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An Evaluation of Some Selected Ingenious Nigerian and Ghanaian Play Directors' Contributions to the Sustainability of African Theatre

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Abstract: The Eurocentric controversy that occupied the discourse space at a time on the non-existence of African directing and directing styles, which is an integral approach in play-making process, had been punctures by African theatre scholars. Consequent upon that, this paper chronicled scholarly directorial contributions of some selected Nigerian and Ghanaian theatre scholars who have used the art of play directing for the sustainability of African theatre. Qualitative research design was adopted, complimented by descriptive, deductive tools. Interview and participant observation approach were also employed to gather the data used in this work. In this direction, works of twenty theatre scholars were examined but eleven were purposefully selected for this study. The research finding shows that in Africa, especially among Nigerians and Ghanaians, are theatre scholars, whose ingenious contributions are in the fore in the sustainability of theatre practice in Africa. The paper concludes that these ingenious contributions were the reason why African's place in the global theatre parlance, especially in play-making art has grown in leaps and bounds. The paper therefore, recommended that more African scholars should explore more areas in inventive contributions, either in the theatre field or in other professional fields, inventive contributions, with a view to showcasing the ingenious prowess of African scholars in diverse fields.

Keywords: African Theatre, Play Directing, Directing Styles and Sustainability

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Introduction

The controversy about the non-existence of the art of play directing in the early African theatre practice, and by extension in Nigeria and Ghana which ranged over a period of time has been laid to rest by some African theatre scholars. Their works cascade the breakthrough in play-making art, using the art of play directing. Some of these scholars include Ukala (2007), who in his work; *African Theatre: Beast of no gender* made it clear that the art of directing has been long in existence in the production of African theatre. Mowah (1999, p. 146), cited in Ukala (2007, p. 38) confirms this when he reviewed Ukala's play, *Log in your eyes.* He eulogises this in the creative exposition of Ukala in the play, when he identifies a character in which "three roles are subsumed in a symbolic character director who is as well both a narrator of the story and a praise-singer". This he asserted in his submission to drive home his position that "The African theatre is that which incorporates a stage akin to the village square system in which everyone in the audience is a participant. It is for this reason that the director/producer...artistically integrated" (Ukala, 2007, p.39). Bell-Gam (2003, p. 9), in his work, "Akwafaribo": The directorial function of the master drummer in Nji-Owu performance of Opobo also succinctly declares that "long before the advent of European colonisation, rural communities in Nigeria had variety of cultural groups. Their performances were in oral form, there were leaders who organised them".

Flowing from the above, and again, citing works of the likes of Adedeji, (1981), Akinwale (2000), Johnson (2001 and 2003), Bakare (2002), Musa (2002, 2006 and 2009) and others, historical records abound that the art of directing has been a tool in the African theatre

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practice since theatre started in Africa. Also in Africa historical explorations, the Egyptian I-kher-nefert was identified as a key figure in the emergence of the art of play directing in the African theatre. In the 4th Century BC.Edwin and Goldfarb (2005, p.5) confirm the claim. Freedley and Revees (1941, p.2) cited in Musa (2007, p.25) also attest to this. This, therefore, has sustained the fact that the art of directing in Africa has its root in traditional African festivals and performances.

The influence of the Missionaries and the European Business Merchants who explore Africa cannot be obliterated from play-making art but in whatever form their contributions may be, it was a build-up on the African structural architecture on the art of play directing in African theatre tradition. Arising from this Okoye (2011, p.31) in his paper, "Postcolonial African theatre: Notes towards a Definition" identifies the "persistence of Empire on the 'postcolony' in various forms: cultural, political economic and even psychological." Although it is affirmed that the Europeans, in their various countries, before exploring Africa, have been involved in a kind of theatre practice in one form or the other. Nevertheless, one fact that we do not agree with was that their advent was the pacesetter for the use of that art of play directing in play production in Africa. It is incontrovertible too that the Missionaries in particular, encouraged theatrical enactment in churches as a way of propagating Christianity when they employed it as a mechanism for making education attractive in schools. Therefore, we can say that most of the products from these Missionary schools were the early theatre actors who were prominent in almost all the literary African theatre practice.

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The manifestation of the art of directing in Africa became more noticeable in three-theatre tradition in Nigeria and Ghana. These are the traditional theatre, professional/popular theatre and the literary theatre. Obafemi (2009, pp.269-272) identifies three additional theatre traditions to include; the First Generation Literary Theatre, Emergent and Alternative Dramatic Traditions.

In Nigeria, Late Hubert Ogunde, Late Duro Ladipo, Late Kola Ogunmola, Late Moses Olaiya and the others were in the vanguards of the traditional theatre that falls under the actor-manager-directors. In Ghana, the kind of traditional theatre performances that was in vogue during its popular traditional theatre era was the Concert Party. The Ghana's practitioners of note were Teacher Yalley of Sekondi, and later the Bobs; Bob Vans, Bob Cole and Bob Thompson. Collins (1994, p.5) confirms this when he informs that "Ghana's first generally recognised concert party actor of note was Teacher Yalley, the Headmaster of Sekondi Elementary School". The Bobs: Vans, Cole and Thompson were the next set of actors that developed the Concert Party tradition. The Ghana Concert Party leadership structure, which was more or less a solo performance outfit, can be described as actor-manager directorship.

It is encouraging that all the above efforts show African theatre professionals efforts at contributing their quota in complimenting theatre scholars' efforts at developing the theatre and the art of play directing. Not only did their contributions corrected the notion earlier held by Finegan (1970, p.331) who describes the "storytelling theatre tradition of Africa as a product of an underdeveloped mind hence, devoid of idea of aesthetics. (Finegan 1970, p.331). Ukala (2007, p.13) submits that she hastily concluded that Africans "have no idea of the aesthetics"

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This Arinde (2005) expounds on when he concludes that aesthetics is 'an oil on the canvass of play directing.'

Literature Review on the Evolutionary Trend

Two creative processes stand out in the art of play-making. The first being play-writing and the second, play directing. While the former is about conceiving fictional ideas, represented in an artistic blue print, the latter is a process of transforming the ideas from page to stage. Hence, the two processes are creative processes in their own right. The importance of directing in the process of play making, therefore, is germane in theatre practice. It is gratifying to note that the spirited efforts of Adedeji (1981), Gbilekaa (2000), Akinwale (2000), Johnson (2001 and 2003), Ejeke (2003), Bell-Gam (2003) and Musa (2002 and 2003), to mention just a few provided the needed information on the issue.

Akinwale (1997) identifies three levels of theatre practices in the Nigerian theatre; the indigenous/traditional, professional/popular and the literary theatre. Each of these levels parades in various dimensions, methods of packaging play productions (art of play directing) and effort of one who directs (the director). Theatre presentations at these three levels thrive on both oral and practical presentational forms, depending on the forum. Performance aesthetics, such as song, music and dance are extant. Although, the art of directing was not as pronounced as it were today as Musa (2007, p.30) submits that during the traditional theatre era "traditional theatre director was and definitely not aware of their functions as theatre directors".

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In a more pungent submission, Adedeji (1981, p.224) provides some historical facts regarding the practice of traditional theatre in Nigeria when he concludes that theatre "first emerged from the dramatic root of the *Egungun* (masquerade)". The dramatic root of Egungun as an organised cult is noted for its belief in the aesthetic of hierarchy in arrangement that respect status and therefore promotes leadership. This accentuates the presence art of play directing and the status of a director in the egungun performance. Also, in the work of Echeruo (1981) entitled: "The Dramatic limits of Igbo Ritual", he identifies element of the art of directing in the role played by the Chief priest of *Ebu* as in his announcement and fixing of a day for the celebration of Ebu, "Mbom Ama Festival". His role as the person who makes the communal offerings at the *Ebu* shrine (Echeruo, 1981, p.141) points to the manifestation of the director in the traditional theatre practice era.

Akinwale (2000, p. 118) in citing Adedeji (1981) identifies the status of a director in Esa Ogbin of the egungun cult. He submits that: "Esa Ogbin the progenitor of the theatre can be regarded as one of the earliest theatre directors". Musa (2007, p. 31) also asserts that "Ologbin Ologbojo was essentially a theatre director". This was after examining Adedeji's (1981, p. 223) submission on Ologbin Ologbojo of the famous Alarinjo itinerant performers where he submits that: "Ologbin Ologbojo founded the Alarinjo theatre."

In another submission, Areo (2011, p.64) confirms that "the traditional chiefs who see to the proper and accurate performance annually can also be likened to the director." This is a built up on the position that was earlier advanced in Echeruo (1981, pp.136-148) and Amankulor (1981, p.116) on Ekpe Festival, where they variously identify that "the chief priest of each

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compound co-ordinates and unites all other sacrifices...” These various submissions buttress the claim that the art of play directing and the status of a play director exist in the Nigerian traditional theatre practice and by extension Africa as all countries in African parade similar historical theatrical growth and development.

In series of interviews Affiok B. Uwatt, Bernth Lindfors, Dapo Adelugba, John Agetua, Donald Burness, Amatu Dabeyemeari Braide and host of others had with Ola Rotimi, contained in Uwatt’s (2002), they variously attest to the presence of the art of directing and director in the traditional Nigerian theatre practice. It is also apt to explicate on the leadership appellations that were prevalent in the traditional theatre period, which Musa (2007, p.30) identifies as a two-in-one appellation. He refers to it as “the community and/or Traditional theatre director”. Musa’s reason for describing them with the appellation above is principally due to the mode of their ordination. In the same vein, the study also found out that some are bestowed with the leadership status by lineage, in which case they wear the title such as; Olori-ebi (Clan head) Balode (Leader of the Hunters), Adosu Sango (Progenitor of Sango), Abore (One who offers sacrifice in a shrine) and many others. These leadership nexuses we categorise as “Lineage Director”. We also observe that some leadership status is bestowed through divine selection by the gods. Appellations of such directorial titles include Oluawo (Chief Priest), Atokun (Director) and many others. The study classifies this category of director as “Divine Director”. It is also apt to state that the traditional theatre presentational style thrives on storytelling, song, dance, drumming and pantomimic dramatisation and these are the vehicles employed for their delivery.

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This style according to Barranger (2009, p.1) "helps preserve history, religious and social customs'".

Closely following the traditional theatre practice is the Popular/professional theatre tradition. The practice, viewed from its performance styles, and from the context of its artistic elements, is sophisticated and advanced in presentations. By popular theatre, we mean "the traditional Yoruba travelling theatre", borrowing the description of Adedeji (1981, p.221). Directors of these groups are known as "actor-manager". The title is similar to the Western middle ages theatre director title. The title places at the apex, the founder of the group, who determines who does what, how and when. He casts actors (some of them who are members of his immediate and extended family), organise rehearsals, chose the venue, determines the gate fee and takes the major role in the performances. Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), Oyin Adejobi, Akin Ogungbe, Lere Paimo, Ishola Ogunshola (aka I Sho Pepper) and a few others are the progenitors of this tradition in Nigeria. Barranger (1995, p. 247) describes the "Actor-Manager" as "the leading actor who tended to retain the limelight, the best role" who are the directors in their various troupes. Some of the presentational styles that are prevalent in this theatre tradition are the use of chorus or narrator as a bridge in sustaining the relationship between the play and the audience. Other styles include the promotion of stock character and the use of comic characters in play presentations.

The level where the art of play directing is placed in its proper position is the literary theatre tradition level in Nigeria. Akinwale (1998, p.75) describes it as "the theatre tradition in which English is used as the medium of expression". Some of the Nigerian playwrights who

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popularise this tradition includes: Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi, Dapo Adelugba, Femi Osofisan, Olu Obafemi, Bayo Oduneye, Akanji Nasiru, E.O. Kofoworola, Chuck Mike, Ahmed Yerima, Ayo Akinwale, Irene Salami, Effiong Johnson, Emmanuel Emasealu, AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye, to mention just a few. Musa (2007, pp. 30-4) presents a summary of the various categories of theatre directors in the Nigerian theatre to include:

i) The Actor-Manager director who surfaced in the Nigerian theatre during the dawn of professionalism and the establishment of many theatre outfits and troupes in the country.

ii) The playwright-director- directors (who) were and are still the writers of scripted dramatic play-texts who also direct their creative writing for performance.

iii) The literary and/or the academic theatre directors, who are university dons.

iv) The Students and/ or apprentice directors.

v) The professional theatre director who are core professionals that employ different directorial styles in their play productions.

The literary theatre directors paid serious attention to the art of play directing. This explains why the era produces many directors and pot-pourri directorial styles. Consequently, this paper examines the directorial styles of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi,Dapo Adelugba, Ayo Akinwale, and AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye, all who are Nigerian theatre scholars.

Directing Styles in the Nigerian Theatre

Foremost among the propagators of creative and potent directing styles in the Nigeria theatre is Wole Soyinka. His theatrical and directorial engagements were unquantifiable. He explored myth and ritual aesthetics of African culture and values. Little wonder why Obafemi (2009, p.123) who aligns with his style describes it as: “revolution (liberation) is ritualistic in nature and since theatre is the most revolutionary art form known to man.” After an analysis of

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Soyinka's position, Obafemi concludes that Soyinka's "mytho-ritual approach helps to embrace the past, the present and the future and thus presents a vision of continuity, which is central to African metaphysics and at the same time, helps the playwright (as well as the play director) to approach society's problems historically". This is because Soyinka's approach helped a great deal in providing direction for the production of a truly representational African play.

Soyinka's directing style does not hide his tone for aesthetics in creativity in play production that will affect most touchingly his audience. Yerima (2006, pp.49-50) in referencing Soyinka's quest for artistic finesse copiously quoted him as saying that:

The director must break down the work and transmit such inner meaning, images, imageries, metaphors and symbols to his actors so that both the audience and effect are contained within a very malleable matrix, which is the sum of the physical energy and intellect, sensual and moral interaction of the audience and the protagonist forces on the stage.

To this end, we acknowledge Soyinka as one theatre scholar, who did not regard himself only as a playwright, the art for which he was famous but consistently demonstrates and initiates the art of play directing in his works. Hence his directing style was described by Adedeji (1987, p.126) cited in Ododo (2002, p.92) as one whose "Theatricalism includes the use of the time space, stage, presentational and representational style in plot, character and locale".

Another African scholar who made significant contribution to the art of play directing was Late Ola Rotimi whose works as a play director remains indelible. Osofisan (1986, p.179) cited in the works of Oga (2000, p.66) describes him as a director who: "has no equal on Nigerian stage when it comes to the control of physical space or the manipulation of audience

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response". His mastery and control of physical space, shares the attributes and the creative expertise of the Duke II Sax-Meineingen (1826-1914), who was described as master in crowd control and management on stage. Akinwale (2010, p.31) also describes Rotimi as "a master craftsman of stage iconography". Nwadigwe (2007, pp.7-8) who also confirms Oga's (2000) findings on Rotimi's style, identifies "Pressure Cooker" approach as Rotimi's rehearsal technique, which Rotimi himself describe as "Convoluted Concourse of Juxtaposed and Variegated Actions...method of bringing realism on stage by allowing actions to flow in their "naturalness" as if the audience is witnessing an unrehearsed slice of life".

On this, the submission of Emasealu (2010, p.266) also suffices when he summarises the directorial expertise of Rotimi's as a directorial style that "favours a tenacious textual analysis that involves a robust examination of the theme of the play; the emotional and intellectual substance of the play; the conflict involved and the forces that sustain the conflict". This no doubt presents the totality of Rotimi as a master of the art of play directing.

Another notable African theatre experimentalist and a play director is Dapo Adelugba, a notable speech expert. Those who have encountered him buttress the fact that Adelugba's directing style does not compromise bad speech delivery, correct pronunciation and rendition of lines by his actors in all the plays he has directed such that Musa (2001, p.135) describes him as "speech expert" who always "insisted on correct rendition of lines from his prospective actors". Drawing from Awodiya's (2011, p.257)'s attestation to Adelugba's contributions to the art of play directing in Nigeria scores Adelugba like other fore-users of the arts, the likes of Wole Soyinka, Bayo Oduneye, J.P. Clark, describes them as: "men with selfless attributes, men who

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genuinely developed the profession in terms of their contributions to human and material resources in the practice of theatre in Nigeria." Adelugba's directorial exploits presents very scintillating revelations of his academic engagement. His theoretical postulations and practical directorial works are noticeable in all areas of the theatre in Nigeria. Adelugba is a theatre personality that can be modestly described as a giant in the art, and a theatre scholar par excellence and an astute scholar. Though now late, after he retired voluntarily from the service of the University of Ibadan, he had a short stint at the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Wherever he was, he left his footprint on the sands of Nigeria theatre history. His innumerable contributions in the area of play directing left no one in doubt that some of his directorial styles, which we shall briefly examine as attested to by other theatre scholars made him stands tall among his peers and other theatre directors in Nigeria.

When Rasheed Abiodun Musa interviewed Adelugba in (2000) the interview which he tagged: "Conversation with Adelugba", he published in 2011. There he identifies the following Adelugba directorial styles:

i. A uniquely aesthetically inclined directorial concept;
ii. directorial technique as a play director that cuts across genres; and
iii. an architectural arrangement of the stage, the auditorium, those who act in plays, and those who participate in it such as: stage managers, stage hands and others.

In the same vein, Oni (2011, p.231) summarises Adelugba's pedagogical directing model as that which is "practice-based training with sound theoretical base for production that stretches

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the production capabilities of staff and students utilising productions at national and international levels".

Another Nigerian Play Director is Ayo Akinwale. Akinwale is revered for his "Outer Technique" and "Inner Resources" blocking styles. The styles which allow directors to leverage on different blocking variations; depending on the kinds of actors that the director is working with. "Outer Technique" as propounded by Akinwale (2010, p.35) is a blocking style, where "the director dictates the blocking, the actors note these blockings on their scripts and run the lines with them". On the other hand, he describes the "Inner resources" as a blocking style, where the director asked the beginners to go on set and they perform by moving themselves. The director approves some of their movements while he disapproves some". Although, we found out that he uses the latter in most cases when dealing with professional actors but mostly, he employs the two techniques. It is noted when this researcher worked with him that the Outer Technique (pre-blocking) pays when a director faces challenges of time, irrespective of whether one is working with amateurs or professionals. It also allows the director to establish his authority over his productions. However, the bad aspect of the style is that it puts actors on a disadvantage position; it makes a robot out of them but a good approach for time management.

Ayo Akinwale invented another directing style in (2009). The style is called the "Straight-Take Style". The style, has been tested and found to be beneficial to Nigerian theatre audiences. It has been found to arouse and sustain the theatre audiences' interest and aesthetically excite their desire to want to continue to patronise the theatre to watch live performances- a no dull moment experience. The "Straight-Take Style", according to Akinwale

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(2010, p. 36), indicates that "the play opens and from the beginning to the end there is no light out".

Another directing style, seen as an offshoot of Brechtian style; 'Alienation Effect'. The style, which is propounded by AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye. Adeoye he called 'Neo-alienation Style'. The style he carefully weaves to blend with the African concept of performance aesthetics that promotes audience-actors' rapport. It is also an improvement on the Brechtian's 'Alienation effect' which Adeoye avers that it is: "a theatre that gradually seeks for the decline of long dialogue or wordy plays in performance – a theatre in which every spoken word is capable of numerous meanings." (Adeoye, 2009, pp.vi)

The style emphasises twelve aesthetic of the theatre. These are:

i) the aesthetic of theme of song of audience/players systemic fraternization;
ii) multiple role playing aesthetics;
iii) the aesthetic of artistic deconstruction;
iv) the aesthetic of complete instrumentation on stage;
v) the modern operatic aesthetics;
vi) the aesthetic of human props and demystification;
vii) the multiple narrators' aesthetics;
viii) the aesthetics of de-technicalisation;
ix) on-the-stage make-up and costuming aesthetics;
x) photoramic/captions' aesthetics ;
xi) trado-modern dance aesthetics; and
xii) the critical recalling and curtain call aesthetics. (Adeoye 2009, pp.vi-vii)

A careful analysis of all the twelve aesthetics, presents the theatre as a translucent creative experience that exposes the audience, players and the society to a rewarding and enduring theatrical encounter. In the cause of this research, his style is considered as a weapon of systematic demystification of the hidden conventions that have characterised the relationship

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between the audience and the theatre in the time past. It is also seen as an approach that creates an aura of collectivism, which makes theatre going more inviting and worthwhile. Adeoye successfully displayed the style in his experimental play *The Smart Game (A 'Neo-alienation' Script*) (2009), which he directed for performance to the admiration of theatre scholars, eminent academic and journalists at the Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin and at Alliance Française on 8th July, 2002 and 26th October, 2002 respectively.

Other directing styles that have emerged, which we will not elaborate on because some theatre scholars have dealt extensively on them include J.P. Clark's 'neo-classicism', experimented in his *Ozidi* (1979), the Femi Osofisan's 'theatre of poverty', cited in Musa (2007). His 'theatre of poverty' is depicted in his simple stage settings, language and presentation seen his plays *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980), *Women of Owu* (2005) (both directed by this researcher at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana in 2009 and 2010) and 'Fabulism' as we found in *One Legend, Many Seasons* (2001).

The "sub-textualism directing style" of Effiong Johnson, concentrates on unearthing the hidden meaning buried in a play text. Musa (2007, p.46) describes itsub-text as a method through which "the scope of the text and the secret buried inside a script is expanded". These were some of the stimulating examples of African directing styles, which show that Nigerian theatre scholars have really come of age when it comes to literary, philosophical and technical contributions to theatre development. Hence, one could comfortably assert that there is hope for the future development of the Nigerian theatre and by extension African theatre .

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Directing Styles in the Ghanaian Theatre

Play directing as an art became widely embraced in Ghana around the 1940s. This was when theatre was regarded as a medium for the promotion of historical and cultural values of the people of Ghana. The credit for the literary theatrical breakthrough in Ghana goes to theatre scholars like; Kobina Sekyi (1892-1956), J. B. Danquah (1895-1965), F.K. Fiawoo (1891-1969), Joe De Graft (1924-1978), Efua T. Sutherland (1924-1996), who were identified as the early theatre scholars, and practitioners. They used their literary works to put theatre practice on course in Ghana. They were credited for using their written plays to promote theatre practice as well as a mechanism for the edification and sustenance of Ghanaian culture and ethical African values.

The historical antecedents with respect to the growth and development of theatre and play directing in Ghana, however, was not as elaborate when compared to the growth of the art in Nigeria, perhaps because of the size of the two countries. Nevertheless, the art featured in the Ghanaian three theatre traditions: traditional, popular and literary. Noteworthy is in the syncretism in the modern dramatic stylistic expressions in Ghanaian theatre. This Angmor (1996, p.188) affirms which he drew from "two distinctive forms: namely, the operatic drama and the literary drama". These two forms even though they differ in content, context, presentational and performances styles, there was evidence that their sources are from the indigenous Ghanaian verbal art and Western- influenced dramatic traditions. The operatic dramatic presentations for instance, manifests in three forms: the 'Cantata', the 'comic plays' of itinerary musical bands (popularly referred to as the 'Concert Party') and the 'Folk Opera'. Of the three, the Folk Opera

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has been discovered to be a recent dramatic phenomenon, which drew its influence from the Western culture, predominant in the elements of European opera while the former were identified to have taken after the indigenous theatre practices. Nketia (1965) cited in Angmor (1996, p.I88) describes the presentational mode of the Cantata and the Folk Opera in Ghana as that which has the dramatic elements found in the European opera influenced by its long tradition with the Christian churches. He elucidates on the performance features of that theatre tradition and remarks that "the Cantata and the Folk Opera employ music and gesture as their media… dance drama…expressed through music, poetry, mime and movement of the dance".

The above brief historical submission about the first and second stages of theatre growth in Ghana underscore the early stages of theatre practice in the country. Enthusiastically, the third stage of theatre practice in Ghana, which is the literary theatre tradition presents a robust and commendable theatre practice era. The role of Ghanaian theatre scholars, such as Efua T. Sutherland, Joe De Graft, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mohammed Ben-Abdallah, Martin Owusu, Efo Kojo Mawugbe and Victor Yankah, to mention just a few, were significant to the growth, survival and the development of the theatre in Ghana. Worthy of note is in the fact that their contributions positively encouraged the use of the art of play directing in Ghana.

Sutherland, for instance, was described as the trailblazer in the development of theatre and play directing in Ghana. She promoted the rich Ghanaian story telling tradition through an art called 'Anansesem'; a name amongst the Akan-speaking people of Ghana, which means 'Ananse stories'. 'Ananse', according to Sutherland (1975, p. v) "represent a kind of Everyman artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self examination".

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Sutherland (1975, p.vii) explains that: "Anansesem is a community art, where all the people present are performers in one way or the other, either actively or potentially."

As a propagator of this traditional art, she launched the art in her play *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975), where she artistically "used the device of moving on to the stage a pool of players representing both the specialist performers and the participating audience of Anansesem." Her play making style in Ghana was in the spirit of Anasesem, when she declares that the would-be-directors of her plays must have "the onus for making the public audience feel at one with the one-stage participating audience" (Sutherland 1975, p.vii).

Collins (2012, p.2) reflecting generally on directing style, and particularly on Sutherland states that:

The growth of a National Form of Theatre in Ghana" describes Sutherland directing style as one that "evolve the concept of an authentic African theatre which draws from both traditional and contemporary legacies...a blend of music, dance , mime, movement and dialogue with a strong social spiritual and folkloric base".

Drawing from the above one can confidently submit that Sutherland's style is deeply seated in the use pot-pourri of approaches such as her employment of narrators underscoring promotion of epics, a notable style of total theatre presentation.

Directing in Ghana, however, received a boost when a professional theatre company, Abibigroma was established in 1983 at the University of Ghana, Legon. The credit for the establishment of the outfit goes to Mohammed Ben-Abdallah. Aside the fact that the teaching of drama to undergraduate students was further enhanced at the University of Ghana, Legon, the

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resident theatre company; Abibigroma, provided a unique opportunity and a ready laboratory for play production. This in turn enhanced the application of the art of directing in play production process for the benefit of students of drama who may want to pursue directing as a career in future. It also helps in the propagation of the use of the art for play production. It was at this level that the directorial contributions of Ben-Abdallah remained indelible. His directing style tarts from script selection to audition, casting, assigning movements to actors on stage (blocking), rehearsals, dress and technical rehearsal, and his disposition to performances of his directed plays. Ben-Abdallah who is a playwright when directing, he likes directing, mostly, African plays, which explains why he prefer private audition to select actors that he had previously worked with. He does not pre-block when he commences his rehearsals but blocks scene by scene. This, the researcher observed when he understudied him in 2011during the time that he directed one of his plays. *The fall of Kunmbi,* His dislike not to want to start rehearing and blocking his actors when they are still struggling with their lines, he prefers his Stage Manager to do the preliminary blocking and come to polish the movements later.

His penchant for total theatre aesthetics, which is akin to African theatre tradition and approach to play-making permeate his directing style. He uses songs, drumming and dancing and more aesthetically, the opening glee style to prepare his audience for an African theatre experience.

Another Ghanaian theatre scholar whose directing style is examined is Martin Owusu. Owusu is a professor of theatre and drama at the University of Legon, Ghana. His directing style has been discovered to be unique in play making process. When this researcher interviewed him

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in 2011, we observed that his directing approach follows the pattern of the African traditional experimental theatre forms, which orchestrate the total theatre aesthetics. Accordingly, he directs his plays paying attention to the African aesthetic performance values of total theatre style, in which song, dance, folklore and myth are given prominence. He ensures that he does not compromise the aesthetic values that theatre patrons yearn for in the contemporary theatre performances, such as the use of music, dance and mimetic approach to mesmerise his audience. In addition to Owusu's antecedent as a theatre director, he is a prolific writer and an actor. He buttresses his style of directing during an interview that we conducted with him on 12th April 2011 at the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. He says:

I do not go by an ideological style or ethnocentric, afrocentric style. I think my style is a combination of the sum total of all the African aesthetic, Western values, Brechtian, Aristotelian Growtoski, Stanislavski etc. All these inform me in the process of directing. So, it depends on the kind of ism that one wants to put across. I have flair for big production, I like spectacle, and I like special effect (Owusu 2011. An interview).

From the above, one can decipher that Owusu's directing style can be referred to as a "mix-grill" directing style.

The directing style of another Ghanaian theatre director, Sandy Arkurst is also worthy of consideration. Sandy Arkhust is a renowned theatre scholar and a director at the University of Ghana, Legon. He expresses his passion for continuous performance; hence, we describe his directing style as "Living Theatre". Elaborating on the 'Living Theatre' style, he submits that "African theatre performances thrive on total theatre and so, in order to keep the aesthetics,

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African theatre performances must be sustained on continual running of plays". This, according to him, it is the only way through which the value of African live performance aesthetics can be sustained and kept alive throughout a performance. One of the major ways he opined that African presentational value could be sustained is to discourage the continual use of the proscenium stage. As he expressed well over thirty years ago, we also re-echo our admittance of the position that the use of proscenium stage limits creativity of African theatre directors.

Expatiating further on this, he says that the use of proscenium stage for performances erodes the cultural value and the traditional ethos of African theatre culture and practice. Arkhust's position confirms Ola Rotimi's standpoint who states during an interview cited in Uwatt (2002, p.65) that "to me, these days directing for proscenium is such drudgery, most uninspiring and lifeless". Arkhust, when explaining why he describes his directorial style as a "Living theatre", says except where he does not have option, he prefers to run his play performance non-stop devoid of intermission. This underscores that the use of proscenium stage will limit such creativity. He explains that, blackout during play performances kills action, character, dialogue and spectacle. He likens it to an excruciating task, which actors must perform to resuscitate to life, a previous comatose theatrical action. The comatose in the middle of a performance is what Adeoye (2011, p.149) refers to as 'intermission'. Intermission as he interprets it is, "silence performance". He declares that intermission, comatose, or "short break in the middle of a play should no longer be allowed to thrive in the theatre.

This paper also beamed a searchlight on the directing style of another Ghanaian theatre director, Elolo Gharbin. Gharbin, a young but versatile actor and director, lectures at the

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University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Prior to his appointment as a lecturer at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana, he was an Assistant Director, at the Centre for National Culture, Cape Coast, Ghana. Through participant-observation, we were able to examine and identify the directing style that is unique to him. This researcher was an actor in one of the plays he directed in 2010 "Refund". His style relating to blocking is what we describe as "Extemporaneous Blocking Style". Gharbin, from from his work examined does not pre-block, neither does he writes down his blocking in any prompt-book. Even though he expects his stage manager to note his blockings, he continues to effect changes as he deem fit and in alignment with his aesthetic desire. One unique style that Gharbin is noted for is his penchant for the marriage of the professional and amateurs. In another of his productions, this researcher was privilege to observe him direct Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971) in 2009. He brought professional dancers and drummers from the Centre for National Culture to join students of Department of Theatre Studies, University of Cape Coast, Ghana in 2009 to realise his total theatre aesthetics and to confirm his marriage of professionals and amateurs style.

Another Ghanaian theatre director that is worthy of note is Dzifa Glikpoe. Glikpoe is the current Director of Drama of the Abibigroma. She, as a former student of Mohammed Ben-Abdallah has drawn from him many directorial experiences some of which are the directing styles we found in the area of blocking of her actors. She is a dynamic director who strongly feels that actors should be free to display their creative instincts. In this wise, she, as a female director does not belief in assigning movements to her actors prior to the time of her rehearsals.

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Glikpoe is also a director that can be described as a "Grass-root Director". She demonstrate this by making Abibigroma, a resident theatre company that she heads to package set pieces play texts that are approved for West African Examination Council (WAEC). Like itinerary players, she moves her company from one secondary school to another in Ghana to present the set plays. This style no doubt is a demonstration of her love for the grass-root theatre. It could also be her style of beginning a catch them young programme by integrating younger students into the study of theatre later in their career.

Conclusion

The art of directing complimented by the work of theatre scholars who by extension are directors have grown in leaps and bounds in the two countries; Nigeria and Ghana. Research results contained in this paper on the state of directing and position of directors, buttress the fact that the art of directing and creative styles of directors have made directing an art in the African theatre practice. The selected theatre scholars whose works were chronicled in this paper affirm Adam and Charles (1984)'s submission cited in Adedokun (2003, pp.35-6), where they state in respect of the director that:

The Director of today is not just credited with the talents of a creative artist, and with being mere organiser of actors and scenery but someone who play through an imaginative process. The object of this creative project goes far beyond arrangement of resources. It is to give the play a life on the stage that the written text cannot possess: to enhance its virtues, disguise its faults and

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limitations, and to help a company of actors to clothe it with meaning and feeling, which exist only as an idea expressed by the performers.

Findings in this research reveal that the art of play directing and the status of play directors abound in the two countries under examination, therefore, the hope for progressive improvement of the art is high as the upcoming ones have shown mastery of the art and therefore, hope for the sustenance of theatre in Africa.

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