

In Search of Indigenous Theatre Management Philosophy for Committed Drama on the Nigerian Abuja Stage

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Abstract: This paper investigates the existence of a possible nexus between theatre troupe management philosophy and its level of social commitment. The investigation becomes important because of the arguable decline in the production of theatre of socio-political commitment on the contemporary Nigerian stage. Tracing the historical development of the production of theatre of commitment on the Nigerian stage, it argues that Ogunde, Ogunmola, Ladipo, Soyinka, Rotimi, Osofisan, and the likes of Obafemi, as playwrights and managers of the earlier theatre groups/companies on the Nigerian stage, appreciably succeeded in creating and sustaining theatre of social commitment for two main reasons: they were able to leverage on indigenous theatre management form and some on their respective universities' arts theatres. In its quest to fully understand what has changed from these early theatre managers and the present theatre managers in relation to the move from the production of theatre of socio-political commitments, the paper, using qualitative method of data gathering and analysis, through interviews and personal observations, notes that there is indeed a shift in theatre production ideology on the Nigerian stage. It posits that the ideological shift is occasioned by certain historical realities: a growing social indifference to the plight of the masses and the quest for personal material survival among the current theatre managers, as most are interested in winning government patronage for the survival of their troupes. The paper, falling back on the Yoruba Omoluabi Philosophy of social commitment, recommends what it identifies as the Omoluabi Theatre Management style for the Nigerian stage.

Keywords: Radicalism, committed drama, performances, management, survival

I. Introduction

In its temper of mind and temperament, postcolonial theatre management and making on the Nigerian stage, from Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Wole Soyinka, John P. Clark, Zulu Sofola, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan to Olu Obafemi, seems to be different in visions and contents, arguably, from what obtains in the present. Then, their plays and productions appeared to have always been informed by a sense of socio-cultural retrieval consciousness explication or socio-economic and political commitments to the society (Asigbo and Okeke, 2013; Oni and Adigun, 2019; Akoh, 2023). The level of socio-cultural consciousness explication cum socio-economic and political commitment is arguably still being reflected in some Universities' Arts Theatres productions where their works are still being produced to date. This is being done by pockets of writers, perhaps, reminiscent of the Biblical allusion of a remnant in Israel that have not bowed themselves to the Baal of materialism. Such are writers

and managers who have refused to become socio-politically indifferent to the plights of the masses in their writings, as is debatably being witnessed today. Of course, this cannot be said of many other writers and theatre managers, especially on Abuja, the Nigeria Federal Capital City, theatre stage. In essence, unlike the plays and the productions of the present generation of troupes' managers and producers that are, as would be argued in this paper, often motivated by a possible sense of self-preservation and materialism, the plays and productions of the earlier generation of playwrights and theatre makers in Nigeria are often socially committed. In fact, to borrow Marx's 'dialectical materialism,' even when dealing with socio-cultural issues, the works of those earlier generations are essentially and largely 'dialectically materialistic' in their offerings (Osofisan, 2016, 2010; Gbilekaa, 2013, 1997; Akoh, 2023).

Now, as we have briefly noted in the abstract of this paper, it appears there is a form of progressive ideological shifting in the vision and the temperament of the current crops of Nigerian theatre makers, directors and managers from what obtains in the works of the previous generations (Akoh, 2023, Doki, 2015; Asigbo and Okeke, 2013). However, we need to note that the said progressive ideological shifting is in no way completely parallel to what Asigbo and Okeke (2013) or Arinze-Umobi and Akpankwo (2023) dwelled on in their separate interventions on the same debate of ideological fluctuation on the Nigerian theatre stage. In their works, they were mainly concerned about the dichotomy of the ideological shifts from Marxists' oriented plays of the likes of Osofisan, Rotimi, Sowande, and Obafemi, which are often regarded as representing a class of radical plays as against the plays of the likes of Yerima, Ukala, Bakare, Irobi, Asigbo which are said to 'bear no ideological leanings in the true sense of the word' (Asigbo and Okeke, 2013: 2). We will come back to this claim later to make three claims.

Nevertheless, it is sufficed to say at this point that, historically, one fundamental nature of the Nigerian theatre forms is in their communal ownership (Doki, 2015; Ojoniyi, 2021, 2023). Of course, this communal ownership is not in any way different from the nature of the ownership of the Greek theatre in its ritual origin from the Dionysian festival. And, this position, of a communal theatre ownership, has two direct and layered implications for us. First is that it appears there has always been a communal management structure of the theatre as could be seen in the Yoruba Alarinjo theatre form, and the Ekuechi Facekurade theatre form (Ododo, 2015; Ihidero and Gana, 2023). This can also be seen in the Greek Patron model form of theatre management and ownership as discussed in Ododo (2024). In fact, according to Ododo (2024), in Athens, it was the responsibility of the State to appoint theatre patrons to bankroll the productions of different playwrights and performing guilds during the Dionysian festival. He argues further that:

To them, theatre was not just about entertainment; it was a profession, a trade, a business, and, above all, a communal instrument of cultural and existential hope, renewal and life rejuvenation in the face of cosmic fatalism. Theatre was part of their life. It was their culture. It was a way of celebrating Dionysus, the god of rebirth and of maintaining peace with their essence through a form of a sense of yearly renewal in its honour. Their theatre was the height of the celebration of the Hellenic will of Dionysus over whatever constitute the shadow of darkness in the human fate as of the life of King Oedipus (2024: np.)

It is thus clear that, historically, theatre was a communally managed venture. It was an instrument of the State and it functions in the service of every member of that culture community. That the theatre is a tool of societal communal consciousness awakening is also attested to in Jestrovic's (2025) editorial position in *Theatre Research International*. For example, he writes in the editorial that:

In Serbia, where I was born, people all over the country, with several theatre and film actors at the forefront, are taking to the streets to protect their land from the deal the government has made with Rio Tinto to open lithium mines – a company known for labour-rights and environmental violations worldwide (243).

Further taking our cue from this form of communal engagement of the theatre as an instrument of social cultural commitment, we then come to the second layered implication of a communally owned theatre form. It is equally

of its communal functional service requirement and expectation to the people. In essence, in its prima and modern form, theatre is expected to serve as an instrument of socio-economic and cultural transformation and renewal of the people (Akoh, 2016; Ojoniyi, 2023, 2021) just as could be seen in the claim of Jestrovic (2025) above. Theatre is therefore often managed as an instrument of the education and censorship of common human vices or actions. These are actions or vices that are seen as being culturally or ethically repulsive and inimical to the collective socio-cultural development and well-being of a culture community. Akoh (2016) corroborates this position of the communal service expectation of theatre by a culture community in an essay entitled '*Legislative gossip as theatre...*'. In the essay, he writes of two masquerades, Odeli and Abule, who are said to be saddled with the responsibilities of exposing the secret vices or evil deeds of erring members of the culture community they serve during their yearly performances (Akoh, 2016:17-21). He argued that this is done for the purpose of social control. Of course, the two masquerades derive the power and the legitimacy to carry out this communal responsibility function of social control from the authority of the King and the people.

In essence, before colonialism and its attendant children of individualism and excessive materialism began to destroy the races' sense of Omoluabi collective responsibility (Ojoniyi, 2024), traditional theatre forms in Nigeria have always been owned by the people and have always been deployed in the service of the community for social control and communal governance. Unfortunately, this sense of communal ownership of the indigenous theatre forms and its attendant layered service responsibility demands on the Nigerian theatre managers seem to have been lost to those two demons of Western individualism and materialism. The consequences of this development are often reflected on the progressive compromise of the traditional function of theatre as a potent instrument of good governance and social-cultural control among the people.

II. Culture, Radicalism and the Problems of Theatre Management on the Nigerian Stage: The Soyinka to Obafemi's Era

Westernization, as a counter culture to indigenous culture, with its attending conflicting socio-economic and political ideologies, through its colonial philosophy of education and cultural policies, which see almost everything African, especially the peoples' languages and culture, as being inferior to anything western, has, arguably, remained one of the major problems militating against the development of Africa to date. There is, perhaps, no doubting the fact that the damages colonialism and neocolonialism have continued to do to Africa's temper of mind, in relation to the peoples' sense of wholesome thought processes, through the embrace of uncritical westernization at the detriment of indigenous languages and culture, both as the true source of educational episteme of their shared bank of universal consciousness and collective identity memory source as a people of proud cultural history, are staggering and, have, unfortunately, remain enduring to date. Of course, there have always been such attempts to fight back the crisis occasioned by colonialism and neocolonialism. For instance, such philosophy as Negritude – then promoting cultural retrieval and explications – seems to encapsulate the responses of early African western-educated scholars to the cultural hegemony and imperialism of the West as it rejects colonialism and neocolonialism. Also, scholars like Uli Beier, Idowu, Afolayan, Soyinka, and Ngugi have variously had to contend with different instruments of Western imperialism and continued demonization of African religion, languages and cultures (Beier, 2005, Afolayan, 1979, Soyinka, 1976, Ngugi, 1986).

What is evident from the claims above is that there was indeed the imperialist deconstruction onslaught on the African cultural values and knowledge episteme, the totality of their ways of life, including their ritual performances and theatre. This is just as it is captured in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* in the conflict of the disregard of the Pilkings for the people's culture and ritual performance. Of course, at that time in African history, most of the indigenous cultural and ritual performances were banned and relegated to the background by the colonial authorities. In fact, at a point, a practice which still possibly subsists to date in many primary and secondary schools, the speaking of indigenous languages by the students is often prohibited, for the languages are seen as inferior vernaculars that would corrupt and hinder the quick assimilation of Western cultures and ways of life by the students!

It was within this vexed cultural hegemonic imperial performance space that the likes of Soyinka, Clark, Rotimi and Sofola emerged as radical cultural retrieval and explication playwrights cum theatre managers and makers (Oni and Adigun, 2019 :xix-xx). However, their form of theatre is largely patterned after the Western arts theatre culture, and is often performed in the university arts theatre for a university audience. This development makes their production to appear as an alien form to the African theatre forms. One of the major reasons for this is because the management-ownership structure of the theatre has, technically, been removed from the hand of the common people, the indigenous people. Furthermore, the Western styled art theatre form, outside of the university system, is unfortunately arguably inherently materialistic and ideologically polarising, especially between the two main Western ideological leanings of capitalism and Marxism. These two Western-origin ideological positions are products of colonialism on the Nigerian theatre stage. The original Nigerian traditional theatre forms are theatre of communalism, and not of capitalism or Marxism either. The Alarinjo theatre form and every other form of Egungun/masquerade theatres are, to borrow the popular definition of democracy, theatre of the people, by the people and for the people. They are not materialistic theatre or theatre for profit making and/or for existential materialist survivalist agenda as it largely obtains today (Ayakoroma, 2014)

Soyinka and his other early Nigerian playwrights, theatre managers and makers are thus radical cultural retrieval/explication writers and theatre managers. Hence, we opine that they are only erroneously seen as not being radical enough by those who want them to uncritically accept and promote the Marxist ideological position. We now know that the false belief behind that position is that they are inherently for capitalism because they were not calling for violent revolution in their works. For us, such a reading of Soyinka and his group of first-generation Nigerian playwrights as pointed out in Akoh (2023) is ideologically subjective and biased. In fact, Soyinka and the group are not just radical cultural retrieval/explication writers and managers who operate at such cultural and intellectual vantage position to understand the limits of uncritical Marxism and its' call for violent revolution; they actually, through their writings and activism, confront every form of colonial and postcolonial hegemonic structures while equally not being unmindful of the need of a responsive leadership in government.

At this point in the history of Nigeria theatre, we must equally admit that the calls for revolutionary carnage as then being made by the Marxist ideologues are actually alien to the African temper of mind and cultural memory – a cultural memory of a communal sense of responsibility as could be found in the Omoluabi philosophy and performance aesthetics (Ojoniyi, 2024). In hindsight, it could be perceived that the group of writers, critics and theatre makers making the call for violent revolution as led by Osofisan, Jeyifo, Sowande, Obafemi, and Gbilekaa are also the group insisting on the claim that Soyinka's group are not radical enough. Of course, it is thus the group that perhaps styled themselves as the group of true revolutionary, radical playwrights and theatre managers on the Nigerian stage – for they were, after all, the same writers and, to a large extent, the critics, setting the parameters for measuring literary commitment and naming themselves and the others as the radicals or the conservatives (Gbilekaa, 1997; Osofisan, 2010, 2016).

Perhaps, watching the contradictions and the ahistorical positions of the said self-styled radicals against Soyinka and his groups, especially against the arguable background of the collapse of the ideology of the left, the third generation of playwrights (Akoh, 2023) on the Nigerian stage became more existential in their approach to theatre making (Ojoniyi, 2012; Adeosun 2024). Of course, the implication of this development is multilayered and as absurd as the theatre of the 21st century Europe after the 2nd World War. For, no doubt, it appears that a level of disillusionment, a sense of alienation and a form of existential anguish, became the driving vision of the playwrights of this period (Adeosun, 2024). This is one of the reasons we agree with Adeosun (2024) that a playwright like Esiaba Irobi should not be lumped in the same 'ideological' class with playwrights like Yerima, Asigbo, Bakare and the others that are said to belong to the third generation of Nigerian playwrights.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the current existential predisposition to playmaking as being possibly reflected in the works of the present Nigerian theatre makers is capable of flying in different directions, especially if and when it is driven by such existential sense of disillusionment, alienation and anguished without drawing on the capacity to admitting the contradiction of the absurdist dictum of its equally accepting its limits through a

suggestive lucid reasoning (Ojoniyi, 2021). And, one of such directions it could go is to become completely engrossed in a mere materialistic survivalist vision. It is the shift towards this direction that seems to have taken over the Nigerian Abuja stage of theatre management and production.

III. Materialism and Theatre Management on the Abuja Nigerian Theatre Stage

Abuja is the Nigerian seat of political power. And, in a dysfunctional postcolonial State and democracy as of Nigeria (Ojoniyi, 2024), the Abuja theatre stage is arguably a suitable stage for the production of theatre of socio-cultural commitment for socio-political reengineering of the State. However, most of the recent performances and productions on the Abuja theatre stage, including the University of Abuja arts theatre stage (aside Jerry Alagbaoso's *Sipping Coffee with my Boss*, as performed on 6 October, 2023, Segun Abodunrin's "Bongeria I, and "Emilokan" as performed on 30 November 2021 and 14 of August 2023 respectively, Roseline Yacim's *Obirikittit Idite* (Cycle of Intrigues), performed on 16 February, 2024, and Ojoniyi's *Memories of Receding Shadows* as performed on the 22 of July, 2024) are performances and productions that seem to deliberately avoid the burning issues around the dysfunctionality of the State. While Jerry Alagbaoso's play dwells on issues of sexual harassment in universities, Roseline Yacim's play on the intrigues, betrayal and corruption in the selection process of political leaders, Segun Abodunrin's plays on burning issues such as thuggery, corruption and oppression, and Ojoniyi's play directly addresses the issues of banditry, kidnapping, Boko-Haram insurgency, corruptions, the political recklessness and indifference of major political parties and office holders in Nigeria, most of these other manager-playwrights deliberately avoid and ignore such issues in their performances and productions. In fact, Ola Awakan's plays and productions on the Abuja stage such as *Echoes of the Drums* (2024) and *The Tales of Legends: Tafawa Balewa, Golden Voice of Africa* (2025) are arguably written and performed for political class patronage than for any socio-cultural commitment in the radical theatre terms. It is against this background of a suspected deliberate avoidance of addressing such burning socio-political issues as presented in Ojoniyi's 'Memories...' on Nigeria in their performances and productions that we agreed to interview selected major theatre company managers and producers on the Abuja theatre stage. We spoke with five of them. They agreed to be interviewed and we asked them 17 questions as represented below:

1. Please, can you introduce yourself?
2. Can you briefly talk about your background in the theatre, especially as a troupe/group/company manager?
3. When did you move to Abuja, where were you before moving to Abuja and the differences in terms of influence on your production experiences?
4. What is your production motivation/vision?
5. Have you ever had to modify your motivation/vision in the course of your practice as a theatre manager?
6. What do you think about the role of theatre in Nigeria of today against the debates of the roles of arts/artists in a society?
7. Can you talk about your high and low moments as a theatre manager in Abuja?
8. How have you been sustaining your vision financially, especially in managing your company/troupe?
9. Have you heard about the theatre of social commitment or radical theatre before?
10. Can you please explain what you know about such theatre?
11. Looking at productions such as *Yoruba Ronu* of Ogunde, *Before the Blackout* of Soyinka, *Red is the Freedom Road* of Osofisan, how do you feel about such performances calling for social change in the face of obnoxious government policies and social ills?

12. What do you think are the reasons such plays are no longer performed today by groups like yours?
13. Would you like to use your group to revive such plays that are critical of government policies and that challenge societal ills openly?
14. Has your production ever been banned before? Or have you ever been invited by Police/DSS for interrogation after any of your production?
15. Do you feel there is any need for such theatre of social commitment like that of Ogunde, Soyinka, Osofisan and the rest today?
16. Will you be willing to promote the production of such plays anytime soon with your company?
17. Are you ready to be arrested for reviving and promoting such theatre?

The questions above were sent to them electronically after we had agreed on the modalities for the interview. However, of the five, only three eventually responded to the interview questions. And, here, we will simply identify the three as M1, M2 and M3 and we will use the inanimate pronoun 'It' to represent them for some privacy and ethical reasons. M1 has a PhD in Theatre Studies and moved to Abuja around 2014. In M1's production trajectory as a theatre manager on the Abuja stage, the only radical play it has produced, aside from sponsored TDF productions, is Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*. That was in 2014. M1 agreed that it has had reasons to modify its production vision before on the ground of '...the turn of events and with the outburst of digital technology...' (M1, 2025). However, M1 was not so explicit and forthcoming on what it meant by '...the turn of events...' Nevertheless, its response to question 7 on its high and low moments is very suggestive of such 'turn of events.' It claims that:

I have had instance where we recorded maximum loss financially in the live theatre. Those moments made us to modify our approaches to a more digital approach for theatre productions. With the introduction of digital technology, we got the attention of lots of sponsors...' (M1, 2025).

For M1, theatre is a business. And, this position can be understood against its record of 'maximum loss financially in the live theatre.' Thus, in its response to question 8, it simply says: 'We are smart about it these days! Beyond passion, we see theatre as a business enterprise' (M1, 2025). On question 9, M1 admitted that his major understanding and major focus on the theatre of social commitment is all about TFD. Of course, this could be understood against its earlier response to question 7 where its concern is more about securing the sponsorship of donors for such productions. To question 11, M1 simply wrote: 'I think those performances in the early days of theatre in Nigeria established theatre as a watchdog in the society' (2025). After that, and, perhaps, instructively suggestively, M1 simply ignored questions 13 to 17 without responding to any.

M2 said it has been in theatre practice for more than 25 years but moved to Abuja in 2016. It admits it is tough for creatives to survive in Nigeria when it claims that:

'For a creative, it was quite challenging because you have a story to tell but your story will not sell if you do not appease your audience and no producer was ready to partner with you. Rather than giving up, we decided to look for published plays to produce. Some of the published plays that we performed were *Lion and the Jewel*, *Wedlock of the gods*' (M2, 2025).

This claim, of the need to appease the audience and the producer, already agrees with M1's position on the need and the importance of securing sponsorship for the productions. It equally underscores the reason to shift grounds or, properly put, to modify the message or the content of the text for any production of the company/troupe. M2 also admitted that it has had to modify its production vision and mission. It says:

This was tough even though we are still in the process. No matter how good your script or actors are, the way and manner you present it matters a lot most especially in a fast growing city like Abuja. We realized

that our audience didn't really enjoy poor theatre and if we really want to create a niche for ourselves in the city, we had to shift to the commercial theatre. We had most of the ideas on how to achieve that but we had limited funds. So to stay afloat, we had to begin to devise ways and means to achieve this at minimal cost but with an outstanding performance. Part of what we did was to reduce the number of cast which will also trickle down to less production/artist fees, less costumes ... (2025)

Again, at the heart of the tough decision of the modification of the production vision is the vexatious issues of funding and survival. And, having to shift to whatever 'the commercial theatre' is will require the modification of vision and, perhaps, a shift in ideological position of the troupe. This is central to the future productions of the group as it is important 'to stay afloat' in the theatre performance/production business. Having experienced low turnout and poor sales of tickets at its productions, and admitting that "Sale of tickets cannot pay the artist fees", M2 equally has had to source for funds 'Whenever we have an upcoming production...both from individuals and organizations. These sponsorships have been what has been sustaining the vision' (2025).

M2's responses to questions 9, 10, and 11 show that it is very aware of the theatre of commitment, its focus and its challenges. It actually also claimed that its' troupe's focus is also to:

use our theatre platform to share knowledge, provide a voice for the vulnerable, shed light on social issues and trigger thought and conversations, all this while entertaining our audience. 2024 was our year of stories. We used compelling narratives and captivating performances to spotlight social issues that might otherwise be ignored or misunderstood (M2, 2025).

His response to question 12 perhaps raises the challenges of performing such plays just as Osofisan (2010, 2016) has equally raised. He writes:

In the kind of society that we live in and the systems that are in place, creatives are being careful about how they relay certain issues. Some won't even dare to talk about it, e.g issues like politics, religion, insecurity etc. These are highly sensitive issues that can create unrest leading to violence or the creative will face the full wrath of the law. Unlike, in more civilized societies where the creatives know that the law will back them so far what they are portraying does not contravene the law but it is not the same thing here. As a theatre company, we are trying to raise those issues but in a subtler manner that will provoke the thoughts of the audience and lead to change (M2, 2025).

However, we must acknowledge that Osofisan and his generation were, in their own case and time then, writing under different military dictatorships. In spite of which their messages of social commitment were still very clear. Thus, when M2 admits that creatives are being careful to mount the productions of socially committed theatre on the Abuja stage in a democracy in its response to question 13, we could easily see and agree that the temper of mind of the current theatre manager-producers has indeed shifted from what it was in the time of Soyinka and Osofisan. Even when it says it would like to mount a true theatre of social commitment on the Abuja stage, it still puts a caveat when it writes:

Yes, we would like to. But we also must agree that art has evolved over the years. Hence, before doing that, we would have to do our research properly and make sure that whatever we are portraying is backed up by the law to enhance the growth of the society (M2, 2025).

The question is: Has there ever been a law, even under military dictatorships in Nigeria, that forbids the production of theatre of social commitment? To our knowledge, there is no such law in Nigeria that says writers cannot write about urgent issues of social crisis like kidnapping, banditry, Boko-Haram, corruption and political recklessness of the political class in the State. M2 like M1 is clearly deliberate in its choices of productions and the issues they address or raise for funding and survival reasons.

On his part, M3 has been involved in theatre production on the Abuja stage earlier than M1 and M2. Its production vision in its words is to use:

...theatre as a mirror to society—reflecting its triumphs, struggles, and complexities.... is to create productions that not only entertain but also educate, inspire dialogue, and provoke thought, fostering a deeper understanding of the human condition. This is attributed to my interest as a development advocate... (M3, 2025).

M3, like the rest, equally admitted that it has had to modify its vision on the grounds of securing funding, meeting the audience's preference and what it called 'societal dynamics' for the survival of its troupe:

Yes, I've had to adjust my vision over time to align with the realities of funding, audience preferences, and largely societal dynamics. While the core of my vision—using theatre as a tool for social transformation—remains unchanged, I've learned to adapt my approach to ensure sustainability and relevance. I have also had to modify my approach for commercial reasons, and today, embracing the minimalist approach, for economic reasons (M3, 2025).

Although, M3 insists that 'I believe that theatre should both entertain and challenge the status quo, serving as a catalyst for societal reflection and change', yet, how he does that when it has to revise and shift its vision 'to align with the realities of funding, audience preferences, and largely societal dynamics' (2025) remains an issue of interest when such vision clashes with the interests of those funding stakeholders and the audience!

Unlike M1 and M2, M3 has quite a number of ways it identified as mixed-method to funding its troupe. They include, in its words, 'sponsorships, partnerships, ticket sales, and grants. Additionally,' it equally claims, 'diversifying into workshops, training programs, and cultural events have helped generate income to sustain our activities' (2025). These multiple streams of funding seem to have given M3 the latitude to produce more socially committed plays than M1 and M2. In fact, M3 identified about eight socially committed plays its troupe has mounted. Also, from the responses of the three of them, it is only M3 who claimed that he has been invited by the Directorate of State Security Service before for questioning:

The production, in 2010, of the late Onukaba Adinoyi Ojo's "The Killing Swamp", came under the spotlight of government. I was invited 24 hours to the show, which was to take place at the Shehu Musa Yar'dau's Centre, and interrogated by the DSS, who expressed fear that my play is capable of inciting violence because of its content. We eventually went on with the show, but under heavy DSS cover. Thankfully, I have not faced such extreme consequences again. However, there have been instances where productions were subtly discouraged or faced pushback due to their critical tone (M3, 2025).

M3 also still appears very passionate about reviving socially committed plays as the plays, in its words, '...carry immense historical and cultural value,' claiming that, 'Reviving them can reignite conversations about accountability, justice, and the power of collective action (2025). To him, the continuous production of socially committed plays is a must as '...In a world grappling with corruption, inequality, and social injustices, the theatre of social commitment is as relevant as ever. It offers a platform to address these issues and mobilize communities toward change' (2025).

In responding to question 17, M3 submits that: 'While the idea of being arrested is daunting, knowing how reckless our policing system is, I believe in the transformative power of theatre. If promoting such productions means taking risks, I am prepared to do it' (2025). Its response here, like that of M2, is evidently cautious. It does not in any way move near the militancy and the activism of the likes of Soyinka, Osofisan, Obafemi, Irobi or, in recent times, Ojoniyi.

IV. Conclusion: Towards an Omoluabi Theatre Management Theory and Policy

Clearly, there has indeed been some sort of ideological shift in the focus of theatre management and production on the Nigerian stage as can be seen on the Abuja stage. And, as we have promised above, we will like to make three claims about the issue beyond the dichotomy of liberal or conservative versus radical theatre/drama on the Nigerian stage. The first is that the works of the early theatre managers like Ogunde, Ogunmola, Ladipo and others and the generation of playwrights and theatre makers of Soyinka, Sofola and Rotimi have also always been radical. They were playwrights and theatre managers that help to set the stage for clear race retrieval and self-explication concepts and principles for African cultural practices and people from the bondage and the yoke of European hegemonic views of Africans' presumed cultural inferiority and barbarism. The second is that the works of playwrights after the generation of Osofisan like Yerima, Irobi and Ojoniyi should not be lumped together as not bearing any ideological leaning because they refuse to subscribe to uncritical Marxist ideology in their works. As we have thus noted, these writers and theatre makers are clear existential and avant-garde writers, who do not totally accept Marxism, yet their works are not less radical as they clearly confront and seek to deconstruct all forms of hegemonic structures of the Nigerian socio-cultural establishment and polity. The third is consequent on the second claim and it is that there is actually no such drama that is perhaps totally ideologically value free or neutral, for at worse, it would be absurdist and avant-garde in its offering as can be seen in most of the works of Irobi and Ojoniyi.

It is thus clear that the claim about the ideological shift on the Nigerian theatre stage is not necessarily about the dearth of radical or socially committed plays as much as it is about the jettisoning of the tested historical indigenous form of theatre ownership, management and of the socio-cultural function of the theatre to the people. The current theatre has become a theatre for the people and not by the people. Culturally, the people must own the theatre and its stage or performance arena. Theatre must therefore be restored to the people as their instrument of socio-cultural reengineering as it was from the beginning. To do this will take care of the second problem which is linked with issues around a form of existential survival battle of the contemporary theatre managers and their troupe, especially in a dysfunctional postcolonial State like Nigeria.

Consequently, we opine that such philosophy and principles of communal responsibility as could be seen in the Omoluabi philosophy and performance aesthetics of the Yoruba, as discussed in Ojoniyi (2024), is a viable option and replacement for whatever is the existing mode of theatre management on the Nigerian theatre stage in the present. The Omoluabi philosophy and performance aesthetics is about the responsibility of the individuals as members of a culture community who must come together to ensure the growth and the development of the culture community. It is a management philosophy that expects the individual members of the culture community to accept/admit that they have such communal concerns and obligations to come together to address the developmental challenges of their community, and here, the Nation Nigeria. With the application of the Omoluabi philosophy and performance aesthetics of communal obligations to theatre management crisis on the Nigerian Abuja stage, theatre ownership and sponsorship will revert/go back to the people. It would thus once again, and properly so, become the socio-cultural instrument of the people who originally own it as it has always been historically. And, until this is done, theatre on the Abuja stage will be what it is now, a mere instrument of business and existential material survival in the hands of common theatre jobbers.

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