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by Ochuko Kenneth Oyoroko

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1. The paper must be original, current and scholarly;
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The Crab Journal of Theatre and Media Arts (Number 5, June 2009, 1-35)

The Drama and Theatre of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Appraisal

Adebola Ademeso (PhD)

Abstract

It is assumed that every part of the world had undergone one form or the other of oppression, repression, and loss of identity either through colonialism, neo-colonialism, racial discrimination or terrorism, leadership failure and misrule, corruption, and because of the fragile nature of these issues in the course of social discourse, many writers especially the dramatists have explored the various available techniques and styles, media of communication in stage performance like dance, music, songs and poetry that are rooted in the culture and tradition of the people. Though, the political and social environment may not be friendly to the dramatists but the consistency and social commitment in their works provide a strong force for the artistic and ideological vision that can propel development and growth in a democracy. One of these dramatists is Femi Osofisan whose drama and theatre have engaged the men and women, young and old, the rulers and the ruled in negotiating a social reengineering of the Nigerian polity for the good of all. In this study which adopts the literary and historical methodology, Osofisan is examined as a dramatist against the backdrop of his artistic and social vision. The strategies for the sustenance of his drama and theatre especially in terms of style, technique, device and experimentation are highlighted. It is our submission that Osofisan is a dramatist whose thematic preoccupation is centred on reengineering society particularly as it concerns the plight of the common man in developing societies. His lofty dramatic techniques which include the Brechtian model that is akin to traditional African theatre practice; his evocation of rich poetry and potent imagery and his application of Richard Wagner's artistic synthesis make his works accessible. Indeed, these equip the reader/audience with the tools that aid interpretation and analysis to gain a profound understanding of his plays.

Introduction

Femi Osofisan as a postcolonial playwright, and his works shall be examined against the backdrop of his drama and ideology with the aim of bringing out the metaphorical import in his drama and theatre, and

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An Evaluation of the Deconstructionist Approach to Play Directing

AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye

Abstract

The gulf between the play-text and the performance of the play is unavoidably wide in the theatre. In performance articulation, however, the written text is supposed to be theatrically matched with physical and emotional actions. In such a highly creative adventure involving man and material resources, reason must give room to reality; the text must accommodate physical actions. Accepting the relevance of literary theories to the development of theatre practice and scholarship, this paper, through the deductive methodology examines Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory and suggests its application to play directing, an art of the theatre. After drawing relevant examples from the Nigerian theatre, we observe that Derrida's deconstruction theory can be adopted for use in the global theatre market. We submit that the theatre director, who is a translator of the original intention of the playwright's play-script, should adopt Derrida's deconstruction theory for a holistic directorial interpretation and script translation.

Introduction: The Theatre Director as a Profound Translator

All over the world, theatre practice is a constantly changing phenomenon. As the theatre, a socio-political agent of engineering change, the growth and development of play directing, an important art of the theatre is paradoxically affected. The play director who is an interpreter and translator of directing art must, therefore, change its directorial style or rework an existing directorial approach to suit the taste of his audience and importantly, to suit the overall direction of theatre practice in his society. There must be constant theatrical experimentation and a grand rejection of 'theatrical conservatism' and orthodoxy if a director's theatrical directions must be relevant to the present enviable state of the theatre.

The gulf between the play-text and the play performance is also unavoidably wide in the theatre. In performance articulation, however, the written text is supposed to be theatrically matched with physical and emotional actions. In such a highly creative adventure involving man and material resources, reason must give room to reality. Theory (the thesis of the text) must, therefore, accommodate the practical theatre (performance of the text).

In the process of dramatic and or theatrical synchronization between the text and the performance in play directing, there can be a great harmony or a deliberate disharmony with the central motif of the play-text from the director. This choice of the director to stick to or impose a new vision to the interpretation and translation of a given text may, therefore, please or displease the playwright who has the legal authority over his play-text. The director, most often, goes beyond the text to satisfy his artistic vision or to please his audience.

Accepting the relevance of literary theories to the development of theatre practice and scholarship, this paper, through deductive methodology, examines Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory and suggests its application to play directing, a critical art of the theatre. We agree totally that the search for new creative styles should be a constant attraction especially to scholars in the humanities. Critically speaking, therefore, Jacques Derrida's theory, we presume, will be most suitable for the conventional/literary theatre tradition in the global theatre market. Its relevance to the African, nay, Nigerian academic theatre cannot be over-emphasised because as Illah has observed the "Nigerian Academic Theatre was and is still a veritable pedestal for literary and dramatic experimentation and training. It is virtually synonymous with Nigerian theatre" (27). This is very much in line with the position of Morrison who has stated that:

> Directors and actors must seek constantly for new means, new materials: the stuff of experimental theatre is undiscovered metaphors, deeper revelation of human possibility, dissolving of meaningless conventions and taboos. The attitude should co-exist with acknowledge of, and respect of theatrical orthodoxy: nor should adventurous actors and directors be discouraged by the fact that someone at some time has made the same experiments, with great success or disastrously ... (156).

The success of the play director, a profound translator, depends on his frequent romance with new style and new vision. If the director has to condemn an existing style in totality, he must justify this through his new theatrical metaphor. Hence, the proposal here is on the imperative of the deconstructionist approach to play directing.

Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction Theory

Born in 1930, Jacques Derrida is a French philosopher who had his philosophical training at the *Ecole Normale Superieure.* However, he subsequently taught until quite recently, his writings have had an impact upon a broad spectrum of thinking in the human sciences and cultural criticism. Although he received his doctorate d'Etat in Paris only recently (1980) and on the basis of his many publications, Derrida's writings have had and even more significant effect outside France than at home (Silverman 3).

Through several writing (in the French language and translated into English language) such as: *Of Grammatology* (1975), *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (1976), *Writing and Difference* (1978), *Dissemination* (1981), *Margins of Philosophy* (1982), *The Archeology of the Frivolous: Reading Condillac* (1980), *Spurs: Nietzche's Styles* (1987), *The Truth in Painting* (1987), *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond* (1987) and many other scholarly articles and interviews, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory has been well articulated, conceptualised and theorised.

Deconstruction is a philosophical fallout of post-structuralism although "it has spread not only into literary, art, and film criticism and theory, but also into psychoanalytic, pedagogical, and social theory" (4). As observed by Rajnath (1), it is the American literary critic that "built on its basic assumptions the magnificent edifice of a new critical movement". This impression is also corroborated by Norris (12) who says that "deconstruction has been largely transformed from a philosophical activity into a branch of literary criticism". The popularity of the theory of deconstruction and its domestication into other disciplines apart from philosophy can, therefore, be given not only to Derrida but to the vibrant American literary scholars, anthropologists and critics.

Various notions and interpretations have been given to deconstruction. While some scholars say that it de-structures structuralism and serves as its antagonist, some deconstructionists give different meaning, claiming that it nonetheless serves as a "thoroughgoing textualist critique" while Derrida himself says that there is a narrow margin

between philosophy and literature and in his *Of Grammatology* he

> makes the distinction between 'declared' and described' statements; the former being made explicitly as stated intentions or themes of the text, the latter being movements which the text manifests but which, however, remain at the level of the unthought or unthematised within the text (qtd. in Silverman 225).

While concluding on the inadequacy of the text when meaning is sought, Derrida remarks that "the structure preface-text becomes open at both ends. The text has no stable identity, stable origin ... each act of reading 'the text' is a preface to the next" (qtd. in Norris xii).

Three definitions from scholars will also be recalled here as they have conceptualised deconstruction. First is that of Wumi Raji who says that:

> A central principle of this body of criticism is the concept of *intertexuality* which directly refers to the way in which different texts exist in interdependent relationships to one another. And this is a clear negation of the concept of textual self-sufficiency or literary completeness or structuralism (Raji 223).

Considering further, the opinion of Roland Barthes, Raji concludes that "deconstruction also negates author's claim to authority over a particular work ... the author is no more than a mere guest in the text; he is no more that another figure sewn into the rug" (Raji 4).

Second is Christopher Norris' definition of deconstruction. Norris (x-xi) says that deconstruction is:

> A constant reminder of the etymological link between 'crisis' and criticism'. It makes manifest the fact that any radical shift of interpretative thought must always come up against the limits of seeming absurdity ... Deconstruction is the active antithesis of everything that criticism ought to be if one accepts its traditional values and concepts ... That literary text possessed meaning and that literary criticism sought knowledge of that meaning.

And lastly, also is Silverman (4) organic definition of deconstruction. He says that deconstruction is concerned "with offering an account of what is going on in a text – not by seeking out its meaning, or its component parts, or its systematic implications but rather by making off its relationships to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts".

From the above, it can be deduced that deconstruction theory in its

entirety detests textual autonomy and accepts the mutability or rather, the interrelationship between texts. A deconstructionist also sees the author of a work as the creator rather than the final interpreter or translator of the work. Author's 'preface' or interpretation can also lead to other interpretation(s). The core of deconstruction is criticism as it criticizes the structuralist's conviction of seeing the meaning of a text in a text through certain structures or system alone. Hence, the main attraction to this researcher and without abusing the interpretation of this theory is intertextuality, which, in layman's terms, means the interrelation of one text to the other. Intertextuality also suggests that there can never be a "decidable meaning to a text". Finally, deconstructive critics asserts that "language is a system with no positive terms ... no word or thing has meaning in itself, but derives meaning from the relationship it has within the structure of language. Deconstructive critics ... reject the possibility of objectivity or stability in language, character, or story" (Gibson 36).

Thus, deconstruction is a middle level theory because it has been applied successfully to philosophy, language, poetry and law as reasoned by Derrida's disciples. Middle level theory in the words of Saliu (11) is that theory "that has been applied to more number of cases with admirable results". In fact, deconstruction is especially being used by the American Critical Legal Studies Movements because:

> It provides a whole of useful strategies for inventing or undoing commonplace distinctions, for example: those between fact and value, the 'letter' and the 'spirit' of the law, perspicuous cases and those that require some degree of interpretative insight. More specifically, it offers a sophisticated means of making the point that all legal discourse is performative in character (Morrison 17).

Michael Ryan in "The Marxian Deconstruction Debate in Literary Theory" also concludes that deconstruction "fits into a Marxist cultural criticism more affirmatively in regard to sub-cultural practices... Those practices constitute imaginary resolutions of real structural contradictions in our society–the ideal of freedom and success juxtaposed ...sub-cultural styles are frequently also political statements of resistance especially in a working-class youth life" (Ryan 135). With its total acceptance in the social sciences, education and the humanities, proposing the theory of deconstruction into the theatre nay play directing is therefore necessitated because of the interpretation and translation role of the

theatre directors in the theatre. It is also crucial because the works of some theatre directors (styles and approaches) belonged to the director's theatre, a password for the deconstructionist's school in the romanticisation of Derrida's deconstruction theory.

Directing Styles and Approaches: A Review of Past Deconstructionist's Efforts

(A) *The Global Theatre Perspective*

Style makes a director and directorial approach, "distinguishes one director from another to the concept of theatre that underlines a director's work" (Cameron and Hoffman 307). It is, therefore, important for a theatre director to strive to carve a niche for himself and be unique by having a unique directing style and approach.

The world's foremost theatre directors such as the Egyptian I-Kher-Nafet (written record confirmed him to be first stage director), the four great Greek dramatists; Sophocles, Euripides, Aeschylus and Aristophanes do not have a well established directing style or approach because play directing was then, a part of the playwrights' art. This position has been confirmed by Huberman, Pope and Ludwig (229) when they observed that "playwrights themselves held the responsibility of mounting their own plays" to under-scope the power of the playwrights especially in the 5BC Greek theatrical record.

It must be added that in spite of lack of a clear-cut directorial style and approach to the works of some of the playwrights above, the works of William Shakespeare, for example, have been given various theoretical interpretations such as "feminism, psycho-analysis, structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, cultural materialism and reception theory" (Gibson 26-43). Most of the works of the world famous playwrights, therefore, serve as models for theatrical experimentation.

Directing style and approach can, therefore, be traced to the radical appearance and theatrical experiment of a German Nobleman, George II, the Duke of Sax-Meiningen (1826-1914) through his theatrical productions which he coordinated into 'an integrated whole'. 'Individualism' was thus brought into the enviable art of play directing, an art which is the "arrangement of the doing of others, a very complicated process requiring many exceptional skills of its own" (Hodge 1) by Meiningen between 1874 all through 1890.

This first modern director through the Meiningen company also:

> designed the historically accurate costumes and scenery. Unlike his contemporaries, he held intensive rehearsals and arranged his actors in a disciplined and coordinated fashion. The Duke became famous for a number of innovations; for example, he placed the main actors within a scene among the crowd, rather than centre; he varied the stage by using platforms and different levels; he revolutionized the manner of staging crowd scenes; and he made early use of the box set and three-dimensional scenery (Frerer 73).

With the style of organic unity, numerous staging methods and the approach of serious intensive rehearsals, Sax-Meiningen creates a directing style that other directors after him have activated and deactivated within the Meiningen tradition. This obviously serves as first major deconstructionist's effort to play directing although such semantics was never given to the Meiningen ingenuity.

The Stanislavskian directing style and approach is led and created by Constantin Stanislavsky, a producer-director-actor and co-founder of the Moscow Arts Theatre who pays special attention to the technique of acting through the actor's use of inner resources against mechanical or external acting. Statements such as "create your own method", "director must fulfil cultural mission", "we broke the old and exaggerated the new" and many more make the Stanislavskian "system" an actor's theatre rather than the director's theatre. In fact, Stanislavsky summarises his style very pungently:

> The basis of my system ... is formed by the laws of the organic nature of the actor, which I have studied thoroughly in practice. Its chief merit is that there is nothing in it I myself invented or have not checked in practice. It is natural result of experience of the stage over many years... Directors explain very cleverly what sort of result they want to get. They tell the actor what he should **not** do, but they do not tell him **how** to achieve the required result (qtd. in Roose-Evans 10).

While directing "The Fruits of knowledge", Stanislavsky narrates his "First Experience as a Director" by concluding that "I approached my work simply. It was necessary to produce a performance, and I produced it as best as I could. I showed what my imagination saw to the actors and they imitated me" (Stanislavsky 207). Stanislavsky thus translates his works through the actors' natural potentials which he helps them to discover.

Vsevolod Meyerhold; another creative director just like Gordon Craig who accepted the "idea that the playwright is somehow the enemy of the theatre" also developed and often re-write or eliminate the play-text in order to present his own artistic vision. Meyerhold agreed that two things are essential for a play production to succeed, "first, we must find the thought in a theatrical form. This form I call a Jeu de theatre and around it I shall build the performance" (Roose-Evans 21). This avant-gardist director was directorial influenced by 'Pavlov's theory of association' which centred on the attraction that the theatre audience is made to 'see what we want them to see'. This directing style calls on the theatre director to have a 'fathomless memory' because the play-text of the playwright can easily be subjected by the theatre director's use of the 'technique of the traditional vaudeville' which indicates that the director's vision is ultimately superior to the playwright's vision. Meyerhold's uniqueness and creativity at improving his own vision (the director's vision) is nothing other than reducing the play-text to mere guide and his own organic interpretation, the basic underlining art in his performance repertory.

'Gesamtkunstwerks' which is the TOTAL control of the production by the director is another directorial style

> described by Richard Wagner that anticipated modern theatrical practice. The organizing concept or "Master Artwork" 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 499).

In the Wagnerian style of directing, performers have no say: they remain under the firm control of the director whose instructions in the theatre must never be challenged. Wagner has been reported to be the most autocratic director in directing history and his style sharply contradicts division of labour or democratic spirit needed in the theatre. He necessarily translates his artistic works with little or no respect to performers/designers' concepts.

Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre and his alienation effect which has been critically described as verfremdungseffekt, disassociation, defamiliarisation, distancing, estrangement and disbelievability is an antithesis to Aristotelian's call for 'emotional involvement of the audience and actors in performance'. It is also anti-stanislavskian in acting because it negates transformation of actors and allow the audience to 'ask

questions' and 'appeal to reason' rather than to emotion.

The main attraction of the Brechtian theatrical dialectics is that "Brecht approaches drama as a form of serious practical sociology". While preaching alienation effect, Brecht submits that the

> stage and auditorium must be purged of everything 'magical' and that no hypnotic tension' should be set up ... The actor does not allow himself to become completely transformed on the stage into character he is portraying ... Given the absence of total transformation in the acting there are three aids which may help to alienate the actions and remarks of the characters being portrayed:
>
> 1. Transposition into the third person
> 2. Transposition into the past
> 3. Speaking the stage directions out loud (Willett 136-8).

Directors in the Brechtian alienation style must be ready to use heavy technical devices so as "to distance the action from the spectators and enable them to pass judgment with some detachment on corruption portrayed" (Blamires 368).

Grotowtskian's poor theatre created by Jerzy Grotowski through the "Theatre Laboratory" is another theatrical/directing style that contradicts Brechtian style, rejects Meyerhold's bio-mechanical training and negates the 'superfluous' use of make-up, costume, lighting effects and scenery in theatrical presentations. Instead, Grotowski considers "the personal and scenic technique of the actors as the core of theatre arts" (Grotowski 15).

The directorial styles and theatrical approaches of directors such as Peter Brook of the 'empty space', a space which he has theorised and theatricalised into 'the deadly theatre, the holy theatre, the rough theatre and the immediate theatre': Alan Schneider (the first American director to produced Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1956); Richard Schechner (who directed *Dionysus in 69* – a nudist theatre (Waldman 97-8) and his experiment with Environment Theatre; Jean-Louis Barrault (a versatile France director of the post-war era); Robert Wilson (of the visual tableaus and his ceaseless repetitive movements) and many more are worth considering in the saturated experimental theatre of Western world.

B. *The African Theatre Perspective*

In the African theatre also, most of the known directing styles can be located in the thousands of indigenous/traditional festival theatres. The contention on the presence of the director in the African festival theatre has been laid to rest by Akinwale, Musa and Bell-Gam. The trio concluded that there is, indeed, the presence of the director in the indigenous African performances. Whether in the Yoruba's Alarinjo travelling theatre or in the Opobo's Nji-Owu performance, the director certainly and importantly has numerous directorial functions to perform although his directorial style is mostly tied to the cultural nuances of his traditional performance.

Interestingly, African theatre directors of the conventional/literary theatre too have numerous directorial styles and approaches to performance making. Through Circle Player, African Theatre Workshop, Serpent Players of New Brighton, the Space Theatre and the New African Group, Athol Fugard, the popular South African dramatist popularized what is now known as "Theatre of Commitment" which centres on 'experimental playmaking'. Fugard's theatre is the actor's theatre. There is no much on stage aesthetics or décor rather, emphasis is on the need to revive the South African indigenous theatrical traditions which in the words of Dennis Walder, Fugard did by re-awakening "the surviving influence of indigenous African traditions of storytelling and response. The resulting synthesis challenged familiar theatre conventions, at the same time as it challenged the entangling ideologies of race and class in South Africa" (qtd. in Fugard xiv).

Athol Fugard in collaboration with Zakes Mokae, John Kani and Winston Ntshona created and produced plays such as *Klass and the Devil* (1956), *The Cell* (1957), *No-Good Friday* (1958), *Nongogo* (1959), *Hello and Goodbye* (1965), *The Coat* (1967), *People are Living There* (1968), *Boesman and Lena* (1969), *Sizwe Banzi is Dead* (1972), *The Island* (1973), *My Children! My Africa!* (1989), *Playland* (1992) and many more specifically to fight apartheid, dramatise the plights and sufferings of the black South Africans and to "give back to the people their voices" in a country where the minority whites rule over the black especially during the apartheid regime of the whites. These plays were mostly 'produced between 1958 and 1973'.

Fugard is an actor, playwright, producer and above all, a director. His directorial style includes the use of 'ritual rite and ceremonies' and 'urban song and dance' to build up the overall aesthetics of his

performance. The actor, to Fugard, is the sole determiner of a production.

The 'Fugardian drama' is also a workshop theatre and the director using the Fugardian style is only a collaborator who must be intelligent because 'without intelligent direction there can be no collaboration" (Nelms 5). Athol Fugard also makes use of any available space or makeshifts set rather than the heavily equipped Western theatre setting by producing performances in the open space or market square.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's wonder through the Kamiriithu theatre in Kenya also succeeded because of the directing style employed by him and his co-playwrights/directors, Ngugi wa Mirii, Kimani Gecau, Waigwa Wachiira and so on when they wrote, directed and produce *Ngaahika Ndeenda-I Will Marry When I Want* (1982) at Kenya through the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre. The main wonder of this particular performance is that the peasants and workers demonstrated and demanded from the government of the day, their long denied rights after watching the final performance of the play, the rehearsals which they were part of in 1977.

Ngugi's theatre of relevance, collective theatre or theatre of revolution promotes the Mau-Mau manifesto as represented by Kenya Land and Freedom Army who fought the oppressive imperialist and the neo-colonialist's government of Kenya especially under Arap Moi. Ngugi's directing style is mainly translatory and interpretative. He brought back, and to the stage, his people's agonies through the dramatic recall of major events that characterised and reshaped the past history of the Kenyan people. His approach is anchored on the theatre of the people, created for and partly by the people and performed by the people for the people. Ngugi used the following style of directing and approach in his theatrical presentations:

1. The use of open space-air theatre bereft of conventional theatre structures.
2. Open air rehearsals.
3. The method of using the people who are part of the struggle as the cast.
4. The use of local language and local theatrical idiom such as; dance, music and song all laced with local rhythm.

Relating the success of the 1977 experiment in Kenya, Ngugi recalls that:

> The results of this effort to evolve an authentic language of African theatre were obvious when the play opened to a paying audience on 2 October 1977... the performances were timed for Sunday afternoon. Evenings would have been too cold for everybody. *Ngaahika Ndeena* was an immediate success with people coming from afar, even in hired buses and taxis, to see the show. Theatre became what it had been: part of a collective festival. Some people know the lines almost as well as the actors and their joy was in seeing the variations by actors on different occasions to different audiences (wa Thiong'o 57).

The same *Ngaahika Ndeenda* was performed in 1984 by Wazalendo players through the Africa Centre in London to mark the centenary festival of the Berlin Conference of 1884. Unlike the Kenya experiment, the play this time around and according to Ngugi was rehearsed "in different community centres. One of the most successful was the last one which took place in Brixton, where people literally sat from 2 in the afternoon till 6.30, discussing various aspects of the play and various aspects of the rehearsals which they had seen" (qtd. in Eyoh, 1986:111).

Although it has been reported that the government of Arap Moi razed the Kamirritu Community Educational Cultural Centre and banned the "Famous Theatre II" in 1982, Ngugi and his theatre workers have made a clear statement through their collective theatre that, idea cannot be killed and that a 'revolutionary shrine' well and clearly "enshrined in the revolutionary of a people" can never be destroyed.

Ebrahim Hussein, the Tanzanian foremost playwright/director also celebrates the Maji Maji uprising through his play, *Kinjeketile* (1970). Hussein deconstructs the historical reality of the Maji Maji uprising

> in order to show his audiences what he sees as the more valid wider historical processes: the structure of resistance, if one likes, to colonialism. He wishes to make this presentation accessible to ordinary folk for whom this historical process is by no means complete (Etherton 164).

Although German machines, bad planning, the deception or the failure of the power of the gods and disunity led to the failure of Maji Maji rebellion yet Hussein presents a unique episodic theatrical style where "each scene makes a specific point which builds up into the ... argument".

In Ghana, Efua T. Sutherland's production of *The Marriage of*

Anansewa (1975) creates a new vista in the dramatic icon of the African story telling performance through Anansegoro, the traditional theatre which starts as domestic performance before its promotion into the conventional stage. Sutherland explains more on the theatrical concept of Anansegoro:

> The stories are composed with performance demands in mind and in a number of different forms and styles. Most are in a combination of narrative prose and poetry which is meant to be sung or rhythmically recited on the basis of solo and choral response (Sutherland v).

Through Ghana Experimental Theatre, Kusum Agoromba, Kodzidan, Workers' Brigade Drama Group and Drama Studio Players, Anasegoro has been experimented with through different directorial styles and approaches but with one main theatrical method of the narrative technique.

As a director, the core of the directorial style and approach of Sutherland's Anasegoro is that:

(a) There must be a perfect role relation between the audience and the players. The players are part of the audience and sizeable members of the audience are players.
(b) Singing, dancing and musical accompaniment must dominate the performance. Anansegoro is highly operatic and of the total theatre mode in nature.
(c) Ananse, the main character through the Akan's Anansesem has series of stories which are domesticated into the story telling performance.
(d) As a strong product of Ghana's art theatre, Anasegoro through *The Marriage of Anansewa* demands an 'extensive stylisation' which main convention in the words of Michael Etherton includes: "... (1) effecting the distorting of time: (2) completing the action of the drama; (3) using stage space (visual transformations); (4) using speech, music, song and dance (aural transformations)" (Etherton 197).

Any good review of the various directing styles and approaches in the Nigerian conventional theatre must consider the enviable directorial roles of the following Nigerian theatre directors for their enviable roles in promoting the art of play directing in the Nigerian theatre apart from

their numerous counterparts in the popular, traditional and festival theatres: Dapo Adelugba, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark, Ola Rotimi, Bayo Oduneye, Bode Sowande, Femi Osofisan, John Ekwere, Zulu Sofola, Olu Akomolafe, Olu Obafemi, Kalu Uka, Bode Osanyin, Sam Ukala, Ziky Kofoworola, Ahmed Yerima, Felix Okolo, Jide Ogungbade, Inih Ebong, Sonny Oti, Steve Abah, Jenkeri Zakari Okwori, Ayo Akinwale, Saint Gbilekaa, Bakare Ojo Rasaki, Emmanuel Oga, Effiong Johnson, Ted Anyebe, Sola Fosudo and many more.

In a study, titled "Directing Styles and the Nigerian Theatre", this researcher has documented eight directing styles which are common denominators in the Nigerian theatre and that which the directors above created and developed. They are "the preconceived or pre-blocking directing style, inner resources/actor's freedom directing style, inner and outer resources directing style, the traditional directing style, the improvisational directing style, the director's theatre directing style, the editing directing style and the computer directing style"(Musa 8).

It is however important to talk briefly on some major directorial approaches of some Nigerian directors. First is Dapo Adelugba of the Ibadan School of Theatre. He is known as "Daodu" through his role during the production of Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* in the 60s. Adelugbaresque or Daoduism is therefore synonymous with the art of play directing in the Nigerian theatre. Being one of the foremost director in the literary theatre tradition, Adelugbaresque or Daoduism is a password for excellence in theatre directing where emphasis is on intensive rehearsals, multiple casting, the use and development of 'greenhorns' in the theatre, non-imposition of acting style(s) on the actors and the designers, excellent character portrayal, democratic spirit in play production process, repertory theatre, disciple and excellent speech productions. Dapo Adelugba's theatrical directions spanned four decades and he has directed well over thirty plays from the African, Irish, European and American traditions. He is also a reputed expert in the production of the plays of Wole Soyinka having directed seven of Soyinka's plays.

As a playwright/director, poet and novelist, Wole Soyinka needs no introduction in the global theatre market and whether through the Art Theatre at the University of Ibadan, the Guerrilla Theatre Unit of the then University of Ife, in the American stage or European stage, Wole Soyinka, has sought a redefinition of stage directing and theatrical practice from his supposed ritual theatre to the overtly experimental

performances and the comical cum satirical tradition which we have romanticised into the fifth stage. As a director, and during rehearsals, Soyinka is good at slashing or editing plays'. In fact, Gibbs (71) once observed that:

> Soyinka himself has, as noted in the case of *Kongi's Harvest* produced his work and offered different interpretations to it. Apart from two productions of *Kongi's Harvest*, he has produced parts of *A Dance* twice. A notable point about the first production (1960) was that Soyinka replaced "The Dance of the Half-Child" as he conceived it with a more modest routine.

For Soyinka, the play-text is "a mere map with many possible routes". Clarity of speech through excellent pronunciation of words, life-like portrayal of characters and many more are some of the non-negotiable styles that Soyinka has used as a director. Soyinka's stage must also be loaded with professionals whether as cast or crew. No failure or trial in the theatrical direction of Wole Soyinka.

A contract to Adelugbaresque or Daoduism in the art of play directing in Nigerian is theatre director/playwright, Late Ola Rotimi. Rotimi's theatre is the director's theatre because there is a near total control of production by Ola Rotimi especially through Ori Olokun's Company and African Cradle Theatre affectionately called Rotimi's (ACT). Rotimi has written and directed some of the best classics in the Nigerian theatre such as *The God's are not to Blame* (1971), *Ovonramwen N'ogbaisi* (1974), *Kurunmi* (1972), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1983) and many more. The directorial emphasis of Ola Rotimi theatre while auditioning includes the use of "solicited private audition" and frequently with "general audition from the areas of singing, acting and dancing. In singing, Rotimi... insists that song may be in any language... that the song must have a tune to it. It must have a range as well as be pleasing to the ear" (Oga 37).

Rotimi creates "The Pressure Cooker Technique" to make the actors to be alert to their roles and it is a style which, in the words of Emmanuel Oga, one of the versatile scholars in the Rotimian's school involves the sprinkling of idiophone musical instrument loudly and in quick succession. The actor is to render his line and fulfil blockings at a very fast pace with this bewildering clangour in the background. The choice of idiophones, explains Rotimi, is predicated on the understanding that a membranous instrument, for instance as a result of vibrations, is

bound to 'drown' the clarity of the actor's voice thereby rendering it indistinct (106).

Femi Osofisan, Karl Marx and Bertolt Brecht's representative in the Nigerian theatre is also a playwright/director of the left. Osofisan's impoverished and improvisational theatre under the experimental tradition and his directing approach which Ayo Akinwale, a strong disciple in the Osofisan's theatre says "engages the school of inner resources approach" (19) in play directing and that which Johnson (97) called "The Aesthetic of Poverty" also belonged to the Grotowskian tradition. Effiong Johnson, however, missed the point when he says that his book is the first to publish Osofisan's directorial approach. Scholars such as Awodiya (1993 and 1995), Obafemi (1996), Akinwale (2000 and 2001) and Osofisan himself (2001) and many more have comprehensively documented the directorial/theatrical approach of Femi Osofisan all, concluding that, Osofisan's theatrical style leaned towards the Grotowskian's Poor Theatre and the repeated content of most of his plays promotes the tenet and ideal of revolution and Marxism. Other styles such as Sam Ukala's folkism, Effiong Johnson's theatre of poverty, Ayo Akinwale's festival/travelling theatre which he reworked into the modern theatre and many more are important styles and approaches that are usually influenced by situation and environment which directors operate from apart from the intellectual capability, financial power, nature of and types of performers and crew at hand, structures/types of stage for performance and so on which can influence the outcome of theatrical productions.

Directing styles and approaches also cannot be divorced from ideological tenets and theoretical base. While Meyerhold relied heavily on Pavlov's theory of Association in his style, Grotowski is 'drenched in both Communism and Catholicism' to propose his poor theatre with disciples such as Osofisan and Johnson. Marxism also assisted Brecht in his practical theatre and revolutionary sealed is also responsible for the Fugardian and the collective theatre of Ngugi.

The Application of Deconstruction Theory to Play Directing

Directing entails the coordination of many theatrical duties into one. The core of the director's duties, however, is the artistic duty. Under the artistic duty of the director in play directing, the theatre director; organises the audition which he will use to do a proper casting, runs

the rehearsals (here fundamental artistic duties of composition, picturisation, readings, blocking rehearsals and many more) usually take place. In play directing, the director is basically an interpreter, a translator and a mediator. He interprets and translates the playwright's script and mediates between the playwright and the audience on one hand and between the performers and the audience on the other.

As an interpreter, the director normally reads many play-texts and either through commission or self-sponsored, he digests the thematic pre-occupation(s) of the chosen script and mediates between the playwright and audience on one hand and between the performers and the audience on the other.

As an interpreter, the director normally reads many play-texts and either through commission or self-sponsored, he digests the thematic pre-occupation(s) of the chosen script as contained in the play-script for possible stage performance. In this process, the director has four visions to work with and his decision or indecision on the medley of these visions can make or mar his artistic creativity. The four visions are:

1. The playwright's vision as contained in the play-text.
2. The director's vision of the play-text (this may likely negate the playwright's thematic vision)
3. The performer's vision or projection of the role.
4. And the vision of the audience or the society which may be a fall-out of the playwright's or the director's vision.

In the four listed visions above, theory (reason) must give room for practice (reality).

Usually, the director's vision may be imposed on the script and this is one of the tenets of deconstruction where the director often reduces the playwright to 'a mere guest in the text'. When a director does this, he is only deconstructing within his own socio-political and artistic reality.

Second also is the difficulty of getting accurate or correct interpretation to a play-text. Well, through back-stage-blurbs or prefaces to plays, playwrights often summarise the thematic concerns of their plays. Some playwrights also write brief notes on the dramaturgical style(s) that they want the prospective directors to use while directing their plays. To the deconstructionists, there is a differences between 'declared and described statements' because the declared statement often captures

the playwright's intention and the theatre director may use the described statement "which the text manifests but which however, remain at the level of the untaught or the unthematised within the text" to capture the directorial philosophy or concept of the play in the process of production. This can be arrived at through a critical interpretation of the text on the part of the director while translating for stage performance.

Thus as 'each act of reading the text is a preface to the next' so also is the fact that each production of a play through deconstruction theory is the production of a new play, a new style yet of the same text.

Deconstructionists re-evaluate the difference between 'crisis and criticism' and link it with the distinction between 'literary texts and literary criticism' to underscore the fact that there can never be a 'decidable meaning to a text'. This, no doubt is easy to accept because the theatre director is a critic who sees a literary text as mere working document or guide which he can reject or criticize by giving it a new translation.

Deconstructionists' rejection of objectivity or 'stability in language, character, or story' finds solace in some aesthetic theories because objectivity and subjectivity, stability or instability is tenuous aesthetic arguments for love is in the eye of the beholder. What is objective to director 'A' may be subjective to director 'B'. So, the search to deconstruct is in itself the search to know more about the existing script. This search must be done with vigour not with self-indulgence on the part of the theatre director.

Deconstruction negates traditional style of directing and theatrical orthodoxy to accept sub-textualism, a directing theory where sub-texts are seeing as necessary ingredients in directorial conception (Hodge, 1971; Styan, 1979; Wilson, 1991; Johnson, 2001 and Musa, 2007). Sub-text expands the scope of the text and the hidden secret buried inside a script. Its meaning is almost deeper than the surface meaning of the text but an early discovery of the sub-text invariably widens the directorial scope and engenders a proper understanding of the play for performance. This notion too has been effectively theorized by deconstructionists for they reasoned that deconstruction is not only concerned 'with what is going on in a text' but "rather by marking off its relationship to other texts, its contexts, its sub-texts".

The major attraction of deconstruction is intertexuality which looks at the relationship between one text and the other. So, most plays are

written through stories, myths and other fables where adaptation, transposition or transplantation has also become crucial in creative writing. If playwrights can adapt or transplant (originality is lost in this process) then, theatre directors can as well, re-create and impose their own artistic visions on dramatic scripts.

Under the aesthetic of artistic deconstruction, the artistic director must, therefore, super-impose his own artistic vision in the performance web of the play. The deconstructionist's director searches beyond the script because he is interested in artistic deconstruction, but his created play-within-the performance under the aesthetic of artistic deconstruction must be relevant to the play and it must expand the performance's aesthetic richness and not destroy it.

Directors using the theory of deconstruction in play directing are, therefore, free to create theme songs, numerous songs, invent new but brief dialogue and they can create numerous but useful characters with or without speaking roles even if playwright did not create them to spice up their performances.

It is envisaged that there will be constant friction between the playwright and the artistic director under the aesthetic of artistic deconstruction because the playwright might come to the theatre and see a new play totally different from his own play and that which may go beyond his imagination. This theatrical distraction, however, does not make the artistic director an artistic rebel. Rather, it only imposes on the director the rare opportunity of breaking the play into minutest details, breaking the barrier of communication and allowing the performances (especially of the so called complex plays) to be more understandable by the audience through the actions and reactions of the created characters' dramatic behaviours.

Directors in the Deconstructionist's School: Recent Example from the Nigerian Theatre

Even before Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory was formulated, theatre directors have radically reinvented the theatre stage through their various experimental performances. Directors such as; Richard Wagner, Sax Meiningen, Vsevolod Meyerhold, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski, Ngugi wa Thiong'o; Ola Rotimi, Inih Ebong, Ahmed Yerima, Effiong Johnson, Emmanuel Oga, Jenks Zakari Okwori and many more belonged to the director's theatre/deconstructionist's school of play directing.

Some Nigerian theatre directors were interviewed with the hope of getting their opinion on the workability or suitability of deconstruction theory to play directing. Ahmed Yerima, the present General Manager of National Theatre and the Artistic Director of National Troupe of Nigeria and the researcher revisited the aesthetic of deconstruction with particular reference to his theatrical direction of Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) in July, 2004:

> Musa: I am a director in the deconstructionist's school... do you suggest that we deconstruct... plays as artistic directors?
>
> Yerima: I think so. I think that there is a need for it. Like what I am doing with *Death and the King's Horseman* right now, I am deconstructing it within my own social reality, within my own understanding of the Yoruba culture...[1]

Bakare Ojo Rasaki, the former Artistic Director to Gambian National Troupe and a consultant multi-talented dance choreographer to over fifteen State Councils of Arts and Culture in Nigeria has also directed and deconstructed Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963) by creating four additional songs to the final performance of the play in the late 1980s. Effiong Johnson of the Uyo School of Drama in Nigeria on his own says that directors do not owe playwrights 'any obligation at directing to suite their interpretation'. He is a radical deconstructionist.

Unwemedimo Atakpo, a Nigerian play director also deconstructed Sonny Sampson-Akpan's *Comments* (a one-man, one-act play) radically to suite his own directorial interpretation. Stephen Inegbe captures Atakpo's theatrical deconstruction of *Comments* more clearly thus:

> As directed by Unwemedimo Atakpo, *Comments* displays, to a considerable extent, the creative freedom of a director without unnecessarily endangering and distorting the focus of the playwright. Evolving a style of fourteen other characters who performed as actors, dancers and musicians in a play meant for one (69).

Through 'neo-alienation' style (a theatrical cum directorial style), this researcher also directed "The Smart Game" written for the Department of Performing Arts' Lunch Time Production of University of Ilorin, Nigeria in year 2002 and Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (directed for the French Cultural Centre, Alliance Francaise, Ilorin in 2004). In the two productions, actors stayed on the stage throughout the performances and in *The Lion and the Jewel*, Sixty-six performers were used. Thirty

seven new songs were also created to build on a play which the researcher embellished with point by point dance, mime and pantomime, opera and musicals to break long words and perceived artistic cum linguistics distractions in the play.

Importantly, however, deconstruction theory in play directing is not a call for the destruction of the playwright's 'intention and purpose' in a play. It however, emphasised the directorial liberty of a director as he strives to give new translation, new vision and new style to plays through the art of play directing. After all, and in spite of the playwrights' poetic license, they often revised their plays when confronted with the limits or the errors in the first publication of their plays. More than the playwright, the director who will translate words into actions must have some freedom in the business of artistic communication. This is because of the "overtly dynamic mechanics and elastic aesthetics of the art of play directing" (Musa 2001).

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed some major directing styles and approaches and focused specially on the imperative of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction theory to play directing. The endless nature of creativity, therefore, makes the theatre director a constant searcher and researcher. Deconstruction is a fruitful search for dramatic and theatrical presentations and as a middle level theory it should, therefore, be seen as the ongoing reality in the theatre nay play directing. Directors who are deconstructing plays are only doing more to expand the boundaries and frontiers of creativity, of translation.

In the world of literary discourse, there have always been numerous theoretical foundations through various epochal and ideological interventions such as classicism, romanticism, neo-classicism, modernism, structuralism, post-modernism, post-structuralism, feminism, Marxism, dialogism and so on. In African literary discourse also, critics have been divided into various groups. We therefore have: "Larsonist critics, African Euro-centric critics, Bolekeja critics, Ogunist critics and Marxist critics" (Gugelberger 11-12) with ideological bents such as; Negritude and Tigritude and their political theories of socialism/communism and capitalism and many more leading. The attractions in Derrida's deconstruction theory are very crucial and important in building good theatrical directions and must not be ignored especially by theatre directors of the experimental school. Directors must

deconstruct to create new social vision and articulate them into excellent performances from the endless list of plays in the Western, Asian and African theatre traditions.

Note

1. Ahmed Yerima in an interview with the researcher on the 1st of July, 2004 at the Conference Centre of the University of Lagos, Lagos State, Nigeria.

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A Study of Select Female Characters in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother* Jero and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

Edward Egbo Imo

Abstract

This paper is chiefly concerned with a comparative evaluation of some key female characters namely: Amope in Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero* and Sikira and Liza in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. In the course of the evaluation which has been carried out using the literary methodology, it was observed that these characters in their differing socio-cultural backgrounds and socio-economic statuses, champion the cause of women emancipation in a highly patriarchal society such as Nigeria. This paper, therefore, is a clarion call on contemporary Nigerian playwrights to portray women as agents of social change rather than mere kitchen managers in an ever-changing world.

Introduction

Scholarly investigations into human artistry of the past reveal that unlike other animals, man has the power to picture in his mind what is not but what might be. His experience is neither limited to the things he can see, hear or touch nor is he only able to accumulate, record, and profit by the experiences of the past, but also to imagine and devise different means of inventing new ideas. These new ideas are further emphasised through the artist's sense of selectivity – when man begins to create, record or communicate what he has seen or felt as he has experienced it – art is said to have begun. It is interesting to note that, of all the arts, theatre is the most pragmatic – what works is good and what works is eventually accepted and this becomes the theatre of the period.

There is no gainsaying that drama requires readers to contribute more than any other form of fiction. Within the ambience of drama, not