

About the Book

The book is a reminder of the functionality and dysfunctionality of the society. It also discusses the role of art and the artist in identifying and correcting the various ills and vices therein. However, this book is recommended for everybody.

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Indeed, all the scholarly contributions are convincing enough for us to assume that this critical work is part of the growing trends of scholarly explorations that are artistically crafted to address socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural challenges that are confronting Africans, and the world at large.

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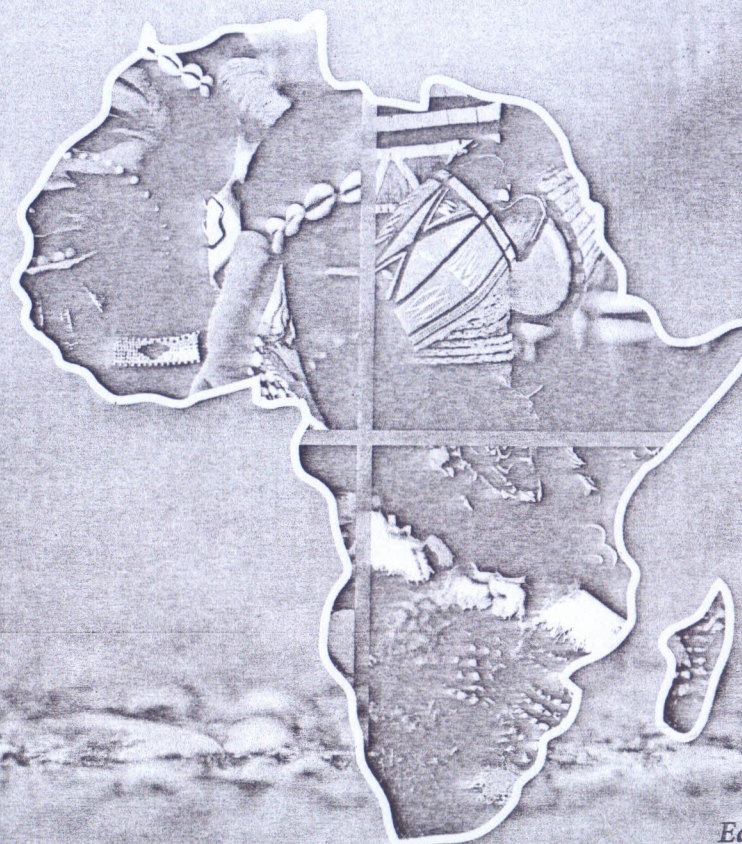
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African Culture and Performance Dynamics in the Dramaturgy of AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye



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and Philip Arthur Gborsong, Ph.D

Department of the Performing Arts, University of Ilorin,
Ilorin, Kwara State and Department of Theatre and
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The Form of Total Theatre Aesthetics in AbdulRASheed Abiodun Adeoye's Selected Works



Oludolapo Ojedirán

Introduction

Ngugi (1972, pp. 44-5) says that:

The African writer was in danger of becoming too fascinated by the yesterday of his people, and forgetting the present. Involved as he was in correcting his disfigured past, he forgot that his society was no longer peasant, with ownership of means of production, with communal celebration of joy and victory, communal sharing of sorrow and bereavement; emergent elitist middle-class and the masses were developing, their seeds being in the colonial pattern of social and economic development. And when he woke up to his task he was not a little surprised that events in post-independence African could take the turn they had taken.

As one of the foremost African writers, Ngugi (1972) observes that most writers rarely concentrate on what is happening in the present society, which makes most of them to be historical writers, orators or poets. Adeoye negates this observation as he writes to bring out the ills of his society which makes him a satirist. Presenting in his plays, Adeoye talks about the societal ills and their repercussions on the Nigerian society as a whole. Adeoye, as a writer discusses the menace of prostitution, embezzlement, unnecessary quest for wealth, gangsterism, politics and the 21st Century politics in Nigerian, which has caused more havoc than good. Adeoye (2012, p. 52) observes that:

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 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, etc".

Oikelome (2014, p. 266) stresses that the strength of total theatre performance derives from the fullness and the expressive coherence of each unit to bring into the artistic pool its unique structural, semiotic and aesthetic qualities. Total theatre as a form of performance, includes all or most of the theatrical elements, such as, music, dance, song, spectacle, special effects and other things. All these are what add the required aesthetics to the works of the African writer who intends to mix orality with the written form in order to get to the psyche of the intended audiences. Writers like Ziky Kofoworola, Ayo Akinwale, J. P. Clark, Femi Osofisan, Ahmed Yerima, Zulu Sofola, Irene Salami-Agunloye and many others, have successfully used the total theatre style; AbdulRasheed Adeoye is not an alien to it as well. Adeoye as an advocate of total theatre style of performance, who makes use of such elements as an avenue of communication, information and education rather than considering its aesthetical value alone. Akinsipe (2008, p.76) opines that African art

is the fusion of music, dance, drama and other related arts. Indeed these elements are so interwoven in the traditional performing arts, that the absence of one renders the whole performance incomplete and in most cases, unacceptable to the people.

However, while this new form of total theatre encompasses different theatrical elements, which also comprises the fusion of music, dance and drama, it is also seen as a social and artistic medium of communication, which helps to pass across social, cultural and religious messages with the use of artistic spectacles and expressions.

Synopses of both Plays

The Killers (A Social Drama)

Adeoye presents Wazobia country that is full of corruption, struggle, disorderliness and social injustice. He showcases different ethnic groups and their fight for supremacy at the beginning of the play, the student union outburst to a corrupt system, the disloyalty and dishonesty of workers in Wazobia Merit International and "the killers" in everyone who seems sane in the society. Ironically, all these characters are the representation of different people in the Nigerian society. However, with this crafted satirical work of art, the playwright is able to call the attention of everyone in order to correct the ills.

The Smart Game (A Neo-alienation Script)

This is a satirical play that discusses issues such as laziness, poverty, bribery, corruption, prostitution and HIV menace. Despite the fact that Oloriebi is hard working, his family lives in poverty which is the genesis of their disarray. Oloriebi's wife, Ebun, is influenced by her friend Nike, who uses her as a bait in order to get material things. Unknowingly, Ebun falls

into Chief Olowolayemo's tricks by becoming his mistress. While Ebun destroys her home due to greed and quest for material wealth and was later arrested for killing Chief Olowolayemo, who gives her a portion to kill her husband, Nike becomes HIV positive, regrets all her shortcomings but the deeds have been done. Adeoye presents this play as a melodramatic piece in a way whereby the good is rewarded and the bad is punished.

Total Theatre Aesthetics in Adeoye's Selected Works

The question remains about what is new about AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye's form of African total theatre. While through the plays, one notices that Adeoye intentionally infused music and dance into his dramatic piece, but apart from this, his use of spectacles add beauty and essence to his creativity. These elements include but not limited to songs, dances, language and spectacles.

Music/Songs

Music and songs play an integral part in African tradition which automatically transfers itself into the African art. Such songs and music helps to understand ones' society as they present the cultural heritages, oral tradition and societal norms embedded therein. Ekpa (2001, p. 34) observes that it is a common knowledge that music is a form of communication and a basis of interaction in the African societies.

Also, Ikibe (2017, p. 337) defines music as a combination of various sounds made pleasant, either melodically or harmonically, to the ears which could come from the human voice or musical instruments. From the beginning of the play, *The Killers (A Social Drama)*, Adeoye presents one major element of total theatre in terms of songs and dance to embellish his creative imagination in words. In the Prologue, he starts the play with a major competition amongst the different ethnic groups, which is cut short by the Director, who equally serves as the Narrator. The different songs and language used in the play shows the struggles for political, ethnical, and economical values of each community, whereby one feels superior to the other. For example:

Awa lagba x2ce: we are the elders-the leaders x2ce
 Adire funfun lagba adire: white fowl is the leader of all fowls
 Awa lagba x2ce: we are the elders-the-leaders x2ce
 Adire funfun lagba adire: white fowl is the leader of all fowls.
 Kowokowo x2ce: let it fall x2ce
 Araba o wo mo: araba tree is no longer falling
 Oju ti iroko: shame to the iroko tree
 Kowokowo: let it fall (pp.1-2)

Drumming is part of music as this talk to the audience or listeners who are able to interpret what the drummer is saying. While total theatre as it is in Africa enjoys the accompaniment of music and songs, which allows the message of the drama to be well articulated, there are various instruments that are viable to its success. To Omojola (1994, p. 147), music in traditional Nigerian society is generally conceived as part of a multi-media, total theatre experience, within which different aspects of the performing, such as, Poetry, Dance, Drama, often combine for effective communication. In Adeoye's *The Smart Game* (A 'Neo-alienation' Script), he identifies different forms of songs, such as, A Song of Caution, Song of it is Different, Song of Meat, Song of the Rich Man, Song of the Disobedient Man, The Song of the Dishonest Ifa Corpus, Song of those who own the World, and so on. The music/song in any form of total theatre will always include the chorus/orchestra, instruments and the orchestra pit. Ikibe (2017, p. 338) further observes that:

Olu Obafemi, E.O Kofoworola, Ayo Akinwale, Bakare, Ojo-Rasaki and AbdulRasheed A. Adeoye, being popularisers of total theatre, have been noted as playwrights and play directors who have employed the use of music as a vital element in the dramaturgies of their play productions.

The incorporation of music in any dramatic presentation is believed to add colour and aesthetics to its acceptability by the audience. Music can be incorporated and serve as interlude, or can be substituted for lines in drama, which invariably makes the presentation more lively, creates mood, depict settings/locale, reduces boredom in the theatre, narrates some aspects of the play and creates rhythm to dance steps. However, music/songs if successfully employed drives the play to a meaningful end. Such is seen in *The Smart Game*... where different songs are used to pass the message of the play across to the audience.

Dance

Dance is an integral part of Adeoye's writing and directorial approach. He makes use of this in order to add aesthetics and in some instances to narrate scenarios in his works. This is explained by Nketia (1974, p. 67) who claims that dance can also be used as a social and artistic medium of communication which can convey thoughts or matters of personal or social importance through the choice of movements, postures and facial expressions. Adeoye uses dance in his works as language, symbols and images which helps build his characters, and form part of his stage picturisation. However, dance as part of total theatre form is expressive, communicative and impressive which Adeoye uses to his advantage in writing his plays. For example, *The Smart Game* (A 'Neo-alienation Script) describes what the readers are to expect in a suspense mood. While the Lead drummer and the Dancers argue and yearn for perfection, it shows Adeoye's quest for a sane society:

Dancers: No! You set the pace and dictate the tune, you drum for us and we dance..

Lead Drummer: Okay. Just dance more and sing well. Let this opening glee convince our audience of our readiness for another theatre experience, and as the Lead Drummer, I will be willing to join you as he Lead Dancer (*Leads the dance*)

Dancers: Good.

(*Vibrant and energetic dance movements are enacted. The Lead Drummer falls and other Dancers beat him*)

Lead Drummer: Don't kill me and beat me no more. What I want is perfection and like the critics piercing at our performing artists, I have now discovered that the tiger is rare in the forest... (pp.3-4)

However, one should note that the quest for sanity in a society described by Adeoye's play is a bit unattainable. Seeing beyond the dialogues of this actors, Adeoye presents a dicey scenario whereby the citizens are to choose whether they want a society free of corruption, or a society that should continue in the derogatory act that has made the society loose its values.

Language

Language is a universal way of communicating which may be verbal or non-verbal. Language is dynamic as the social phenomenon influences its use. Weber, as cited by Edwards (2006) in Ogunsiji (2013, p. 23) identifies coercion, influence and authority as components of power. Language exercises certain influence on its users and this influence can be social, psychological, cultural, educational and so on. It is the configuration of all these that constitutes the power of language. While language is part of cultural heritage, it is also mostly influenced by the social values. Akinwotu (2009, p. 341) asserts that

man uses language to communicate his experience and every man draws words from his lexicon of language localised in the brain. The extent to which a man can use language creatively therefore depends, among other variables, on the number of words stored in his lexicon. When language is used creatively, it becomes an object of beauty.

Adeoye shows his use of language dexterity, language aesthetics and language effectiveness through the lines given to his characters. For example,

Narrator One: Those metallic smiles must stop. They must stop immediately! I want those pretentious dances and music to stop (Walking to the Orchestra). All those pretenses buried and hidden under your fingernails must be removed. . . why, why must you dance in the face of agonies and crises? . . . This is the majestic night of truth, a night where there is no place to hide. . . a night you should not see your discussions as mere

effusions or our drama as mere illusions. . . . (p. 4)

Adeoye's language brings out his thematic preoccupation. This allows the readers to see beyond mere drama, rather, readers see his concern and affection for the society. In one of his lines given to Narrator One as he addresses Narrator Two, the evil in the society is brought to the fore

Narrator One: What are you still waiting for then? Talk to my people about the evil called violence. Let them know that peace radiates progress and prosperity while violence is a noxious stench of destruction, the last call to death . . .

Narrator Two: Children of my mother's womb
 The pride of my father's land
 Your grievances may be genuine
 You may be robbed and punished . . .
 You may be suffering unjust cause,
 Don't put a spoke in your wheel by taking
 The laws into your hands . . .
 Seeking redress through the legal means
 Does not make you a coward- the real
 Coward it the one that hides to
 Destroy, to kill and punish
 This is the truth which fears no colour
 Oh yes, adjust yourselves to the night of
 The Killers by turning a new leaf (pp.5-6).

The above conversation shows a written script that effectively communicates with the readers' psyches and emotions to see the evils of man's inhuman nature and the society he is. However, while there is a conscious presentation of what is happening around us in the text, there is also the unconscious reasoning that makes readers see themselves as part of the evil in the society. This aligns with Atanda (2017, p. 268) observation that:

A playwright is the wordsmith who chooses words for the enunciation of the language by characters. Language and dialogue through characters move the plot and action along to reveal the theme and define the distinct characters. . . language can be verbal and non-verbal.

Verbal language is the spoken words while non-verbal language is the non-spoken words which can be in form of dance, mime and gestures in any dramatic piece. Adeoye's spoken

words are seen in the fabrication of his dialogues which are carried out by the characters while the dances, mimes and gestures are seen through the creative textual stage directions or the creative genuineness of the director.

Spectacle

The use of lighting, settings, costume, special effects and properties, which add to the visual aesthetics of any production, goes a long way in portraying its spectacles. Brockett and Ball (2004, p. 45) observes that

beginning in the nineteenth century, when visual elements were given added prominence, stage directions became usual. Since that time, the printed texts of plays have typically included many aids designed to help the reader visualise the action. In evaluating spectacle, the characteristics we should be most concerned with are the appropriateness and distinctiveness.

Adeoye's major achievement in *The Killers* is through his neo-alienation concept which allows him to showcase his spectacle in a different but concise manner. The distinctive nature in Adeoye's neo-alienation theory is intended to help characters and audience have a better understanding of his mode of presentation than using any other existing dramatic theory or style. Some of the spectacles in Adeoye's plays can be seen during performance which displays the use of props, make-ups, costumes, light and complete instrumentation on stage.

Integration of Total Theatre and Neo-alienation Dramatic Style in AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's Works

Adeoye's dramatic style is tagged, "Neo-alienation" which allows the remolding and reworking of Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect. While this is the combination of the Western and African forms of theatrical realisation on the African stage, Adeoye sees it as a form that allows experimentation and deliberate uncommon creativity which audience or readers see as a form of aesthetics that add value to the performance. The use of narration and narrative style helps put salient messages across to the readers who are interested in knowing about the performance the more. The narrators either make their comments before, or after a scene has taken place, which gives the audience more insight into the world of the playwrights. Adeoye (2009, p. vii) identifies twelve elements of the Neo-alienation theory to include:

1. The aesthetic of theme song of audience/players' systemic fraternisation
2. Multiple role-playing aesthetics
3. The aesthetics of artistic deconstruction
4. The aesthetics of human props and demystification

5. The multiple narrators' aesthetics
6. The aesthetics of de-technicalisation
7. On-the-stage make-up and costuming aesthetics
8. The aesthetics of complete instrumentation on stage
9. Photographic/captions' aesthetics
10. The modern operatic aesthetics
11. Trado-modern operatic dance aesthetics and
12. The critical recalling curtain call aesthetics.

As earlier discussed in this paper, the total theatre form is part of the African theatrical tradition which allows orality, written form and additional spectacles to be added deliberately to present aesthetically pleasing performance to the audience or reader. Considering the twelve identified canons of Adeoye's Neo-alienation style, most of these are imbibed in the total theatre aesthetics which the African artist celebrates. These twelve canons can be sub-divided into the total theatre form elements which can give readers better understanding of Adeoye's style of performance. Seeing this from Ugolo (2001, p. 2) perspective, 'music equates dance'. He sees that:

It is important to note that in Nigerian, music as a concept is multi-dimensional because it includes other elements. Amongst most ethnic groups in Nigeria a single world for music does not exist because when most ethnic groups are asked to supply the word for music they offer the word for dance, song or beating of a musical instrument. . . indeed in many Nigerian cultures the fusion is such that the word for music and dance have come to be synonymous.

In an attempt to categorise the twelve canons into Drama, Dance and Music, it is noted that the employment of the three in total theatre requires a good understanding Adeoye's view about performance as a whole. For example, the drama aspect can accommodate canons such as: the aesthetics of artistic deconstruction, the aesthetics of human props and demystification, the multiple narrators' aesthetics, the aesthetics of de-technicalisation, on-the-stage make-up and costuming aesthetics, photographic/captions' aesthetics amongst others. the dance aspect can also align with trado-modern operatic dance aesthetics and the music/song could go for; the aesthetic of theme song of audience/players' systemic fraternisation, the aesthetics of complete instrumentation on stage and the modern operatic aesthetics. However, the last of the canon which is the Critical Recalling Curtain Call Aesthetics can go for the three (drama, dance and music). Some of these dramatic canons fall under spectacle which is a way of embellishing any theatrical performance and allowing the audience to yearn for more while reading or watching. It should be noted that while some of

these canons can be seen while reading through Adeoye's plays, some can only be seen on stage during performance when put to use.

Satirical Functions in AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's Total Theatre Form

The Adeoye's total theatre form functions to:

- I. educate, entertain and evaluate the society
- II. correct the ills of the society irrespective of emotions, feelings and sentiments
- III. make people conform to the societal norms, rules and regulation
- IV. create awareness of the spiritual, cosmological and physical world
- V. help the society create a sane and remorseful citizens

Conclusion

Adeoye successfully aligned with Achebe's (2012, p. 56) assertion that:

African art as we understand it has not been distilled or purified and refined to the point where it has lost all traces of real life, lost the vitality of the street, like art from some advanced societies and academic art tend to be. In Africa, the tendency is to keep art involved with the people.

Adeoye's new form of total theatre, gives room for creative freedom, whereby new techniques and experiment are put into use, to create in the readers and audience an identity within the content and context of the theatrical exhibitions. The genuineness of Adeoye's Neo-alienation theatre style facilitates the experimental rediscovery on the African soil which is steps ahead of the Brechtian Alienation style. Using the Adeoye's plays helps us to see the socio-political, socio-cultural, socio-religious and socio-economic aspect of the Nigerian society through the art of music, dance and drama that serve as means of communication to the society. Furthermore, Adeoye's concept of total theatre has helped to recreate a communal theatre that presents the social injustice, religious intolerance, economic downturn and ethnic bigotry in a new form, thereby showcasing a society that needs thorough purging from evil deeds.

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2

Social Drama and Political Discourse in the Dramaturgy of AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye's *The Killers*



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Introduction

The Killers is written to unveil the plethora of socio-political problems bedeviling Nigeria as a nation. Thus, the play is a socially committed theatre and the playwright is correspondingly a committed writer. One can safely refer to Adeoye as a socially committed dramatist. He belongs to the contemporary generation of Nigerian playwrights and theatre practitioners who are preoccupied with moving the theatre forward and making it more relevant and functional. Osofisan (1998, p.38) has rightly argued that, "if we must change our societies, if the theatre must fulfill its vocation as an agent of progress, the dramatists who create it have no option but to pitch their camp on the side of the common people". What is fundamental in the postcolonial Nigerian theatre aesthetics is not just the writer's ability to reflect the violence around him, but also his attitude to those important social and political issues. The value of drama as an element of protest against a series of oppressions lies in the fact that the theatre is a vigorous manifestation of ideological reality of how society operates. Such an ideological commitment to national consciousness manifests in the social drama of Adeoye as the play clearly addresses itself to the poetic of nation formation and social justice. Udumukwu (2007, p.10) defines a nation as an entity determined in terms of time, space and territory on the basis of human beings who dwell it as subjects, and who have potential values.

The nation is also conceived as any group of people aspiring to a common political state-like organization. The import of this assertion is that, if such a group succeeds in forming a state, the loyalties of the members might be 'civic' rather than 'ethnic'. The nation crystallises as a shared community of interests and within the context of Nigeria establishes the foundation for protest against any form of aggression.

Fanon's essay "On National Culture", according to Udumukwu, provides a basis for