

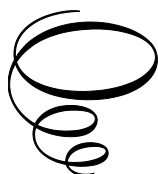
Nigerian Stage Directors' Philosophies, Aesthetics and Ideologies

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Edited by

Bisi Adigun and Duro Oni

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“When I pick up a play, I research, read up other plays by the playwright, and anything the man has said. And that makes every new play challenging”.

—Bayo Oduneye (1936-2021).

This book is dedicated to Bayo Oduneye (Uncle B), who was the mentor and/or teacher of a number of directors featured in this book, and who sadly passed on to glory in November 2021.

We would also like to dedicate this book to Wole Oguntokun (1967-2024), the lawyer-turned renegade theatre director, who contributed to this book but died, fortuitously, on World Theatre Day, 26 March, 2024.

May the souls of the dear departed rest in peace.

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Finally, our sincere gratitude goes to Cambridge Scholars for agreeing to be our publisher. It has been an honour and a sheer joy working with Adam Rummens, Amanda Millar and Sophie Edmonson.

FOREWORD

SUNNY ODODO¹

Modern Nigerian theatre is synonymous with the starting point of the late Chief Hubert Ogunde's professional theatre in 1944. Nearly eighty years down the line, the Nigerian theatre has become a compelling industry and part of Nigerian heritage. But how much of this heritage is known to the world? How much is preserved for posterity and knowledge-sharing? I dare say that not much work has been done to provide global references for Nigerian theatre due to poor documentation. Given the volume of theatre productions in Nigeria for almost eight decades, across genres, cultures, forms and intercultural dimensions, Nigerian theatre certainly has something that the globe can learn from; our theatre forms and styles certainly have ingredients to influence other theatre cultures.

The theatre is an organic human experience in its composite and collaborative nature, providing an elaborate landscape for general and specialised human participation. Like an onion, theatre production is multi-layered, and each layer is an industry propelled by philosophies, styles and aesthetics. These elements are what define the character and identity of an art form. Theatre directing is the art of combining all the elements of a stage production together into a unified whole that satisfies an artistic vision. Every production is also driven by the directorial style of its director, whose background (as an actor, stage manager, technical director, musician, etc.) helps to shape and sharpen that artistic vision. All these tell stories of production processes. However, the Nigerian stories have not been adequately told because the owners of the stories have remained mute. Nigerian stage directors have created—and continue to create—exciting and memorable productions, but most don't document them for knowledge sharing and preservation. This is the vital vacuum that *Nigerian Stage Directors' Philosophies, Aesthetics & Ideologies* has come to fill.

¹ Professor Ododo was the GM/CEO of The National Theatre from August 2020 to January 2024.

This vital work chronicles the Nigerian performance space, and the astute input of thirty Nigerian directors. The book provides the basis for an intelligent discussion on the unique homegrown directorial styles, and their values for the modern stage. These provide viable alternatives for the expansion of stage aesthetics and production hierarchies which are creatively buoyed by necessities and needs. Though long overdue, Nigerian directorial voices are finally here for all to listen to. The vibrancy of the Nigerian theatre does not just 'happen' but develops through a deliberate process, and that is exactly what this book shares with us. Indeed, it is also time to commission works on the directorial approaches of early Nigerian directors, such as Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Dapo Adelugba, Ola Rotimi, and Bayo Oduneye—all of blessed memory—and indeed, Wole Soyinka, in order to see a more robust picture of Nigerian stage directorial dialectics. Surely, this book will influence and inspire new directorial thoughts and approaches for the next decade. It is a 'must have' for all.

Sunday Enessi Ododo, FNAL (31 May, 2023).
Professor of Performance Aesthetics and Theatre Technology

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS GLOBALISING INDIGENOUS NIGERIAN DIRECTING EPISTEMOLOGY

BISI ADIGUN AND DURO ONI

In any theatre or stage production, the role of the stage director is singularly the most comprehensive. They are the individuals in the theatre business who are charged with the sole responsibility for supervising and coordinating all the artistic and technical activities that are required for the staging of any theatrical performance, particularly the transformation of a play from page to stage. Thus, any play or stage performance presented before a live audience in any part of the world, including here in Nigeria, is the vision and imaginative work of a stage director. The theatre performances of Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Isola Ogunsola (a.k.a I Show Pepper) and many other Nigerian dynamic stage directors, have been a delight for theatre goers in the South West of Nigeria for decades. However, when one puts into a Google search engine the query, ‘list stage directors’, no single Nigerian director, be they male, female, young, old, dead or alive, is included in the list of more than 40 theatre directors provided in response. In fact, the only names listed on Google are Caucasian directors, such as Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Max Reinhardt, Tyrone Guthrie, Bertolt Brecht, Antonin Artaud, and so on. Ironically, it is the theories and philosophies of these white directors that take prominence in the syllabuses and curricula of theatre arts departments in all the Nigerian universities where directorial courses or their equivalent are offered. Meanwhile, Nigerians such as Hubert Ogunde, the founding father of Nigerian theatre, as well as Duro Ladipo, have been in the business of theatre-making since precolonial times. However, neither of them is included in Google’s list of stage directors. It may be argued that this is because they belong to the so-called ‘popular’ theatre tradition. However this raises the question of directors of traditional literary theatre, such as Dapo Adelugba, Ola Rotimi and Bayo Oduneye—all of blessed memory—not to mention the Nobel Laureate

Wole Soyinka, who has directed extensively all over the world. This research is, therefore, placing the indigenous knowledge of the art of stage directing in Nigeria on the world map by having thirty Nigerian stage directors document their expertise in a book. After all, according to a Yoruba saying, "It is what one has that one appreciates, hence, the child of a firewood seller appreciates the bark of a tree".

In his essay 'Much Ado about Brecht',¹ Ola Rotimi argues that there is nothing novel about the Brechtian so-called *Verfremdungseffekt* by virtue of the fact that it was already an element of African traditional theatre practice long before Bertolt Brecht was born. To reinforce his argument, Ola Rotimi concludes that there is nothing the vulture has that the baboon does not have: the vulture is bald in the head; the baboon is bald in the bottom. Ola Rotimi's message in the essay is crystal clear: it was not the Western world that brought culture to Africa. He therefore enjoins theatre scholars and practitioners in the developing world to "pause and ponder on our past, so as to enable us to confront the present and the future on a more informed footing" (1990, 260). It is apposite that this quote is from an essay written over thirty years ago by one of the most celebrated Nigerian directors, because the aim of this book is to carefully document the aesthetics of over two dozen Nigerian stage directors both—at home and abroad—with a view to familiarising them, and their respective theatre works, with curriculum creators/developers in Nigerian citadels of learning where theatre arts programmes or their equivalent are offered. To put it baldly, the idea of this book is to answer and give credence to Ola Rotimi's call by highlighting the fact that Nigerian directors do exactly what Caucasian stage directors do. Therefore, it is simply unacceptable for Nigerian directors to be unrecognised by Google algorithms. After all, no partridge is taller than another, except the one standing on a heap, according to a Yoruba proverb. So, while this book is clearly inspired by *Directors on Directing* (edited by Toby Cole and Helen Krish Chinoy), it focuses on the aesthetics and ideologies of a careful selection of Nigerian directors.

According to an Igbo proverb, "A man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body". In Nigeria, we seldom appreciate our history, indigenous arts, and scientific knowledge, let alone research and document them properly for posterity. And this is due in large part to the fact that, as a people who have been subjected to

¹ Rotimi, Ola. (1990). 'Much Ado about Brecht' in Fischer-Lichte, Erika, et al (eds.). *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: Theatre Own and Foreign*. Gunter Narr Verlag Tübingen, pp. 253-261.

colonialism in the past as well as Western imperialism in the present, we still clearly suffer from a ‘colonial mentality’ that, if care is not taken, will keep affecting us negatively into the future. In other words, we have the propensity not only to look down on our ways of life, but to also consider everything that is imported as being of better quality. It is for this reason that, to date, we have no reliable, indigenous, comprehensive epistemology on Nigerian stage directors. This means that when we teach our students the art of directing a play by a Nigerian playwright, for a Nigerian audience, we have no option but to be referencing foreign books on dead foreign directors who had never set foot on Nigerian soil or who knew nothing about the ever-evolving Nigerian theatre scene. This, in our view, is akin to forcing a round peg into a square hole, or using cutlery to eat *isi ewu* (a goat’s head delicacy). The pertinent question is: How can the mind of an aspiring theatre director in Nigeria be full of the methods and theories of Russian Constantin Stanislavski, German Bertolt Brecht, English Peter Brook, or Polish Jerzy Grotowski, while they know next to nothing about the aesthetics of Nigerian stage directors? This is the main lacuna that this book aims to fill. Containing contributions from thirty Nigerian stage directors who are of different ages, generations, genders and social class—and more importantly, from various parts of Nigeria and beyond—it is our hope that this book will adequately equip Nigerian theatre arts students and practitioners with the relevant indigenous knowledge, craft, and skills necessary for thriving as theatre artists in their country of birth.

Furthermore, we believe this book will serve as the primary source of indigenous knowledge about the art of directing stage performances, while theories and concepts by foreign stage directors from Western countries will remain foreign, secondary, and merely complementary. Through this book, a serious-minded aspiring Nigerian stage director can easily access the minds of, and draw inspiration from, both retired Nigerian stage directors and those who are still actively practising. This will allow them to observe the paths these directors have taken—and continue to take—towards their craft and profession. We hope that, in doing so, the future generation of Nigerian stage directors will be afforded the unique and invaluable opportunity to learn from an epistemic community and stand on the shoulders of indigenous giants to reach new heights.

Chuck Mike’s interview contribution, titled ‘*E get as e be*: Reflections on the Craft of Directing in the Theatre’ in Chapter 19, is unavoidably one of the lengthiest, not because he is the tallest of all our contributors, but because his career spanned over six decades. He puts the point we are

trying to make here more succinctly when he makes the following statement in the interview which he contributed to this book:

We must not allow occidental values to be an overall determinant of what we consider excellence in Nigerian theatre-making [...]. Western knowledge can be useful but we must never lose sight of the fact that there is a vast pool of traditional and contemporary African resources to call upon to elevate our craft. We must continue to exploit them towards nourishing and embellishing our art form. By acknowledging and contrasting the challenges and triumphs of the craft here, we also pay homage to those on whose shoulders we stand in furthering our art. May our experiences and stories be a ledger upon which subsequent directorial generations balance their experiences and profit from (See Chapter 19, pp.282-283).

It was also Chuck—as we fondly called him when he was the Acting course lecturer for one of us at Obafemi Awolowo University in the mid-'80s—who said that this book was “very much-needed” when we initially contacted him to contribute to the book. We ended up asking nearly all the contributors whether they agree with his assertion. Of course, they all agreed before elaborating on their individual responses. In fact, it is worthy of note that it was in an attempt to elaborate on why he made the statement in the first place, that Chuck made the above comment, which we have deemed necessary to quote in its entirety here. Chuck's contribution is simply a *tour de force*. Every sentence in the over eleven-thousand-word contribution is laced with wealth of experience and wisdom from this American-born giant of the Nigerian theatre, who became a septuagenarian in September 2022. But Chuck's contribution, which is full of wisdom, does not stand alone. Each contributor—who must have directed a number of shows professionally in order to have been contacted to contribute to this book—surely has a thing or two to add to the epistemology of Nigerian stage directing, which is the main thrust of this book.

The journey of the book began in earnest about the middle of 2021, when an email was sent to all the stage directors that we had identified as potential contributors, with a view to encouraging them to contribute. About fourteen stage directors were initially contacted, but as the project developed, we deemed it necessary to reach out to a few more. While we were fully aware that several stage directors on our list were academics, and therefore would have no problem making essay contributions, we gave all our contributors the option of an interview, whereby they could respond either in writing, by email, or in a video-recorded face-to-face interview,

to all the generic questions they were asked. In the end, four contributors opted for the essay format, ten responded in writing to our interview questions, ten people recorded face-to-face interviews, and six virtual interviews were conducted on Zoom. Rather than their full names, we have used the initials of each of our interview contributors where they respond to our questions. Note that it is not only to distinguish, but also to give due respect to Femi Osofisan, who is eternally known as FO—just as Wole Soyinka is known as WS—that the letter k has been added to Felix Okolo’s initials. We then arrange all the chapters in alphabetical order, according to each contributor’s surname. The result is a rich kaleidoscope of contributions from Nigerian directors who have, from their various individual perspectives, responded robustly to all the generic questions we asked them. This is a clear demonstration of that Yoruba truism: “Many roads lead into a marketplace”.

Segun Adefila, one of the younger-generation Nigerian stage directors in the pack, befittingly leads the charge with his post-modernist outlook on life in general, and on the art form of theatre in particular. Adefila’s view is that an actor does not need to act, but to tell story. The co-founder and director of the Bariga-based Crown Troupe of Africa, Adefila has his roots in African indigenous theatre paradigm, as he hails from a house where an *Egungun* (masquerade) is domiciled. Thus, he has been steeped in the culture of performance from childhood. In his words, “I don’t believe in art for art’s sake”. This is, however, hardly surprising given the fact Adefila is an avowed acolyte of Wole Soyinka. Adefila feels contented as a young theatre maker because great minds, such as Soyinka and Osofisan, know him personally.

Makinde Adeniran’s chapter, ‘A Director’s Insight On Play-Making’, closely follows Adefila’s. Like a few other Nigerian directors in this volume, Adeniran started out in the theatre as an actor but has also worked extensively on many productions as a scenic designer, before his love of a challenge landed him in the director’s hot seat. Starting with his stage production of Zulu Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* in the 1993/1994 academic session back at Obafemi Awolowo University, Adeniran has gone on to direct over twenty-five stage productions. A satirist by nature, as well as a humanist, Adeniran says his job as a director is to train young actors to realise their potential.

Bisi Adigun’s ‘To Direct or Not to Direct? – That’s No Longer the Question’ is in Chapter 3. Although Adigun graduated in drama from Obafemi Awolowo University in 1990—specialising in theatre management—it was

in the independent television sector that he first got a job after his compulsory one-year national service. However, when he found himself in Ireland in 1996, Adigun began to feature regularly in stage productions, until he felt the need to set up his own theatre company in 2003. That was how Arambe Productions came to be, through which Adigun identified, nurtured and showcased his directing skill for over twenty years with over two dozen stage productions, not only in Ireland but also in Nigeria and the United States of America.

Adigun's chapter is followed by Abiola Adumati's 'The Artistry of a Female Director: Flashes from the Past'. In our view, Adumati's contribution is appropriately titled in the sense that she is the first female stage director you will encounter in the book, but not the last. It is generally believed that stage directing is a tough terrain dominated by men, but female directors such as Adumati are certainly demonstrating through their impressive theatre works that anything a man can do, a woman can do better. In Adumati's words: "A play director must be skilled, creative, determined and hard-working, because directing is a challenging and tasking art of the theatre". In her view, stage directing requires energy as it is very time-consuming. Adumati argues, therefore, that it is a vocation exclusively reserved for someone—not necessarily a man—who loves the art passionately.

In Chapter 5, 'Directing: Leading the Team to Tease out Truths', Niji Akanni, who started his career under the tutelage of Chuck Mike, chronicles his journey into directing from his undergraduate days at the then University of Ife. In a truly fascinating essay contribution, Akanni makes it clear that, after experimenting with texts for many years as a stage director, becoming a journalist has brought him to the realisation that he must respect the playwright's written word. He regards a director as a teaser of truths out of both the performers and the text he is working with. For Akanni, a director, therefore, is more of a negotiator than a dictator.

In Chapter 6, Joshua Alabi helps us to understand that a good director also needs to be a good business person. However, Alabi sees himself first and foremost as an actor and a performer, having started his professional theatre career with the Crown Troupe of Africa under the leadership of Segun Adefila. It was through delegation, and in an effort to influence other people in the troupe to do their bit, that Alabi caught the directing bug. His determination to gain more knowledge would later lead him to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Creative Arts from the University of Lagos. On graduating, Alabi set up the Kininso Theatre Company, with which he

has directed more than 100 productions. Alabi, who is also a writer, certainly has a lot to say about the art of stage directing and how to become rich doing it.

Chapter 7, ‘Stage Directing: A By-Product of My Creative Ability’, is by Bolanle Austen-Peters. Although Austen-Peters trained as a lawyer, she has always known that her first love is theatre. “Creativity has always been my passion, growing up as a teenager”, she recalls, “I’ve always loved to dance, and with the privilege to see stage productions of people like Hubert Ogunde, my passion for arts grew stronger”. Having had the opportunity of travelling around the world while she was working for the UN and other international organisations, Austen-Peters noticed that many countries, unlike Nigeria, have cultural centres, and that was what led her to establish Terra Kulture, which incorporates, among other things, a hall for theatre productions. It was through the weekly Theatre@Terra that Austen-Peters developed her skill in stage directing. Unarguably, Austen Peters has contributed—albeit mostly in the genre of musical theatre—to the renaissance that Nigerian theatre is currently experiencing.

Tunde Awosanmi’s essay contribution is our Chapter 8. Though Awosanmi is also a graduate of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife, his areas of specialisation were playwriting, dramatic literature, theory and criticism. So, how did one of Nigeria’s most sought-after stage directors become one? In his words, “I came into directing to rescue directing”. Awosanmi sheds more light on his rescue mission by explaining that he thought it was high time he went into directing when he noticed that there were lots of spectacular stage productions devoid of their philosophical meanings. So, it was in an effort to ensure that the meanings of plays are not overshadowed by the visual elements deployed in their productions that Awosanmi became a theatre director. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a play must be philosophical for Awosanmi to want to direct it. He argues that his direction is unavoidably multifaceted, bearing in mind that he usually looks at any play from multiple perspectives, including that of a playwright, as well as a theorist and a critic. Awosanmi’s site-specific production of Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests*, which was staged on the grounds of Soyinka’s Ijegba estate in July 2014, is indeed a testament to his skill as an able director of philosophical plays.

Awosanmi’s chapter is followed by ‘Directing: Convergence of Ingenuity and Dexterity’, a contribution from another graduate of OAU in the person of Austin Awulonu. Unlike Awosanmi, however, Awulonu specialised in directing at Ile-Ife and he had the privilege of observing Ola Rotimi at

work. Also unlike Awosanmi who has remained consistent as a stage director, Awulonu has gravitated towards film and television over the years. Nevertheless, we are of the view that Awulonu's chapter is an important inclusion in this volume, bearing in mind that in his book *The Leadership Dilemma: People or Project*, Awulonu has unconsciously delineated the role of a director as the interpreter of the playwright's text to the audience, in the same way that Moses interpreted the Ten Commandments to the Israelites. But while his own book focuses squarely on the issue of leadership, Awulonu's contribution here focuses on what makes a good stage director with reference to some directors he has had the opportunity to learn from. Awulonu's chapter brings us to the end of all the Nigerian stage directors whose surnames begin with the letter A.

We come to Oluyinka Babalola's essay contribution in Chapter 10, titled 'The Making of a Pragmatic Director on Nigerian Stage'. Though Babalola was brought up from the age of three experiencing African total theatre in the form of *Egungun* (masquerade) festivals and Hunters' Guild's performances, it was when he was an undergraduate of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan that he was paid money for making a voice recording as a contribution to a radio programme on FRCN. This marked the beginning of his shift in focus from sports to performing. Having proven himself to be a versatile actor when he featured in a skit for an Association of Theatre Arts variety night, he was invited to join Laffomania, a well-known comedy group at the University of Ibadan in the '80s. Performing with the group enhanced Babalola's acting skills, but his interest was in directing and producing. Having directed for so many years in an academic environment at UI to impress, Babalola, now a more mature director, has concluded, "My concepts, approaches and philosophy of directing emanate from my understanding of the audience's needs". In other words, Babalola's directing is now more audience-centric, not in a didactic way, but as a deliberate attempt to entertain.

In Chapter 11, Rasaki Ojo Bakare problematises the term 'total theatre' which is commonly used to describe African theatre performances that incorporate other performing elements aside from acting. He convincingly argues that his own kind of theatre, though it incorporates music, song, dance, chant, is not, and should not be, described as total theatre. In his words, total theatre means that each separate element—drama, music, and dance—can stand on its own. He insists this is not the case in his theatre. According to Bakare, in the same way that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are inseparable, you cannot separate drama, music, and dance from his theatre. Hence, he proposes the theory of 'performative trinity' to

appropriately describe his kind of theatre. But as you will see in Bakare's interview, that is not the only theory that he has propounded.

We have William Benson in Chapter 12, and, as can be deduced from his title 'My Creativity, My Art: The Holy Spirit My Guide', his view is that theatre is certainly an art form which can comfortably accommodate both the sacred and the secular. Another trained actor, Benson made a name for himself by being one of the main directors regularly engaged by the Duke of Somolu Productions to write and direct the kind of docu-theatre on well-known Nigerians, whether dead or alive, that the company is now known for. It is most fascinating that Benson sees his role as a puppeteer, and his actors as puppets who must do as he dictates, because, as he puts it, "I am more like the order within the sphere of the space of chaos". I guess it is in the same way that Christians believe that the Holy Spirit guides each of their steps.

Israel Eboh's interview contribution, 'Odyssey to Becoming a Theatre Director', is in Chapter 13. Eboh has been directing since secondary school, and even created a drama troupe called the Association of Young Artists (AYA) with Tunji Braithwaite, the late lawyer-turned-politician, as its patron. However, when it was time to specialise at Ahmadu Bello University, where he was pursuing his undergraduate degree in Theatre Arts, he penciled his name down for acting because he felt that was the best way to become famous. However, in the wise opinion of one of his lecturers, Dr Carol Dawles, Eboh was already a good actor but would make a better director. Eboh has not looked back since.

In Chapter 14, UK-based Femi Elufowoju Jr shares his experience of directing both in the UK and in Nigeria. Elufowoju Jr, who made history in 2022 when he became the first black director to direct a mainstream opera in Europe, said he fell into directing as a matter of course. His dream was to become a lawyer, but when he was suspended from the then University of Ife, he relocated to the UK and studied Dramatic Arts in Leeds. On graduating, he became a working actor, but when he realised that the parts that could give him pride and nobility on stage were few and far between, he decided to adopt a DIY approach. He got a group of like-minded friends together, and they began to devise work steeped in African theatre tradition. The rest, as they say, is history for Elufowoju Jr, who received an Olivier nomination and a Best Director Award for his 2018 production of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*.

Ifeoma Fafunwa's contribution in Chapter 15 ends Act I of our book. Fafunwa, who studied urban planning, interior architecture, and subspace at the University of Massachusetts, believes she is a natural stage director, seeing herself as a born designer for whom directing is "designing and arranging things". After graduation, Fafunwa, unsurprisingly, decided to take up theatre as a hobby, which led her to attend some theatre workshops and auditions. She ended up getting a part in *In the Heat of the Night*, a TV show for which she still collects royalties. Having helped on many productions for other people, starting with *The Vagina Monologues*, which veteran Nigerian actress Joke Silva asked her to direct in 2007, Fafunwa decided in 2014 to marry her concern for Nigeria with her passion for theatre by setting up her own theatre company to make theatre that will positively impact society. That was how I-Open Productions came into existence. To date, *Hear Word*, a powerful show that highlights a myriad of cultural issues affecting women in Nigeria, written and directed by Fafunwa, remains the most well-known in the company's stable, as it has delighted audiences, at home and abroad.

With her special contribution in Chapter 16, entitled 'The Power of Visual Storytelling', Ayo Jaiyesimi opens Act II of our book. Like Fafunwa, Jaiyesimi did not train in the theatre, but has always been fascinated by the power of storytelling from childhood. With a background in management, accounting, change management and human resource management, Jaiyesimi's tutelage and mentorship as a stage director was under Bayo Oduneye, who passed away in 2021. To put into practice her passion for societal change through visual storytelling, Jaiyesimi founded The Thespian Family Theatre and Productions, with which she has, to date, directed more than nine plays, five of which are hers. Out of all her plays however, she finds most enthralling *ITAN-The Story*, which, in her words, "showcases the generational conflicts that we are currently facing in our societies".

Next, in Chapter 17, is Effiong Johnson. Apparently, Johnson, a Professor of Theatre, has also been nursing the idea of a book on Nigerian professional stage directors, such as this. So he felt outsmarted when we contacted him to contribute a chapter to our book. However, he soon settled down and joyfully made his contribution with promptitude, as if it was his own committed initiative. In his words: "I most excitedly and sincerely identified with the objective of the book as I was sure it would provide great resource to the teeming Nigerian students of theatre and film studies, and the equally ever-stretching avalanche of practitioners". In our view, it is clear from Johnson's interview contribution, 'Directorial

Positions and Praxis’, that he is a worthy theatre scholar and practitioner, whose wealth of knowledge is worth accessing.

Following Johnson’s chapter is Rasheedah Liman’s essay chapter, entitled ‘Stage Directing from Zaria’. Having begun by stating that the stage director has two basic responsibilities, which are: “(1) to bring about a unified vision within the finished production; and (2) to lead others toward its ultimate actualisation”, Liman then goes on to share her own personal experience as a director starting from her undergraduate days in the Theatre Arts Department at the Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. Although a good actor, Liman opted for directing, and ended up directing a couple of plays in her undergraduate years. She was also the assistant director of her department’s award-winning stage play at the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Festival (NUTAF) in Calabar in 2000. Since graduating, Liman has been working as a director. Her forte is directing plays that address social issues, over thirty of which she has directed to date.

In Chapter 19, we have Chuck Mike’s essay contribution, which we have already discussed. Suffice to mention it here, however, that no fewer than four of the contributors to this book consider Chuck as their mentor. When you read his chapter, you will find out why his alias is ‘Director of Directors’.

Then, you will find Nick Monu, a Nigerian-born director/actor who is based in Austria, in Chapter 20. Monu explains that as a son of a wealthy well-known accountant from a royal family in Asaba, his father did not want him to have anything to do with theatre. However, he knew that theatre was in his genes, as his mother, who is from Ijebu, is related to Hubert Ogunde. Consequently, Monu went on to study Theatre Arts in Washington D.C. (although he had to lie to his dad that he was studying law) and has been working in the theatre as a director and an actor ever since.

Ironically, someone else who truly studied law but later found himself working in the theatre, is Wole Oguntokun, whose interview, ‘A Renegade Director’, is our Chapter 21. Oguntokun—who sadly passed on on World Theatre Day on 26th March, 2024—began writing for the drama group of the fellowship he was part of as a law undergraduate at Obafemi Awolowo University. Upon graduation, he wrote a satire to lampoon the military government that was then in power, but felt his play was not directed as he had expected it to be. This was how he began to dabble in directing over 23 years ago. Now, with over a hundred productions under his belt, Oguntokun ought to be credited for sustaining theatre in Lagos with his

weekly stage productions at Terra Kulture which he started in July 2007. He is the founder and artistic director of Renegade Theatre, hence the title of his contribution here.

Talking about titles, Felix Okolo's contribution, curiously entitled 'Painting a Mud House', is our Chapter 22. As with Chuck Mike, Okolo's mentor, a few contributors to this volume have also described Okolo as a mentor and one of Nigeria's most innovative directors. Okolo, who likens the director to a midwife who helps in the delivery of theatrical dreams, was a dream director for actors to work with during his heyday. Okolo began to work as an actor on sketches after FESTAC 77, before graduating to feature in full-length plays less than a decade later. In the late 1980s, Okolo decided to go to school to obtain a formal education in theatre. He first went to Ile-Ife, where Chuck Mike was a director and lecturer, to study acting. Thereafter he went to Ibadan to study directing under Bayo Oduneye. "The idea of stretching theatre beyond the limits of the script came from the training I got from Chuck Mike", Okolo says, "and the idea of the large casts came basically from Bayo Oduneye". So, when he was reminded that Odia Ofiemun had once lauded him in the following terms, "his iconoclastic penchant for the spectacle, stretching theatre beyond the limits of the text. And his adroit use, and the defining of especially a large cast is unparalleled among contemporary Nigerian theatre directors", Okolo humbly gave the credit to both his mentor/directors.

In Chapter 23, we have the contribution of Duro Oni, who is also this book's co-editor. Though Oni is known more as a lighting designer, he has several professional theatre productions under his belt as a stage director. It is worthy to note that when Oni directed Bode Osanyin's *Woman*, both in Germany and Nigeria, the play ran for the exact time each time. Talk about directing with precision.

Femi Osofisan, who is one of Nigerian prolific writers, is another "accidental" director, according to him in his interview, 'Directing as a Vital Stage in the Writing Process: A Personal Experience of Play-Making' in Chapter 24. Interestingly, Osofisan's foray into theatre directing began at the Government College, Ibadan, through his involvement in the student productions directed by the school's English Principal, Mr. D.J. Bullock. From there, Osofisan went on to study modern European languages at the University of Ibadan, and even though he did not register for any courses in drama he could not resist participating in theatre presentations, which were regular and vibrant at the university then. On two occasions, Osofisan was elected the President of the school's

Dramatic Society, which afforded him the opportunity to organise stage performances he had to direct himself. Thus, for Osofisan, “it’s been a long journey of conscious and unconscious apprenticeship, teaching myself from practical experience”.

Jos-based Patrick-Jude Oteh takes the baton from Osofisan in Chapter 25, with his interview contribution: ‘Stage Directing: A Chance of a Lifetime’. Oteh, like many of his peers, grew up with the notion that a stage director must be autocratic. However, with hindsight, and having practised as a stage director for many years, Oteh has come to the realisation that “slow paced, laughter-filled rehearsal spaces and workplaces get better results, with the active and full involvement of all”. It is interesting to note that Oteh, arguably one of the few Nigerian directors in this book who earn their livelihood mainly from theatre-making, did not set out to major in directing, but technical theatre, when he did his Diploma in Theatre Arts at University of Ibadan. However, in the first year of his undergraduate programme also at UI, Bayo Oduneye (yes, the same Uncle B) singled Oteh out and asked him to consider a career in directing, as he felt that he had the sensibilities of a stage director. Oteh decided to major in directing and eventually pulled off an ‘A’ in his final project. After his graduation and NYSC programme, Oteh veered off in search of other life adventures, but now he runs Jos Repertory, one of the most successful repertory theatres in Nigeria, which he founded in 1997.

From Jos, we move swiftly back to the UK, where Lookman Sanusi, the contributor of Chapter 26, is based. In his contribution, ‘Stage Directing: An Art Not Confined To Space’, Sanusi stated how he got into directing via the route of production assistant, because, unlike Richard Mofe Damijo and Segun Arinze, with whom he was a member of Anansa Playhouse in the early 1980s, he could not, due to his small stature, get coveted roles like Okonkwo in the production of the stage adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* by Bassey Effiong. While Sanusi’s first discipline was English literature at the Lagos State University, he is of the view that the informal training he got whilst working professionally in the theatre in the 1980s was enriching. What is most refreshing and insightful in Sanusi’s chapter is his passion for theatre for young people, which he painstakingly differentiates from children’s theatre, based on his experience working with the Unicorn Theatre in London. Unsurprisingly, Sanusi strongly feels that the surest way of ensuring a thriving theatre in any society is to have a vibrant theatre culture for young audiences. Hence, his parting shot: “I would love for somebody to really think about that and do more work in the area”. Food for thought, indeed!

Next up is Ben Tomoloju's 'A Director's Enterprise: Of Freedom and the Power of the Imagination' in Chapter 27. Tomoloju (a.k.a Ben T) directed his first play *The Son of a Witch and Sweet Poison*, which he wrote himself at the age of 18, when he was an Advanced Level student at Christ School, Ado Ekiti. According to him, he was inspired having had the opportunity to understudy his literature and drama teacher, (now Professor) Niyi Osundare, who engaged his students with his production of Femi Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts*. After his A'-Levels, Ben T proceeded to the University of Ibadan to major in English literature and literary studies, although the course offered a lot of drama electives. It is hardly surprising then, that he was emboldened to direct his own commissioned plays during Student Union Week on two occasions: 1976/77 and 1977/78. Ben T has since directed numerous stage plays, including many for his workshop playhouse, Kakaki. He is a prolific playwright, but as a director, he is known generally for his use of design, particularly scenography, which is why he regards his production of *Kurunmi* with the National Troupe as one of the highlights of his career.

"A stage director is a person to whom theatrical matters come naturally as leaves upon a tree". These are the words that open Chapter 28, under the title 'Pedagogy and Total Theatre Paradigms in Play-Production' by Kalu Uka. Unarguably the oldest of all the contributors in this volume, Uka articulates his deep knowledge of directing total theatre professorially, and with finesse. Uka began directing when he was involved alongside his primary schoolmates in the staging of what, according to him, was known then as *Lock Roben*. However, his full creative directing experience can be traced to his undergraduate days at University College, Ibadan, in the '60s. Although there was no drama department at the time, Uka, like other English students, took an interest in literature, focusing on character observation. Formal training in theatre-making for Uka came through the opportunities provided by working with directors such as Geoffrey Axworthy and Wole Soyinka, as well as co-writing plays with friends such as Nkem Nwankwo and Dapo Adelugba, who was also a well-known playwright and theatre director before his death in 2014. From 1965 to 2003, Uka has directed over twenty stage productions, which he takes the trouble to list in four parts in his contribution.

Israel Wekpe's interview, entitled 'Directing Is a Science', is our penultimate chapter. As can be deduced from his title, Wekpe sees the art of directing from a scientific perspective. In his words: "I see directing as the science of producing a play; *the science*... because you can measure it, you can aggregate it". Wekpe further argues that the director is the

conscience of the play and that of the society. Wekpe's background, however, is in journalism, having obtained an Ordinary National Diploma in Mass Communications from Auchi Polytechnic. It was during an enforced two year break from these studies in Nigeria that a friend advised him to go to University of Benin to study Theatre Arts, since media forms part of the course. That was how Wekpe fell into, and in love with, theatre. Whilst directing at school, he also tried his hand at technical theatre and stage management. To date, Wekpe has directed over 30 plays. Aside from directing, he also teaches directing to students at the University of Benin. The challenge for him, however, is that the materials to teach are not there, which is why, in his view, this book is critical.

Although it is by virtue of his surname that Ahmed Yerima brings the book to a deserved end in Chapter 30, under the title 'The Playwright, the Actor, the Director and I', we believe it is also fortuitous. Had we decided to structure this book in accordance with the idea of big masquerades in the Nigerian theatre scene, perhaps we would have reserved this last chapter for Yerima. After all, it is the biggest masquerade that comes out last, to translate a Yoruba proverb. Without any shadow of doubt, Yerima is one of the most prolific living playwrights that Nigeria has ever produced. But it is not his playwriting prowess that he focuses on in his contribution here, but how the experience he has garnered over the years as an actor and a playwright has helped to shape him to be the kind of stage director that he is. It is worthy of note that it was law that Yerima applied to study at the University of Ile-Ife, but because the course was over-subscribed at the time, he was left with no option other than to settle for drama in the newly established Department of Dramatic Arts, headed by Wole Soyinka. The question is: Had Yerima gained admission into law at Ile-Ife as he had hoped, would he ever have become the Director General of the National Troupe and the National Theatre? It is indeed the head that knows where the legs are heading, as evidenced by the career trajectory of Yerima, as well as all our other contributors to this volume.

Here, at last, is the long-awaited *Nigerian Stage Directors' Philosophies, Aesthetics and Ideologies*. While we must categorically state that the views of each of our contributors are exclusively theirs, we sincerely hope that wherever in the world you encounter this long-overdue book, it meets your epistemological needs and fuels your directorial aspirations.

Bisi Adigun and Duro Oni (November 2024).

ACT 1 –

**STARTING WITH ADEFILA TO FAFUNWA
(A-F)**

CHAPTER ONE

FROM BARIGA TO TEL AVIV: ADEFILA ON *THE ROAD*

SEGUN ADEFILA

Q: This book is about Nigerian directors and directing. How would you describe a director? Who is a stage director?

SA: Professor Ahmed Yerima, one of my teachers, told me in one of his directing classes that the director was an interpreter of a letter that had been written by the playwright to the audience. So, the main aim of the director is to bring into reality the vision of the playwright. But, I also say that the director can also bring his or her own vision into the space of communication. While the playwright is saying this, and I've done a bit of deep research, looking at the subject the other way, so I think I have a choice; I have independence. You've given me a very solid material. Can you stay off now and let me reinterpret it? So, to cut the long story short, a director interprets.

Q: Can you tell us how, when and, perhaps, why you decided to become a stage director?

SA: I'd be lying if I say I know the reason, but I will explain the background. I like stories. As a child I liked to sit at the feet of elderly people to listen to stories; stories are just fascinating. When you came in, you saw me watching a movie. I just like stories; I like to know: "So what happened afterwards?" So, coming from that background, I found myself doing it with my peers, because we all liked stories. But I liked to know the extra things behind the stories. Well, some of my peers might be happy with just telling the story. I just liked to say, "You know, we're not going to do that thing just like that", while we were doing it. And, then, it got to a point where we started the company, The Crown Troupe of Africa, with my friends who were more mature. Some of them were older than I and more experienced. So, one of my friends said, "You know what, I will be