nation:

COMRADE NEWBREED:

You see now Major. We are a family once we agree to be a nation. Come, join us. Join us in our bid and efforts to move this society forward. To find a new set of leaders totally different from what we have experienced so far, join us in our bid to force the hands of history not to repeat its sordid aspects any longer, but to allow us a step forward. Those bad behaviour that, have entrenched themselves as kings in our society must die. Come, come, come (Akínwálé, 1998, p. 77).

The death of Alápòmù because of Aólè’s revenge and dictatorship marks the first physical death in the play. Aláàfin Aólè’s death through the intrigues between him and Àfònjá marks the second physical death in which Aólè, through self-inflicted injury plots his own downfall in the play. He curses the Yorùbá nation that:

AOLE: My curse be upon you.
 For your disobedience and disloyalty.
 When you send your children on errand
 may they not return to you...
 To the four points where I have
 shot my arrows,
 You shall be carried slaves
 slaves shall rule over your slaves,
 And you their masters shall become
 slaves (47).

If Aólè's death marks the second death in the play, the third allegorical death in the play is democracy through the altercations between People's Party, Naira Party and Bridal Party. These political parties are the then Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and Nigerian People's Party (NPP) of the Second Republic in Nigeria. The fourth death in the play is the death of the gods. Here the playwright prevents Òrúnmìlà and the Odus from rescuing human beings. Instead, he wants men to take charge of their destiny. The envisaged fifth death is the "bad behaviours that, have entrenched themselves as kings in our society". These bad behaviours are corruption, bad leadership, dictatorship, greed, revenge, betrayal, political thuggery, rigging and others. But, when are we going to witness the death of the envisaged fifth death in the Nigerian nation? We can only witness this if we play our democracy by the rules.

Another important play from Ayò Akinwálé's repertory is "Hello Prisoners" (1988). Thematically, this play revives the theatre of political subversion. It is a jibe and a dramatic metaphor of revolution of thinking. Consequently, "Hello Prisoners" (1988) is a search for a corrupt-free society where equity, social justice, sustainable development and peace are abundantly celebrated. The play becomes comfortably dialectical for the message of revolution creatively engraved in it such as "breaking down the prison walls", "Hello Prisoners", "We are all prisoners" and others which are deconstructed within the epithet of change, decency and moderation. Since some of our unbecoming habits (killing, embezzlement, robbery and illicit trades) dramatised in the play have made us to become prisoners to ourselves, and to the nation at large, the playwright warns that it is through the revolution of thinking that our nation of nations, Nigeria can move from the state of social-cultural and political crises into a prosperous and egalitarian society.

The Prologue of the play dramatises the unwarranted confrontation between the performers who are eagerly waiting to show their acting skills and Chief Bada who is unsatisfied with the Opening Glee Song of "Hello Prisoners". He later recapitulates into his shell due to the audience's support given to the performers and the resistance of the Artistic Director and the protesting Performers.

The carefully selected Prisoners in the play, (Soroye, Jongbon, Professor Akin Oje, Madam Comfort, Emily) and others represent the corrupt politician, an ideologically turn-coat professor, armed robber, drug pusher and many other fake characters disturbing the fragile peace of our society.

As a play of confession, and a window for the Nigerian's self-discovery through the individuals, each major character in "Hello Prisoners" tells us why and what makes him or her to be a prisoner. Some of their

confessions and lamentations are intriguing and sad, and they help to capture the true picture of deception, corruption, economic sabotage and class suicide which some Nigerians (the agents of underdevelopment) represent. The first is the unrestrained quest for wealth, and the disaster of the African, nay, Nigerian politicians in “Hello Prisoners”:

SOROYE: Don’t call me *so gbo*. I was imprisoned because they found government money in my house. As a governor in government house, I saw nothing wrong in keeping government money in government house. (p.42).

This statement was actually credited to a former Governor in one of the Northern States after the fall of the Second Republic. The privatisation of the Nigerian public property in the words of Soroye in the play above is still a major strategy of corruption from Nigerian politicians. Like a vicious circle, Nigerian politicians have learnt nothing and this unethical political behaviour is a sad commentary on the present Nigerian political class. Perhaps, this is the reason why Abiola (2011, p. 13) concludes that:

With the countless arrangement of erstwhile governors and government officials over the past few years on account of misappropriation and embezzlement of funds, it is exigent that the process by which these funds are accessed and disbursed should be overhauled. There is need for transparency.

For the ideological turn-coat (Professor Oje) in the play, the crisis of re-creating self and a re-definition of identity for gains and accumulation of wealth should be seen as osmosis for self-destruction. Here is a radical and progressive professor who, due to his own inner crisis to fight poverty, allows his people and their pressures to turn him into a thief. It is, therefore, important to unravel Professor Oje’s class suicide and how he gives in to the endless pressures from Chief Bada, a political contractor from his town:

PROFESSOR OJE: (After a brief spell). Those nocturnal creatures visited me more than thrice. Me, a non-believer in mysticism which I always call superstition, had to become a customer of all the Babalawos and diviners in the town. I gave in to what the society wanted until that chief I refused the other time had his turn back on me and finally brought me here...

It is also important to listen to Professor Oje and Chief Bada in “Hello Prisoners”:

CHIEF BADA: It is about the supply of cement for your ministry’s new block. I don’t know if you have awarded the contract.

PROFESSOR OJE: Well we have. But, since you are now showing interest, I can cancel it and you will get it immediately. So why not see me in the office right away.

CHIEF BADA: *Hen hen!* Good. That is what we asked you to be doing. And for that alone, this is for you. Ten million naira...(p.38).

Professor Oje's inconsistent character is a lesson for all. One of the Prisoners, Jongbon has this to say to us about the danger of committing class suicide even though Professor Oje attempts to defend himself:

JONGBON: Yes Professor. But you changed. You should have remained constant.

PROFESSOR OJE: The pressures were overwhelming my boy. Like a huge conflagration. More than the holocaust or the tempest on the sea.

JONGBON: Yes, you should have remained constant (p.39).

After series of frustrations, Jongbon, another Prisoner in the play kills with impunity. He robs innocent people and anytime he is going for his misadventure, he sings "Song of Robbery Victory", drinks and prays together with his gang for a bountiful harvest. Madam Comfort on the other hand is a drug pusher. Her old friend, Emily lures her into the illegal trade. The brief argument between Madam Comfort and Jongbon below summaries the confession of the duo in a play that anatomises man's adventure and misadventure in a corrupt society:

MADAM COMFORT: Shut up. Did the society ask you to steal?

JONGBON: And may I ask: Madam Comfort, did society ask you to carry cocaine (p.42).

The dramatic conflict of the play is heightened through the confession and the patriotic disposition of the union leader in the play, Comrade Johnson who is bubbling with market of ideas on how his members' welfare can be realised in the company that he works for. However, his arrest, after series of demonstrations, makes his Deputy to catapult and betray the struggle of the labour while the antics of Big Boss in the play is extended to include the antics of ruthless capitalists and especially, dictators ruling African nations.

With a Marxian resolution, "Hello Prisoners" calls on all of us "to break down the walls of all prison yards both real and unreal". Thus, this play is within the gamut of revolutionary aesthetics that celebrates the transformation of Ayò Akińwálé from a neo-traditional playwright to a writer of the left, promoting, and very radically too, the tenets of Marxism and singing in the process, a caustic dirge for capitalists and destructive individuals who have failed to understand the wheel behind the dynamics and alchemy of power. The researcher served as the standing Assistant Artistic Director of the "Hello Prisoners" which was produced on the 20th to 23rd October, 2009 for the University of Ilorin 25th Convocation Play.

"Mountains of Wealth" (2001) is the third major play written by Ayò Akińwálé that can be used to explain the thematic concern of the theatre of the essential Akińwálé. Historically, it should be noted that:

Ayo Akinwale's "Mountains of Wealth" though unpublished, has been performed at three different occasions. First at the University of Ilorin's

Africa Hall for the Committee on African Conference on Science and Religion in 2001, second at the same venue for the Unilorin's "Postponed" convocation play and also at the Alliance Francaise Cultural Centre, Ilorin, all in year 2004. The researcher played active roles in the productions, ending as Assistant Director of the play (Adeoye, 2005, p. 174).

As a commissioned play, the playwright attempts to close the gap of superiority between the science and the arts.

The main theme of this play is love. Through love, anger, disunity, lawlessness, human ego and others are broken and dislodged in the play. The play, created in Ten Scenes, explores the age long tradition of relegating the arts/religions into the background through the intervention of the concept of diplomacy to make a strong statement for peaceful co-existence. The same concept is employed to preach harmony by asking both the traditional religion adherents and scientists to sheath their 'weapons' of suspicion and acrimony (Adegbite, 2007, p. 126). In the "Mountains of Wealth", there is a contest between the old order and the new order. The old order is made-up of Abòkè, the traditional Chief Priest of the rustic and agrarian Òkégbilé while the Olókè (the Kábíyèsí of the town), Òtún, Balógun, Fádélé, Ìyálódé and the witches) belong to this new restorative order. Interestingly, the Geological Team under the leadership of Professor Fábíyì belongs to the new order. What is at stake is the need for the people of Òkégbilé to allow the Geological Team to extract, and convert to various uses, the abundant deposits of many natural resources that nature has given to the people of Òkégbilé through their rich mountains. Paradoxically, these mountains housed the sacred groove of the people of Okegbile's main traditional religion.

Abòkè, the Chief Priest of Òkégbilé resists this attempted assault on his people's culture. But the King of the town and the majority of his people see tomorrow. Relying on the fact that their son, Professor Fábíyì is on the Team of Geologists, Kábíyèsí gives his consent for the destruction of the mountains for economic gains. However, the play's dramatic resolution is through the love tango between Débísí (the daughter of Professor Fábíyì) and Folábí (the son of Abòkè). While the two groups are ready for war, the intervention of the two lovers put a halt to the inevitable destruction of men and material resources. Thus, the theme of love through understanding and mutual co-existence is explored to support the notion that: "Art predates science and that Art is the father of science" and "where art stops, religion complements". All in all, God is seen and credited as the First Artist and the Master Creator in the play.

Aesthetics, Dramaturgy and Directorial Poetics of Ayò Akińwálé's Theatre

Arguably, the present researcher is the most visible collaborator in the making of the aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics of Ayò Akińwálé's theatre. Two important reasons are responsible for this. First is the fact that the researcher and Ayò Akińwálé have been co-teaching Play Directing courses at the Undergraduate level since year 2001 to date. These intellectual and artistic engagements have thus afforded the researcher the opportunity to understand the theoretical force behind the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé. Second also, is the fact that the researcher has collaborated with Ayò Akińwálé in producing and directing twenty-seven major, minor, convocation, commissioned and self-imposed experimental plays since year 2001 to date. Most often, the researcher is always the Standing Assistant Director to the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé. From this participant-observation point of view, we are of the opinion that we should be able to understand and analyse the aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics of Ayò Akińwálé's theatre. On this, we have identified fifteen major aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics that have been creatively used by Ayò Akińwálé in his theatre. As we explore all these styles and approaches, we will be drawing examples and illustrations from his previous performances and the three major plays whose thematic perspectives have been explored in this chapter.

1. The Poetics of Audience-Actor-Director's Theatre's Opening Glee

The opening glee poetics and its use is a carryover from the Yorùbá Alárinjò traveling theatre of "Ìjúbà" into the literary theatre tradition. It is the paying of homage to both visible and invisible elements in the African theatre. In the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé, the members of the audience are welcomed into the theatre to be part of a theatrical feast by the actors through the intervention of the stage director who most times can be the narrator. This style is to re-emphasise the functionality of the African theatre. Through this poetics, the involvement of everybody (active or inactive) is sought on the spot and in the beginning of the performance. This is Ayò Akińwálé's way of *theatrical humbling* and a social engineering style meant for the audience, actor and the stage director/narrator to be alert, and awake to the reality of the theatrical adventure of education and engineering.

To achieve his director's theatre's opening glee, Akińwálé, through his three major plays – *This King Must Die*, "Hello Prisoners" and "Mountains of Wealth" has never hid his sincerity in using this poetics. In *This King Must Die* for example, Director is the first actor who speaks and welcomes members of the audience to the theatre:

DIRECTOR: Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you all obtained your tickets from the box office. If so, good. But you see, I can't find my actors. We had a disagreement yesterday over their salaries and personal emoluments and

they walked out of the final rehearsals. I don't know if I can find some replacement in the auditorium (Akinwale, 1998, p. 6).

Later, the same Director in *This King Must Die*, accepts the apology of his actors and informs the audience that, "Rights. Gentlemen meet my cast. A round of applause for them". Ayò Akinwálé titles this theatrical fraternity, "Prologue—The Beginning of Times" in *This King Must Die*.

In "Hello Prisoners", the conflict between Chief Bada and the actors in the Prologue of the play is resolved through the Director's intervention. Hear him as he pacifies the audience and his cast:

DIRECTOR: Sorry ladies and gentlemen. We have just escaped from one of those prisons which this country provides free of charge... so don't leave your seats. Rather, share with us the joy of being a prisoner in ones own country... Ladies and gentlemen, happy viewing, and make sure you do not get caught and imprisoned in the course of the play. Thank you very much for coming (p.2).

The audience-actor-director's theatre's opening glee also resurfaces in the "Mountains of Wealth" in Scene One with the sub-title of "Meet the Cast and Crew". The dimension this time around is that the Director in the play introduces his cast and crew to the audience so as to create a good beginning and a fraternisation between the audience and the cast:

DIRECTOR: (To the audience) Answer them now. Or don't you want them to play their drums for you? My technical people where are you?

TECNICAL CREW: We are here, Sir.

DIRECTOR: Good. He is... he is in charge of lights. She is... The Costumier and Make-up Artist. He is... The Stage Manager. Now man your positions quickly. Oh! Sorry you have not met my actors and actress... You want to meet them? Alright my actors and actresses, where are you?

ACTORS/ACTRESSES: Here, our Director.

DIRECTOR: Greet the audience members.

ACTORS/ACTRESSES: Good evening Sir, Ma (p.3).

It is important to note that this poetics has been used successfully by some Nigerian dramatists such as Fémi Òsófisan, Sam Ukala and a host of other dramatists/playwrights in the third generation including the researcher, to confirm, once again, that the African theatre is a living theatre, and to give the members of the audience some sense of belonging.

2. **The Dramaturgy of Ensemble Acting**

Through the insistence on double/multiple casting to make his performers committed, Ayò Akinwálé has successfully created the dramaturgy of ensemble acting in which no single actor can hold the group to ransom and that which condemns stardom, or performers who fail to follow the ethics of the theatres. It should be noted that ensemble acting is a "mutually created

chemistry of acting together resulting in a commitment to serving the play and not the ego of any particular actor” (Huberman, Pope and Ludwig, 1993, p. 498). The import of this style is that most members of a particular production often understand the movements, dialogue and the general scores of physical action of the major and minor characters in a play. Through this style, Akiñwálé has helped to promote professionalism because the most challenging roles in his past productions have been withdrawn from unserious cast members to committed members of his cast. The cameo part is also treated seriously through this dramaturgy because Ayò Akiñwálé believes that all roles are important for a successful performance.

This dramaturgy has been used successfully by Ayò Akiñwálé especially for his productions that he has adequate rehearsal time for. “Mountains of Wealth” has benefited from this dramaturgy. Dàpò Adélùgbà, a Nigerian theatre director of fifty years’ standing, is also an expert in the dramaturgy of ensemble acting. Directors who want to use this dramaturgy should note that cast members must be united, focused and committed because a performance can be rehearsed for four or six months.

3. **The Dramaturgy of Power Play**

The problem of bad leadership in Africa has been critically scrutinised by scholars and dramatists such as Chinua Achebe, Wolé Soyínká, Olá Rótímí, Fémi Òsófisan, Olú Obáfémi, Saint Gbilekaa and others. The dramaturgy of power play is thus an exposé on the problems that bad leaders have posed to, and contributed to the underdevelopment of the African nations. Politics is also celebrated by the dramatists and theatre directors through the selection, and subsequent production of such politically relevant plays for the consumption of the audience.

A gaze through the major plays of Ayò Akiñwálé points to him as a playwright and theatre director, whose works distill, scrutinise and condemn social inequality, the destruction and bastardisation of cultural ethos and corruption caused by political leaders. Borrowing from the previous dramatists before him, Akiñwálé’s theatre is a *fantare* for the public to see the dangers inherent in over-politicisation of important issues, and the widening gulf of disparity that exists between the “haves” and the “haves not”. Without exaggeration, Ayò Akiñwálé, in all honesty is a committed dramatist and writer, and a committed dramatist is the one whom Akiñyemí and Fálolá (2009, p. 5) see as “the conscience of society and it falls on him or her to make the audience aware of the social, economic, and political problems and the causes and possible cure of such problems”. For example, Aólè, the Aláàfin of Òyó in Akiñwálé’s *Magnus Opus, This King Must Die* has no other way of thinking except through the privatisation of state matters where revenge, greed, obstinacy and authoritarianism sway his already existing ego

of self-indulgence. The paradox of Àfònjá (a gallant general) also comes to the fore in a play of power where the weakling, represented by the Alápòmù in the play is killed and sacrificed on the altar of state assassination.

In “Hello Prisoners”, the failure of the state through General Jill’s totalitarianism creates a climate of despair. This is because a totalitarian leader, due to the forces of destruction at his disposal, can only be obeyed but can never be loved. General Jill turns himself into a prisoner, and as an artist, the rebellion within Akińwálé’s mind, is ultimately, a fight and a struggle for the liberation of his country, Nigeria through a satirical celebration, and theatrical creation of life-like characters, who fall within the dramaturgy of power play. Chief Badá, Big Boss, Comrade Johnson’s second-in-command, Sòròyè and others in “Hello Prisoners” also help to advance and tolerate the necessity of power play dramaturgy. This same scenario is replicated in “Mountains of Wealth” where an individual, Abòkè, thinks that he can lord his will over the decision of the majority.

How Ayò Akińwálé makes use of the dramaturgy of power play in his theatre is not only contextual but theatrical. All the cast members of the major power play characters in Ayò Akińwálé’s theatre in the last ten years were carefully selected. Most of these casts have common attributes: tall, lanky, bold, courageous, proud, smart, deadly and unpredictable. All of them have good acting skills. From Adégbolá John who acted as Azagidi in Don Pedro Obaseki’s *Azagidi* in 2008, Balògun Shèyefúnmi who acted as Chief Bada in “Hello Prisoners” in 2009, to Folágadé Kémi who acted as Iyeneri in Fémi Òsófisan’s *Yungba Yungba and the Dance Contest* in 2011, Ayò Akińwálé’s power play characters have always been the best that can be gotten around.

In the dramaturgy of power play, Ayò Akińwálé has transferred the characteristics of the actual life personalities into the dramatic characters of his power play characters. General Jill in “Hello Prisoners” acted by Alaki Saperá in the 2009 performance, was specifically instructed to alternate his nuances between General Ibrahim Babangida and Late General Sanni Abacha so as to historicise the realities of their tenures on stage. A follow up to this is Iyeneri, acted by Kémi Folágadé who was made to alternate between two strong-willed women; Magret Thatcher and Madam Túnubú of Lagos of yore in the 2011 production of Fémi Òsófisan’s *Yungba Yungba and The Dance Contest*, directed by Ayò Akińwálé. This style of anchoring a dramatic character to marry the realities of a life character can also be distilled through the directorial aesthetics of character mood intensity.

4. **Claptrap Aesthetics**

Claptrap style is artistically created for the audience to enjoy a performance. Here, the voice of the actor, and his or her special ways of pronouncing certain important words to elicit effects become central. In fact,

Huberman, Pope and Ludwig (1993:496) are of the opinion that claptrap is a situation where an actor concludes “a speech or scene with a great vocal or physical display that would inspire or ‘trap’ the audience into applauding”. This technique is very close to Olá Rótímí’s use of repartee which is “the use of rapid and short two-syllabled-phrases between two or three characters in dialogue” (Oyewo, 2007, p. 37). The crux of claptrap aesthetics is good finishing in physical display and vocalisation.

In the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé, emphasis is placed on certain words or lines for dramatic effects. In rehearsals, an actor, (especially if the actor is an amateur) can spend four to two hours mastering or learning how to properly pronounce a word or line. When Akińwálé succeeds in achieving this, such words and lines are most often, the delight of the audience. In “Mountains of Wealth”, for example, the italicised words in the play really tasked the patience of the actors:

- BALOGUN: Go and *tell your science* that it is *not possible* for you to *destroy our mountains* (p.6).
- FABIYI: You see, it is necessary to let him know that *religion predates science*. In fact, *art is the father of science* (p.7).
- ABOKE: If you don’t send these people away from our mountains, *I will turn all of them into small rats* (p. 11).
- ANDERSON: Honourable minister, *I will not go there again. Never* (p. 15).
- NARRATOR: Stop that music (music stops). *Is it every time that one is happy*” (p. 16).
- ABOKE: Let them bring that gun that *fires non-stop*. The *mother of that man who will stop me from fighting this war is yet to be born* (p. 16).
- FOLABI: *Where science stops, religion complements* (p. 17).
- DEBISI: *And where religion stops, science takes over* (p. 17).
- FOLABI: *As a matter of fact, religion predates science* (p. 17).
- DEBISI: *Arts is the father of science* (p. 18).

What is at play in claptrap aesthetics is tonal variety and this too has a place in the two important but often ignored fundamentals of directing: rhythm and tempo. Because of the importance of some words or lines in a play, a director who makes use of the claptrap aesthetics is only doing so to build on his dramatic communication which is the essence of play directing. In fact, it is even more important for inexperienced actors because claptrap, from its directorial record, was a popular technique “among lesser actors in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries” (Huberman, Pope and Ludwig, 1993, p. 496). Claptrap aesthetics should, however, be used moderately, and in an overlapping dramatic manner meant to break actors’ use of monotones. To our knowledge, there is no play directed by Ayò Akińwálé in which claptrap aesthetics is not used.

5. Brechtian-Comico-Satirical Poetics

The popularity of Bertolt Brecht's Brechtian aesthetics is legendary in the African theatre. Even though Brecht himself has never isolated his theatre from the African theatre, which he claimed he borrowed profusely from, dramatists and African scholars' celebration, adoption, adaptation, re-creation, reconstruction and imitation of the Brechtian style has nonetheless makes Bertolt Brecht's theatre a critical intervention on the Nigerian stage in particular. Critical works from Nigerian scholars and dramatists such as Sóyínká (1979), Òsófisan (1977, 1982 and 1992), Nasiru (1987), Iji (1991), Ode (1999), Yerima (2003), Ejeke (2003), Musa (2007), Adeoye (2009) and others have expressed the importance of the Brechtian theatre style in the making of the Nigerian modern theatre. Even when Late Olá Rótímí attempted to downplay the essential Brecht in his article, "Much Ado About Brecht", published in Erika Fischer-lichte, Josephine Riley and Micheal Gissenweher's edited works, *Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre, Own and Foreign*, he has also agreed to the critical intervention of the Brechtian aesthetics in the global theatre market.

For Ayò Akińwálé, the use of the Brechtian style is the beginning of artistic wisdom in the deconstruction of intermission which the researcher has written about. With this style, Akińwálé's "straight take theory" is further theorised. No room for interlude in the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé and no place for unnecessary changing of scene and above all, no blackout. Performers are expected to be their own props managers because they will carry the chairs, tables, stools and all other stage decors that they will use to the stage by themselves. This is not a distraction; the act of "carrying what you will use on stage is further built into the performance creatively. When a scene is coming to an end, another scene is set immediately in an overlapping manner to synchronise with the scene which is about to end. Through this style, valuable time is saved. In *Azagidi's* production, Akińwálé used the Brechtian style to turn the end bit of the play, and the theatre, into a moment of practical social interaction. A tragic work where serious purgation of emotion has been attained was suddenly turned into a satire through the created dialogue of the Director meant to end the play. A recall is important here: "The Fool/Narrator in the performance, Edeimu Daniel says it all: 'why are you people sad'? It is a play that you are watching and the play has ended. We will see you next time". After these few words, members of the audience relaxed and they started to talk as they watched the final curtain call. This same style was also used in "Hello Prisoners" where the carefully selected prisoners, in the performance acted several roles to reinforce a production that was quintessentially Brechtian and satirically generic, wearing the mask of decompartmentalised but holistic staging convention in the process. This

particular performance moves from emotion to anguish, passion to trauma, victory to failure, love to frustration, surprises to upsets; confirming and reinforcing the crises of consciousness and unconsciousness in man's complex world. Calling on man to write his own destiny and be the architect of his own fortune, the beauty of the Brechtian poetics lies in the fact that it "departs from the Aristotelian poetics of catharsis and empathy and it is almost a complete negation of the Hegelian concept of the soul, which is a moral issue" (Agba, 2009, p. 71). Even though it has its own few disadvantages, the Brechtian style has come to stay in the Nigerian stage, and its latest reinvention is the Neo-alienation style which the researcher has valourised into twelve aesthetic possibilities.

6. **The Dramaturgy of Cyclical Plot Continuum**

Akiñwálé's artistic works are encased in well-calculated cycle of life. As a sociologist, he is prodded on by the law of gravity: whatever goes up will come down. He never hid his resolution, and one scene or movement in his plays necessarily dovetails into another through a reasonable dramatic continuum. In his works, the good character is made to be good throughout, while the bad character courts and sleeps with the devil throughout. This style is quintessentially Aristotelian, for Aristotle has prescribed that the characters of our dramatic works should be consistent and even while inconsistent, they should be accomplished with consistent inconsistency.

In the cyclical plot continuum, undefined subplots, protagonists or antagonists are not allowed. However, there is one important storyline even if it will curve slightly; the story will still come to the very important point of cognition. The artistic synthesis of the storyline often leads to organic unity, the core of a well-made play. In fact, Frerer (1996, p. 72) says that:

Organic unity is the desirable relationship between each part of a play: in order words, each scene should be necessary and vital to the whole play... The preserve of a character raises expectation; the audience expects to understand the relevance of that character to the story. Superfluous characters have no place in a play.

In our own estimation, Ayò Akiñwálé's *This King Must Die*, "Mountains of Wealth" and "Hello Prisoners" fall within the creative aesthetics of well-made plays. The "repetitive nature" of the cyclical plot continuum should not be confused for its expressive, detailed and rejuvenating perspectives in playwriting and ultimately in play directing.

7. **The Dramaturgy of Traditionalism**

Adédèjì (1969 and 1986), Rótímí (1971 and 1981), Echeruo (1973), Enekwe (1981 and 1987), Illah (2001), Ododo (2001), Dugga (2001 and 2006), Menegbe (2007), Adeoye (2008 and 2010) and Emasealu (2010) have written, though through different dimensions, on the essence, and imperative of traditional aesthetics in the postcolonial Nigerian theatre. This is necessary

because the theatre exists primarily for a people, and any attempt to insulate the theatre from the people will serve nobody, even though cultural hybridism, through the concept of globalisation, the “battle cry” of the Western nations, is currently attempting to create one world and one culture.

In any African setting or society, if a literary theatre is paired with a traditional theatre, the result of attendance can be imagined. This is the reason why Menegbe (2007, p. 106) concludes that “adapting some dramatic elements such as ritual... trance and dance in a creative manner from traditional African theatre into modern theatre practices shall enhance modern theatre”. At the last count, there is no Nigerian playwright of repute that has not romanced with traditional aesthetics in his or her march towards the development of the theatre. Perhaps, a common lullaby among the Yoruba people of Òyó-Òsun extraction that we have used to foreground a discourse on “The Theatre of Healing: Ehoró-Iba Masquerade Festival of Agbeyeland as a Paradigm” will be necessary here:

Sélèrú àgbò
àgbàrá àgbò
lòsun fí ñ no omo rè
kí dókítà ó tó dé.
Abímo mó dáná lé èyin là ñ
pòwe mo.

This means that:

Little herb concoction here big herb concoction there makes
river Osun to heal her children before the coming of the
medical doctors.

My proverb is meant for those who give birth to children in the
house without burning fire (Musa, 2001, p. 121).

To decolonise the mind (apology to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o), we must celebrate our material and immaterial cultures in our theatre.

To date, most plays directed by Ayò Akińwálé are within the gamut of traditional theatre. His major plays are written with traditional materials gotten from his Yorùbá people. Some examples will be necessary here. In “Mountains of Wealth”, for example, specific stage instructions are written on the type of music, song and dance that should be used. Please pay attention to the italicised words:

(Music begins, Townspeople dance in, first from all directions. Then the Maiden dance in, they are followed by the Warriors. They do a lot of dance to *Bata Music*. Kabiyesi comes in with *Igbín Agbá*, *Iro Enikan boba ja iro*. He sits on his throne. Aboke comes in with *Eban gbomo oke lanti lanti*, choreographed movement takes him, Arugba and other worshippers all clad in white apparel on stage... Music begins. Maiden dance. Hunter dance... Then followed by the Masquerades)... (pp.4-5).

In the 2001 production of “Mountains of Wealth” under discourse, Omo Oke, Obitun, Apepe, Warrior and the majestic dance of the king among other dances necessarily spice up the theatrical moment of the performance.

This King Must Die benefits most from Ayò Akińwálé’s use of traditional aesthetics. The call and response between Fádélé and the Chorus when the former is casting his Òpèlè in the play, is another tonic for actor-audience fraternisation. This episode graduates into the “songs of the Odus” as Òrúnmìlà, the deeply spiritual and benevolent leader of the sixteen oracles takes his turn to heal his people. The praise singer sings for Aólè, while Aólè’s wives sing his cognomen for him and his retinue changes the song when the chiefs enter to begin Movement One, which is the historification of “The Remote Past”. The music and dance loving Alápòmù in play and in the confirmed history of that period is not shortchanged for the playwright, Ayò Akińwálé, gives his heart desire to him and Alápòmù warns and reflects, rather sarcastically that:

Stop! Stop that music. Must you kill me with your incessant drumming? It is a sin to be a Baale? Or must you choke me with drumming because I am in love with it? Welcorme to this theatre ladies and gentlemen. Perhaps you do not know me. I think I better introduce myself. No. Baba Alasiri, do it for me (Akinwale, 1998, p. 24).

Certainly, a lot of research has gone into the writing and the making of *This King Must Die*. Though a modern play, “Hello Prisoners” also has a fair share of traditional aesthetics owing to its total theatre nature. In fact, the resolution of the play comes through ritual aesthetics. Sóróyè, the reformed corrupt politician in the 2009 production, suddenly used black-powder, a special charm to break the wall of the prison to allow the Prisoners to go out to meet the public for the crusade of reformation. Ayò Akińwálé in most of his directed works has, therefore, sythesised the Yoruba traveling theatre style with the theatre of English expression in the dynamic Nigerian theatre.

8. **The Pre-blocking Poetics**

Olá Rótímí, Báýò Odùnéye and a few other Nigerian theatre directors often pre-block their play before rehearsals. There are many reasons why pre-blocking is desirable in the theatre. Frerer (1996, p. 146) lists six of those reasons:

1. to test the effectiveness of the arrangement of furniture and scenery
2. to avoid dealing with actors’ ego
3. to avoid dealing with “whether the actor ‘feels’ like moving”
4. to save the actors’ time
5. to help the technicians by allowing them to see early run-throughs
6. to avoid embarrassment

Although Vaughan (1993, p. 128) submits that pre-blocking “deprives the actors of some of their chance to work collaboratively” with the directors,

yet the advantages of pre-blocking far outweigh its disadvantages. The issue at stake has to do with the nature or experience of the actors that a director is working with. In an educational environment where actors are just learning the arts of the theatre, it is professionally correct to pre-block.

In the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé, pre-blocking is one of his core artistic modes of realising his directing objectives during rehearsals. How? Before rehearsal begins, he will look for a neat file, photocopy the entire play, arrange them neatly in a file, get clean A4 papers which are often arranged opposite the pages of the photocopied materials. He then draws his line which includes the following main headings: Blockings, Light, Sound and Remarks. After this, he takes, for example, page one of the play make and sketch his blockings which include the use of stage geography codes (CSR, DSR, USC and others). At rehearsal, he assembles all the actors in scene one of the play, reads out his blockings and remarks. Here, he often insists that all of them must equally take down their own personal blockings and movements. He can read this out twice, later, he will then tell the actors to demonstrate the pre-blockings that he has given to them.

Pre-blocking poetics has helped Akińwálé to save time in the rehearsal process. This is because he often blocks his plays under one week. After the trial of his pre-blocking, Akińwálé then runs his play fully as rehearsal progresses. Certainly, eighty percent of his initial pre-blockings are retained in the final production. For a prospective director to arrive at a pre-blocking that will not change as rehearsal progresses, he must read the script meant for theatrical direction several times, understand stage geography and the tonal codes in the directing process very well. While actors should be made to contribute their God-given creative potentials to the theatre, pre-blocking poetics should be given the consideration it deserves, and Ayò Akińwálé, just like others before him, has shown that it is worthy of applying.

9. **The Poetics of Festival Theatre**

In linear progression, it has been widely accepted that African theatre grew from the mimetic theory to ritual and from ritual to religious worship which culminates into festival. Hardly can we find a society in Africa without one form of festival or the other. Most of these festivals are meant for celebration of acknowledged success or victory when defeat is imminent. Nigerian dramatists have also brought to the stage, series of traditional festivals and interrogate or deconstruct some of them within our contemporary reality.

As a grand occasion for re-union, festival is essentially communal in Africa. In the African theatre, festival theatre has been used in the literary theatre tradition to advance the people's way of life and bring back lost glories. In fact, while preaching the need for African dramatists to use local

idioms in the propagation of their theatrical aesthetics, Olá Rótímí submits that “traditional African festivals innately thrive in songs, chants, incantations and lyrical arts of the people (cited in Emasealu, 2010, p. 209). Ayò Akińwálé has done more than what Olá Rótímí prescribed by his use of festival theatre in his literary theatre tradition through:

- i. Lyrical art and Praise-Poetry. In his three major plays under focus in this study, Akínwálé makes use of Praise Singers to praise or chant the “Oriki of the King”, or important dramatic characters in the three plays. Kábíyèsí in “Mountains Wealth”, Aólè in *This King Must Die* and Professor Oje when he is made a Minister in “Hello Prisoners” are good examples of dramatic characters whose personalities are elevated through the lyrical art and praise-poetry of the Yoruba people. Lyrical art and praise-poetry are very important in most festival theatre in Africa.
- ii. Masquerades. Masquerades in the African cosmological worldview are symbols of the spirits, gods and our ancestors. They also have dual artistic relevance of good and evil. In “Mountains of Wealth”, they are used as dancers who entertain during the festival of Òrìsà-Òkè.
- iii. Call and Response. Fádélé, Òrúnmìlà and the Chorus in *This King Must Die* necessarily entertain the audience through their dexterous use of call and response. This eventually engenders audience participation and fraternisation. The call and response used in the play are rooted in Yorùbá’s literary corpus and Odù songs. This brings to life, a forgotten aspect of Yorùbá culture, at least to the new and young theatre enthusiasts. Call and response are also effective in a festival theatre.
- iv. Yorùbá Festivals for the Recreation of History. “Mountains of Wealth” benefits from the use of Yorùbá festivals as spectacle for entertainment and theatrical re-birth. *This King Must Die* also celebrates the re-creation of history through Aólè’s revenge and totalitarianism.
- v. Communal Spirit and Identity. *This King Must Die* is a good example here because the communal spirit and identity through ethnic politics of the Second Republic is a case study. Even when they are all celebrating and strategising to form national government, Awóníyì and his People’s Party members, Alhaji and his Naira Party members, and De Alhaja and her Bridal Party members in *This King Must Die* are nothing but ethnic zealots who think first about the people of their ethnic backgrounds before giving a thought to nationalism.

Festival theatre as an enclave theatre essentially sings a song of unique identity in a multicultural society through the projection of communal spirit notwithstanding the fact that festival theatre is “one of the key manifestations of traditional African theatre” (Umukoro, 2007, p. 12).

10. **Transition Aesthetics**

Transition aesthetics could be conceived as the theatrical identity that makes use of the core thematic materials of the yore, the old past. It often moves swiftly to celebrate the issues of the immediate past, and responds to the socio-cultural and religio-political problems of the recent present. In transition aesthetics, no much emphasis on deconstruction rather, the pulse of the work of a dramatic is on reconstruction. Ayò Akińwálé's *This King Must Die* is in the orbit of transition aesthetics. After this play, “Hello Prisoners” captures the theatre of the immediate past and “Mountains of Wealth” also relates to us the current cankerworm of science versus arts, and the African traditional religions versus modern religions in Nigeria.

In Ayò Akińwálé's theatre, the use of transition aesthetics is both contextual and contentual. They appear as thematic representatives of the past in his plays, and he has made use of them in his theatre through his insistence on using the correct diction/speech, make-up, costumes, props and other relevant arts of the theatre to capture the reality of the land of yore, immediate past and recent present.

11. **Town-Gown-Gown-Town Poetics**

Since the use of Theatre-On-Wheels in the early 1960s at the University of Ìbàdàn, the gown has succeeded in marrying the town. In fact, Odu (2011, pp. 314-5) has recently recounted, though in brief, the success of the Theatre-On-Wheels experiment through “That Scoundrel Suberu”, an adaptation of Moliere's *Les Fourberies de Scapin* by Dàpò Adélùgbà. This particular production was taken to major cities in Nigeria in 1961. Olá Rótímí also courted the town in most of his literary theatre performances. This same scenario was witnessed when some traveling theatre practitioners also collaborated with staff and students of the University of Ìbàdàn's Theatre Arts Department in the 1970s. The core of town meeting the gown, and the gown meeting the town, is that the supposed superiority complex or elitism of the academic/literary theatre is broken down for the accommodation of traditional artistes in their productions.

On Ayò Akińwálé's stake in his breaking down of the elitist theatre, two postgraduate students in the Department of the Performing Arts, Abraham Adavi and Táyò Simeon Àrìndé have briefly examined his use of town/gown aesthetics recently. However, a re-examination of Ayò Akińwálé's theatre will show that he is not only good at using the town and gown poetics, he has,

in several instances, engaged in the use of Town-Gown-Gown-Town Poetics. Let us consider a few examples to justify this assertion:

- i. most of his drummers, especially in his creative works with traditional aesthetics are traditional artistes working with Òyó and Kwara State Arts Councils. They are always invited to play Bàtá, Gángan and Dùndún drums during his performances. In this case, the town is meeting the gown;
- ii. as an actor, he has collaborated with Tunde Laniyan at the Bódìjà market, Ìbàdàn, to produce a play in which the dangers of HIV/AIDS were dramatized. At this stage, the gown, the respected Professor of Performing Arts, is meeting the town at the open market for theatrical enactment;
- iii. as a big face on the Nigerian home video production of Yorùbá extraction, the gown has hopped from one location to the other to preach the gospel of gown meeting the town; and
- iv. several secondary schools' performances have been produced by him and the researcher to break the elitism of the University theatre at Queen's School and Federal Government College, Ìlorin.

Ayò Akińwálé has also carried out community theatre projects in Málété, Kwara State, and in Benue State to propagate the Town-Gown-Gown-Town Poetics.

12. The Dramaturgy of the Director's Theatre

What period of the theatre are we now? Reilly and Phillips (1998, pp. 117-8) provide a clear answer to this:

The theatre of the Italian Renaissance, for example, was a designer's theatre. The ancient Greek theatre decidedly was the playwright's theatre. The period from 1750 to 1850 throughout the world saw a scarcity of good plays and consequently we had an actor's theatre. The theatre of the past 150 years has, on the whole, been a director's theatre.

Two theatre directors of international standing have been reputed to be the propagators of the director's theatre in the modern theatre. The first is Richard Wagner, who created *Gesamikunstwerk*, the "Master Artwork" and a master directorial concept "sought to unify all of the production elements including music, dance, acting, scenery, and costumes under the control of the director (Huberman, Pope and Ludwig, 1993, p. 499). The second theatre director who falls under the nomenclature of "super director" in the director's theatre league is Max Reinhardt who has been credited with "a remarkable power of inventiveness and an absolute command over the medium of the stage". Certainly, Reinhardt is of the opinion that in the director's theatre, "the director has complete control over the play and may interpret it in any way

that the play is but one of the elements of performance is not necessarily more important than any other” (Reilly and Phillips, 1998, p. 122).

The reality of the director’s theatre in the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé is that he is in total control of his production. Whether the play is his, or a selected play, his body chemistry and a clear semiotic interpretation of it, has shown that his performers must obey his instructions and directions. The failure, on the part of some of his actors to respect his opinions has made him to de-cast them. This is why in his theatre, no permanent cast list. Once you are not convincing him as an actor, he will tell you to braze up to face the challenges of the theatre. At the same time, he will throw such roles open, and of course, he will look at the present researcher and insist that “Rasheed, you know what to do”! And what is that thing that I know how to do? Instant secret double casting! Later, we will then showcase the double cast who most often do the job better than the rude and indisciplined first cast. His common refrain of “wait for your time” to actors who may want to change his blockings or disobey him is not lost on us as he wears a clean cap of a director in the director’s theatre’s group.

Ayo Akińwálé’s use of the director’s theatre style is also exhibited in his plays. He so much fancies the person of the director that he creates Director and Artistic Director as dramatic characters in his *This King Must Die*, “Hello Prisoners” and “Mountains of Wealth” respectively. So, in theory, the person of the director has been courted by Ayò Akińwálé and in practice, the fear of him as the artistic director in his theatre is the beginning of theatrical wisdom.

13. **De-intermission Aesthetics**

In a recent work, the researcher has condemned intermissions which we believe are “antithetical to the African theatre because they are clear Western theatre, and the proscenium stage imposed stop-gap or a break in the performance process” (Adeoye, 2011, p. 147). Attempt at deconstructing intermission should, therefore, be seen as our “search for genuine African theatre”. With intermission, a performance is essentially decompartmentalised and this unnecessary time for changing of set, décor or costumes through blackout in a performance often affects “free-flow performance” which is one of the problems of the African theatre.

For Ayò Akińwálé, intermission is inartistic. He has demonstrated this several times. Once a play of his is on, blackout is not allowed. The play starts with full lights on and ends without blackout. This aesthetics informed his creation of the “Straight Take Theory” discussed earlier. Even in tragic works that he has directed, where purgation of emotion is needed, he has no room for blackout.

One can also ask: Does Ayò Akińwálé has phobia for technology in the theatre? As a former teacher of Technical Theatre in the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria he definitely has no phobia for technology in the theatre. His main grouse is that most often, technical aesthetics can fail, and the director to him, will be held responsible. Even when recorded sound effects are to be used in his production, he would scream and shout that he didn't want such and that everything should be natural. To convince him about the imperative of special effects in the theatre, the technical arm of his production often try most of the sound effects or special effects in rehearsals several times. Though this aesthetics has its own advantages and disadvantages, the truth is that Ayò Akińwálé, through the de-intermission aesthetics has supported the notion that African theatre is essentially technophobic.

14. **The Poetics of Total Theatre**

The common conclusion is that African theatre is a total theatre experiment. However, how a director makes use of the total theatre experiment is what is important. Total theatre itself is "usually a production style that makes free use of all the many resources of the stage and theatre in general: drama, music, dance, song, film, slide projection, advanced technological effects, e.t.c" (Reilly and Phillips, 1998, p. 288). Interestingly, no single performance can account for the entire poetics under total theatre. In fact, the multimedia nature of total theatre has allowed for its acceptance in the African theatre. While Kofoworola (1993, p. 93) will introduce the functional use of sound effects, music, dance, drama, and film excerpt in his play; *Futonje; Our Love (Quest for National Integration)*, Chuma-Ideh (2011, p. 74) wants artists to consider historicity, culturality, quasi-divinity, epic simile, epic boasting, the use of imagery, symbols and others, in locating the place of total theatre in an African performance. He uses some of these "intrinsic universal conventions or techniques of the epic tradition" to interrogate J.P Clark's *Ozidi Saga*.

In the case of Ayò Akińwálé's use of total theatre, dance is important but it should be integrated into the directorial concept of the production. Music is also important but to him, it must advance the drama in the production. For his dialogue, he has created some of them into songs and in all his three major plays, theme songs are created to advance the plot development of the total experience of his performance. Most of his created songs such as "Song of Solidarity", "Electoral Songs" and "Song of the Odus" in *This King Must Die*; "Song of the Prisoners", "Song of Change", "Song of Regrets", "Song of the Factory Workers", "Song of the Business Woman", "Song of Robbery Victory", "Song of the Working Class", "Song of the Sober Robber" and others in "Hello Prisoners" and "Let's Work on this Mountains"

in “Mountains of Wealth” essentially represent the vision of Ayò Akińwálé in the numerous unfolding situations in the plays and their subsequent performances.

Total theatre poetics has helped Ayò Akińwálé to produce the theatre of his people because of the parable of communalism that the use of music, dance, drama, pantomimic dramatisation and others engender. The dexterous use of the total theatre poetics has also allowed Ayò Akińwálé to deconstruct intermissions, maintain correct tempo and rhythm, and produce thematically relevant and aesthetically profound plays where his immeasurable talent as a gifted creative director cannot be over-emphasised.

15. **The Aesthetics of Showoff Closing Glee**

In a showoff theatre, the dramatist’s main concern is to get the attention of the audience in a creative and clever way. Akińwálé’s closing glee is a serious moment of colourful, shrewd and aesthetic display of the arts of the theatre. The curtain calls of most of his past performances were never done in haste. He devoted a lot of energy in creating his curtain calls which he often used to celebrate his directing skills, his performers and the success of his productions. His closing glee are, therefore, patronising in the gamut of showmanship. The greatest attraction of Akińwálé’s use of the aesthetics of showoff closing glee is in the areas of crowd management. Almost all the cast members of his production will be on stage to engage in various theatrical activities that are linked to the overall motif of the production. New dances are often introduced while some of the songs used in any of his productions are re-worked into the closing glee. A lot of movement (circular, horizontal, diagonal, triangular and others) are also created to spice-up his curtain calls.

The show of creative strength through Akińwálé’s use of showoff closing glee stands to date, as one of his assets in the imaging of his theatre. This is because the entire orchestra, through Akińwálé’s frequent dictation of different musical tune, are usually electrified and the result of this energy sapping moment is the audience’s deliberate choice of standing up to acknowledge the performers.

A Critique of Ayo Akinwale’s Theatre

In modern directing, the conservatism of traditional or slavish directing style must be totally broken to accommodate the changing tide and numerous multimedia aesthetics in the global age of reality. What is needed now in the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé is a performance that is radically different from what we have been watching in his theatre. This is the only way that Ayò Akińwálé, an experimental theatre director, can be truly experimental. Rejecting new “isms” or modern concepts in the directing process as Ayò Akińwálé has shown is not particularly encouraging to budding directors who have to express their revolutionary world through incisive and radical

productions. Let us not forget that the computer age has altered our world. The sophistication of technological innovation, therefore, calls on Ayò Akińwálé to revisit his theatre with the hope of pleasing the teeming youths that dominates his theatre audience. A clear testimony to this critique has been offered by Yerima (2011, pp. 51-2) when he reflects that

the first issue of drama and theatre development in Nigeria is its dramaturgy... This also refers to the type of old and new theatre writing and performances that exist... it is important to note that dramaturgy is an integral part of the development of a people's drama and theatre. It grows with the consciousness of a people, while taking into cognizance the development in other countries and societies... It must be noted that contemporary theatre is *hybrid*, because it draws influences from different schools of thought, therefore, it constantly shifts...

The current pattern of development in the postcolonial theatre calls for a re-integration, on the part of the theatre director, of all relevant forms and styles in the theatrical celebration of the Nigerian theatre, which cannot isolate itself from the happenings in the global theatre market. At least, Eric Reinert has admonished that "an important part of the success of any civilisation is its ability to emulate the factors that led to the success of other civilization" (cited in Akande, 2012, p. 24).

Next in this direction is the tyranny of implementing the icons within the director's theatre totally. In a democratic age, the director has to be democratic without sacrificing his strong will as a director. Although practical theatre triumphs on control, excessive control in the theatre which is a group art will not encourage the development of the art of play directing. Even though we concede to the unprofessional act of some of the past performers in the theatre of Ayò Akińwálé, using the director's theatre's style all the time will be an over-kill. This style should be used only for young actors and actresses.

Furthermore, other theatre designers (Choreographers, Technical Directors, Costumiers and others) that have worked with Ayò Akińwálé in his theatre have complained that he will not give them enough time to work yet he will demand immediate result. They see this act as the tyranny of the director. As much as they accept the fact that play directing has to do with time, they are also of the opinion that their own arts (choreography, costuming and make-up, props management and others) should not be relegated or treated as unimportant arts. Our stake here is that Ayò Akińwálé should give quality time to other creative designers so as to allow them to do good creative works. However, designers too, working with him should follow production ethics of attending rehearsals punctually. A designer who is coming to watch rehearsals two days to production is acting unprofessionally. If the tyranny or

dictatorship of the director must be broken, the unprofessional act of some of our designers should also change. The theatre is guided by rules and regulations, we should be honest to follow and animate the essence of those rules and regulations.

It has been confirmed by Johnson (2001), Adeoye (2007) and even Akiñwálé (2000) that we are not documenting our directing styles and experimental performances. It is, therefore, a great concern that Ayò Akiñwálé has done little in this direction. What is at play here is posterity. We must write for the future performers and directors so that they can learn from us. To this end, we appeal to Ayò Akiñwálé to think seriously in this direction. He has been directing since the 1970s, and if a book on play directing is written by him to document his directing experience, people will have things to fall back on when aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics are being discussed in the Nigerian theatre. Linked to this is Ayò Akiñwálé's refusal to publish five good plays that he has written for the consumption of the theatre scholars in Nigeria and in the global theatre market. It is, therefore, the researcher's candid opinion that most of the produced forms of these plays be published.

It is our considered opinion that Ayò Akiñwálé should pay more attention to theatre technology in view of its multimedia aesthetics. In the age of computer and internet where there are millions of Twitter, Facebook and other social network users, and where the glamour of modern lighting sophistication is fact becoming inevitable in our literary theatre, ignoring their uses is not particularly attractive. This is very important in our modern age where art must cohabit with science. The criticism of Western technological hype should, therefore, be ignored.

Considering the fifteen aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics discovered in the theatre of Ayò Akiñwálé, we are of the opinion that Ayò Akiñwálé's dramaturgy can be comfortably called the *Dramaturgy of Festival Theatre Summation in Symbolic Literary Tradition*. This name, we hope, has captured his theatre because of the frequent appearance of festival theatre and his very symbolic dramaturgy in the literary theatre tradition. We will return to this label in future research endeavour.

The reality of Ayò Akiñwálé's theatre is that it is essentially a literary theatre that makes use of traditional African aesthetics. There is no problem with this choice. We only want to add to the artistic burden of Ayò Akiñwálé by encouraging him to select for theatrical direction, foreign plays that satisfy his thematic and artistic pre-occupations instead of producing African plays alone.

Criticism is inevitable in scholarship. Ayò Akiñwálé has done very well in his theatre and that is why this brief criticism is important. We only

want to add that most of our submissions under this sub-heading are peculiar to most Nigerian theatre directors, and cannot be placed on the table of Ayò Akińwálé's theatre alone even though his theatre is used as a voyage on which our criticism is anchored.

The Conclusion

We have attempted to examine the core issues in the aesthetics, dramaturgy and directorial poetics of Ayò Akińwálé's theatre in this chapter. As a total man of the theatre, who is living up to his intimidating frame through his productions, it is our hope that Nigerian theatre artists in particular, and the global theatre artists in general, will have one or two things to learn in the emerging experimental theatre of Ayò Akińwálé.

We want to appeal to the Nigerian theatre directors who are involved in the making of the Nigerian theatre to continue to produce experimental productions in the re-imaging of the Nigeria's lost identity. Even though there is problem of sponsorship, the artistic satisfaction and desire to re-interpret Nigeria for the Nigerian audience should be the main attraction. If we produce experimental productions, it is also important that we equally document them for posterity.

The committed dramatist is an artistic trader. How he trades his artistic products cannot be divorced from his knowledge of the theatre. We want to conclude that, with the postcolonial challenges through the endless metaphors in the iconic postcolonial theatre, the imperative of training and re-training cannot be ruled out from a theatre director. This is because a good director will want to produce the theatre of his people within the zero sum game of globalisation, *glocalisation*, *localisation*, hybridism and the endless but sophisticated cultural and political challenges.

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