

From Script to Screen: The Dynamics of Directorial Vision in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptation

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Abstract

*This article is a critical reflection of this idea of the directorial conceit to adapt Nigerian theatrical scripts into motion pictures. Theatre and cinema are based on narrative, but their physical and audience interaction, and language of visually require substantial adaptation creativity. With comparisons of prominent stage-to-screen adaptations of Nigerian plays including *Death and the King's Horseman*, *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the study examines the style of directors and how this is shedding light on challenges of fidelity, cultural representation and cinematic transformation. Dwelling on adaptation theory, auteur theory, performance studies, and postcolonial aesthetics, the study presents how the filmmakers adapt stage talk to cinematic show without distorting themes and identity markers. The qualitative analysis and semiotics interpretation of this paper believes that film remakes are not copies of theatre but are some form of reimagining dependent on film directorial vision, burgeoning technology and the socio-cultural circumstances. The result contributes to the bigger dialogues about African cinematography and the relationship that live performance and cinema are developing.*

Keywords: Screen Writing, Theatre, Film, Nigeria, Directing.

Introduction

There has also been an upsurge in modified versions of theatrical scripts to film productions in the Nigerian creative industry because of commercial pressure and ambition.¹ These adaptations, although providing a greater reach to a wider audience are still complex to the directors who have to make the translation of a stage-bound narrative into the film medium. Compared to theatre, which is premised on improvised collaboration and spatial resonance with the audience, film is made up of visual framing, editorial strategies, and camera movements toward meaning.² These variations prompt film-maker choices that harmonize source material with the cinema.

This tension plays out in adaptations of well-known Nigerian plays—*The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi and *Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka. Directors have to deal with the problems of spatial expansion, change

¹Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 44.

²TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 123.



of style in performance, and alterations of dramatic tempo to adapt to the needs of a movie.³ That includes the reinterpretation of scripts that are dialogue-based, the redesigning of costumes and sets to be used on the screen, and training actors to work with the camera more than in the theater.⁴

Although these adaptations are important, the research on the same is little which tends to concentrate only on the script fidelity aspects ignoring the larger artistic overhaul under the influence of directorial vision.⁵ Furthermore, a lot of the discussion is spared of the postcolonial and cultural connotations of the translation of indigenous stage activities into globally marketed filmic texts. This article fills these gaps by examining in critical detail such directorial modes of acting in this field of communication, as Nigerian theatre attempts to cinematically adapt itself in the film industry.

Using adaptation theory, auteur theory and postcolonial aesthetics, this paper locates the Nigerian directors as aesthetic brokers who transform theatrical discourses into powerful images in the cinema. It states that such adaptations do not replicate or define but intermediately re-imagine African storytelling into new spheres of visibility and culture.⁶

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the dynamics of directorial vision in Nigerian theatre-to-film adaptation requires a multidimensional theoretical approach. This study draws on Adaptation Theory, Auteur Theory, Performance Theory, and Postcolonial Aesthetics, each providing distinct but complementary insights into how directors re-imagine theatrical scripts for the screen.

Adaptation Theory

Adaptation theory in its turn is the theory that studies the possibilities of transforming the accounts and narratives between the various media forms. Hutcheon refers to adaptations as independent works as they are not copies of original texts but their reinterpretation with the help of new aesthetic and technology.⁷ Stage plays within the framework of the Nigerian theatre are likely to be associated with reliance on live dialogue productions as well as involvement of people of the community on the stage, and i-static places. These plays are transformed with the adaptation into film comprising of spatial expansion, visual realism and stories told by the use of montage.⁸

³Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 37.

⁴David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 88.

⁵IniobongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 141.

⁶Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 81.

⁷Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), 15.

⁸Tunde Faleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 126.

According to this theory directorial exigencies such as changing of sequence of scenes, inclusion of cinematographic subplots, or reorganization of delivery of lines are acts of translation and not the betrayal of the original text.⁹ This way, Nigerian movie makers learn to be flexible filmmakers, operating between drama and its movie nature, giving precedence to the theme.

Auteur Theory

The author theory is based on the key role of the director as the creative figure in a motion picture both in the manner and style of presentation, the tone, and the overall flow of the film.¹⁰ Directors of theatre-to-film adaptations in Nigeria have a way of stamping their own artistic style over the work production in areas as diverse as the set design, camera framing and actor performance.

As an example, the direction of *Death and the King's Horseman* by BiyiBandeke introduces to the format the additional cinematic aesthetic, which is not present in the real-life format of the performance played on the stage: there are extensive out-of-door shots, non-sequential editing that is demonstrated in the play within the closed theatre environment.¹¹ The mentioned interventions also emphasize the role of the director as the auteur who transfigures theatrical material to the cinematic discourse and generates a particular artistic statement, the border between which mediums can no longer be drawn.

Performance Theory

Performance theory, as proposed by Schechner goes on to say that performance does not remain the same, but is ever in the process of reformation of context, embodiment and audience engagement.¹² When the stage performances transform to the film, the character of performance shifts fundamentally: actors do not perform in front of the audience but in front of the camera, and this aspect compels them to use minor gestures, more expressive emotions, and new distinctions in space.¹³

This theory throws light on how the directors help the actors go through this transformation adjusting the readings of the words, the gestures and timing of those to the conventions of the cinema. It further describes how theatrical features like costuming, arrangement, and stage-to-stage-to-stage movement are recreated via instruments of the cinema like close-ups, lighting, and sound editing hence creating a recalibration of the experience of performance by the audience.

⁹Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 48.

¹⁰François Truffaut, *What Is Cinema? Auteur Theory and Filmmaking*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 12.

¹¹Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 40.

¹²Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 96.

¹³David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 90.

Postcolonial Aesthetics

Postcolonial aesthetics focuses on the reclamation and re-definition of artistic styles by the formerly colonized in the global media environments.¹⁴ Nigerian theatre resonates with native performance culture and oral histories and ritualistic theatre. When being translated into the cinematic language these cultural expressions meet with the modern techniques of cinematography influenced by Hollywood films and other manners of European cinematography.

The directors are thus obliged to walk a postcolonial tightrope, retaining African identity trappings like language, proverbs, and the use of significant costuming without allowing themselves to succumb to foreign cinematic forms that are likely to be attractive to the international film audiences.¹⁵ This negotiation can be traced in adaptation such as *Yoruba Gods Are Not to Blame* where the directors apply film in increasing the process of Yoruba cosmology and mythic structure by using global editing and sound design styles.¹⁶

Combining these theories, this research paper identifies that the problem of theatre-to-film adaptations in Nigeria is multifaceted and depends on both the practices and traditional values of the performance culture on the one hand, and modern filmmaking on the other. The directorial vision comes forth as the crucial element that balances these forces and makes adaptations to work both in the cultural context, the visual level, and within the narrative level.

Literature Review

Academic work on Nigerian theatre and its translation into films has increased since the past ten years, part of the increasing focus of academics on African cinematic discourse. However, most of the literature has concentrated on the fidelity of text or cultural translation instead of the subtle part of director vision in shaping adaptations. The proposed review will interpolate the existing literature in three fronts namely; world stage to film adaptation literature, the Nigerian theatre to film and the emerging obstacles to cinematic identity and directorial vision.

Foreign Reviews of Adaptation of Stage to Film

It has been discussed how scripts have become movies, the concept of fidelity has been explored or how different the plot is jumbled around, or the cinema style of the performance after the play. According to Hutcheon, rather than being measured in terms of fidelity to text, adaptations are to be considered as reinterpretations conditioned by the requirements of the medium.¹⁷ In the same manner, Cardwell explains that film directors have to strike a balance

¹⁴Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 84.

¹⁵IniobongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 144.

¹⁶TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations," 128.

¹⁷Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), 18.

between theatrical conversation and visual narrative in order to ensure narrative consistency whilst allowing the film the possibility of spatial development.¹⁸

According to research on Shakespearean adaptations, common cinematic tools such as montage, close-ups and cross-cutting are often used by the director to provide a greater sense of dramatic tension, which Shakespeare would not have done on the stage.¹⁹ These international outlooks highlight the fact that adaptation is not transcribing, but on the contrary, it is actively directing.

Adaptations of Nigerian Theatre to Film

Adaptation of a theatre to film studies have not been studied extensively in Nigerian scholarship but there are more introductions being made. Faley identifies the issues of simplifying the narratives to make them commercially viable as a problem that Nigerian directors frequently face when it comes to transferring the cultural depth of stage plays into celluloid.²⁰

Obi presents *Death and the King's Horseman* as a case study, noting that the camera mediates some of the immediacy of the ritual of the play of Soyinka with the film adaptation broadening the spatial parameters of the earlier play.²¹ Musa's interpretation of *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, on the other hand, holds that cinematic versions have the potential to enhance the mythic and political sub-texts of stage dramas through the utilization of cinematic symbolism and thematically, non-sequential patterns.²²

Notwithstanding these contributions, however, detailed attention is yet to be paid to directorial vision how directors mediate between performance styles, visual aesthetics and cultural representation during adaptation. The available literature mainly characterizes alterations in narrative contents without a careful examination of the interpretive stance of the auteur towards development of meaning in films.

Filmed Identity, Acting, and Directing Interpretation

The most recent studies admittedly perceive adaptation as the translation of scripts, as well as reimagining the performance of a given performer to new audiences and media. Okoro evaluates how Nigerian adaptations transformed actor training, when directors train stage actors in adjusting vocal projection,

¹⁸Sarah Cardwell, "Adaptation Studies Revisited: Transforming Narrative Across Media," *Journal of Adaptation in Film & Performance* 17, no. 1 (2024): 62.

¹⁹Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 97.

²⁰TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 130.

²¹Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 46

²²Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 41.

movement and emotional intensity to accommodate and match the format of camera-based storytelling.²³

Umoh et al. focus on the idea of costume, set design, and indigenous language use in matters of cultural authenticity in adaptations, and they underscore the importance of directors making cultural identity markers central to a film to gain narrative traction.²⁴ In the same way, Ogunleye discusses the postcolonial aesthetics of the Nigerian cinema, in which he states that through the use of modern filmmaking technologies, the film directors play the role of cultural mediators, successfully opposing the western dominance in cinematic means by implementing their local performance codes in the modern movie-making system.²⁵

Nonetheless, such studies do not go so far as to attempt to synthesize these pieces into a larger vision of directorial vision as an evolving, theory-making force in adaptation. The study satisfies that gap examining how Nigerian filmmakers use auteur style, principles of adaptation and postcolonial aesthetics to design audio-visually and thematically rich film productions based on plays written in the theatre.

Methodology

In this paper, the qualitative study method is used in studying the dynamics of the directorial vision in select theatre-to-film adaptations in Nigerian theatre productions. The qualitative approach suits this study well given the fact that adaptation requires an interpretive dimension, which is better expressed using interpretive indicators rather than numerical ones. The research topic is learning to comprehend the ways in which film directors artistically adapt the theatrical script to the film media in order to retain cultural context and theme of the issues.²⁶

This study is being structured as a multiple case study since the investigation of the directorial methods related to the various Nigerian adaptations is defined as in-depth and comparative. The given design promotes not only the extraction of personal stylistic peculiarities but also general patterns and trends in adaptation practices.²⁷ As case studies, two great Nigerian theatrical pieces that have become films were chosen because of their awesome intentions. The first is *The Death and the King's Horseman* by Wole Soyinka which was adapted by director Biyi Bandele in 2022. This adaptation sheds some light on the process of adaptation of the dialogue-driven, ritualistic play to movie form by a director, who is compelled to make a decision on the compromise between the script-

²³David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 89.

²⁴InibongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 118.

²⁵FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 52.

²⁶John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2024), 47.

²⁷Robert Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 7th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2023), 54.

driven and image-driven approach to the story.²⁸ The second example is *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by Ola Rotimi (the film version of 2019) which shows how cinema interprets Yoruba tragedy and mythical stories as filtered by directors by using the technologies provided by the cinematic medium but still being specifically Nigerian.²⁹ The reasons behind the selection of these cases are based on their cultural pertinence, symbolism, and differences in directorial approach all of which give a thorough scope of analysis.

The study used several sources in collection of data. The observation and discussion of the chosen film adaptations in detail concerning the cinematography, the performance style, editing, and interpretation of the theme served as the primary source. As a basis of comparison, the original stage scripts and, in some cases, archival recordings of the theatrical performances were studied as well. This helped look at spatial dynamics, delivery of dialogue and staging in its theatrical context.³⁰ Secondary sources included academic articles, interviews of directors and actors published in books, and reviews of the adaptations by critics. This literature aided in situating directorial choices in the large Nigerian film and theatre industries.³¹

It was conducted on the basis of the theoretical frameworks mentioned above, as it included both semiotic and thematic analysis. Semiotic study was concerned with visual signs and symbols, e.g., costumes, set design, and camera framing as meaning-making tools in adaptations.³² Thematic analysis was used to find the common, directorial trends coping with space, time, and performance, drawing its conclusions to the reference to the auteur impact and the postcolonial aesthetics.³³ The balance between fidelity and creativity devoted specific attention, especially to the way directors adapted, or kept the plot devices, character arcs, or cultural tropes. The analysis of how actor training, body movement and expression of the emotions changed when they moved to screen became informed through performance theory.³⁴

To be reliable, the project carried out triangulation that involved comparison of the results of various data bases with each other, such as film texts, film scripts, and those of scholarly commentary. However, there were some limitations on the way, including limited access to backstage production notes and directorial interviews that would have been more informative on ideas behind it.

²⁸Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 50.

²⁹Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 42.

³⁰David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 91.

³¹InibongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 120.

³²Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 2024), 122.

³³Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 86.

³⁴Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 97.

Nonetheless, despite these limitations, the selected case studies and theoretical tools offer a strong advantage as far as the role of directorial vision in adapting Nigerian theatre to film is concerned.

Findings and Analysis

This research shows that the vision of the director is conclusive in determining how the Nigerian theatrical scripts are adapted to films. The *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* analysis shows that the directors are not simply attempting to move the content of one medium to another one, they are in fact doing complex re-interpretive work of creativity. These remapping presuppose drastic changes in the dynamics of space, visual narration, performance of actors and topical conservativeness.

The most significant of the findings pertains to spatial transformation. Theatre as such, has limitations in the restraints of the stage and other devices such as symbolic sets and use of the imagination by the audience, in order to enact place. The filmmaker Biyi Bandele in *The Death and the King's Horseman* breaks these spatial boundaries in the cinematic medium. Spacious exterior scenes of the markets and the patio of palaces and the process cells were visually portrayed—the size of colonial Nigeria and its cultural mood—which could barely be communicated by the stage with a simulated dialogue and a few props.³⁵ Equally, in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, cinematographic versions employ the use of several places including royal palaces and villages, which add visual authority to the mythic experience of the main character and makes the viewers familiar with Yoruba cosmology.³⁶ This space affords a freedom to the director who can play around with the setting giving people a more enriching cultural encounter as well as increasing the dramatic effect of the narrative in question.

The second important discovery is dealing with visual storytelling and cinematic language. Unlike in theatre where we communicate a thing by the use of words and the presence of the actor/actress, film allows the Director to convey meaning through camera constructions, editing patterns and use of symbols. Using close-up shots, Bandele succeeds in expressing the psychological state of Eles in struggling with his inner conflict which would not have been easy to demonstrate on stage where the audience is in a physical distance with the actors.³⁷ The slow-motion effects that are used to intensify the ritual dances and the skillful employment of creating light and shadows help to increase the conflict between commitment as required and choice as self-wanted. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, the filmmaker employs the use of cross-cutting to set scenes of prophecy and political unrest side by side as a way of visually supporting the theme of destiny and human fallibility.³⁸ These examples of

³⁵Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 51.

³⁶Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 44.

³⁷TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 131.

³⁸David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 93.

cinematic techniques demonstrate that filmmakers work hard to create new signification and convert a play dialogue script into the cinematic one.

A great change is also to be seen in the area of actor performance and embodiment. Theater tends to require more large gestures and speaking volumes as opposed to the camera usually requiring subtle gestures and silence, which is ever more true in film acting.³⁹ This change is demonstrated in *The Death and the King's Horseman* by Bandele whose directing is even more realistic in the process it used for interpreting emotions, given that in this context actors achieve it more realistically through lower gestures and facial expressions. The same situation can also be observed in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, where the director has actors internalize drama through minimalistic expressions of dialogue, and perspectives of costumes and setting changes.⁴⁰ According to this director, the vision reinvents the aspect of portraying character and makes it more intertwining on a psychological level to the cinematic viewers.

Both of these transformations do not prevent the findings showing that the directors are extremely worried about thematic preservation and cultural authenticity. Even though the fact of cinematic transpositions inevitably brings new visual and narrative content to both films, both stick closely to the overarching themes of the original plays: ritual sacrifice, colonial encroachment and tragic fate in *The Death and the King's Horseman*; and pawns of guilt and political intrigue in *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. Bandele is so much concerned with preserving the philosophical discourses and Yoruba proverbs used by Soyinka but he can be seen to add visual effects with costumes, traditional music and ceremony movements.⁴¹ Similarly, versions of the play by Rotimi preserve the mythic quality of the Yoruba narrations incorporating the local signs and word of mouth act types to preserve the cultural meanings.⁴²

Lastly, the analysis demonstrates that Nigerian directors are working out a postcolonial aesthetic tightrope version, to mix the local performance arts trace with the global cinematic practices. The two adaptations portray a hybrid nature in which African oral performance and drumming and communal dance rituals interrelate with modern cinematography, non-linear editing and use of digital sound design.⁴³ The hybridity demonstrates the manner in which filmmakers indicate creative independence, because they do not want their films to embrace western cinematic conventions, but at the same time open the works to the rest of the world.

³⁹Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 98.

⁴⁰IniobongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 121.

⁴¹FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 54.

⁴²Emmanuel Adeighon, *Language, Culture, and Identity in African Theatre* (Lagos: Kraft Books, 2023), 68.

⁴³Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 88.

All in all, the findings show that theatre-to-film adaptation in Nigeria is not mere copying of plays on stage. Rather, they are intermedial re-creations that are products of directorial vision. Developing space, fine acting, maintaining a thematic continuity, and postcolonial hybrids are some of the ways that filmmakers create cinematic works that both acknowledge the theatrical roots, and carve out their own cinematic autonomy.

Discussion

The results of this research highlight the importance of the role of the vision of the directors regarding the process of the transformation of the theatrical scripts of Nigerians into the works of the film art. These findings relate with the theoretical models of the research, exposing that stage-to-film adaptations are multifaceted as they involve negotiations of reinterpretation, authorship, performance restructuring and postcolonial negotiation as opposed to translation.

Adaptation theory gives a good perspective to this process. The point that Hutcheon makes is that adaptations are not mere duplicates, but creative processes in their own right which re-appropriate existing narratives in the light of what those narratives can be made to do in the new medium.⁴⁴ This principle is illustrated by the use of space and filmic language that can be seen in *Death and the King's Horseman* as well as *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. The directors also intervened by engaging theater repairs (dialogues) and reducing on stage props and converting them to visual spectacular filmic spaces, through editing, camera movement and traveling to exotic destined locations that they increased the thematic substance.⁴⁵ This transformation would testify to the idea that fidelity to source material does not consist in imitating its shape but in conserving its meaning and developing its means of expression through the resources of film.

The results are also consistent with the concept of auteur theory which places the director as the main vision behind filmmaking.⁴⁶ In such adaptations, directors went beyond taking scripts and moving them to screen, and branded them with their respective artistic marks. As in the case of *Bandele*, which was a cinematic remodeling of a ritual play written by Soyinka, the strategy of presenting close-ups, slow-motion shots, and rhythmic editing was done purposely to strengthen the philosophical line of conflict between personal desire and social obligation.⁴⁷ In the same way, the creator of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* rearranged the pattern of plot development and introduced symbolic visual effects going beyond the rules of the stage and enhancing the

⁴⁴Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), 20.

⁴⁵TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 132.

⁴⁶François Truffaut, *What Is Cinema? Auteur Theory and Filmmaking*, updated ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2023), 14.

⁴⁷Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 53.

mythological layer of the plot.⁴⁸ These decisions portray how the directors are auteurs, who have created distinct movie personas out of the stage roots.

Performance theory also sheds some light on the game of adaptation focusing on the change in the embodiment of actors and activation of the spectators. According to Schechner, performance depends on the conditions of its medium and as such, it is fluid and contextual and can even be reshaped by the spatial conditions, and the instrumental conditions of its medium.⁴⁹ The adaptation to the screen demanded that Nigerian performers adjust their acting styles by toning down and making them camera conscious. Rather than eradicating theatricality this change transformed it as intimacy was allowed and psychological and cultural strife could be explored to a greater degree.⁵⁰ In these performances, directors committed to play a key position in guiding actors to move through this transition and to show that adaptation is not just about moving across narratives but is also about re-performing identity.

Aesthetics of post-colonialism also became an important aspect of deciphering the findings. The difficulty in front of the Nigerian filmmakers includes the necessity to keep the national spirit and cultural authenticity and consider using the world cinematic language based on the western standards.⁵¹ *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* both speak of a hybrid aesthetic through which the native style of Yoruba ritual rituals has been marinated with modern stylistic devices and film editing technology. The use of costumes, music, and proverbs based on the African traditions is combined with digitally enhanced visuals and an international cinematic pace making this film unique and postcolonial.⁵² This negotiation is more of a larger attempt by African cinema directors to maintain creative sovereignty over their overall monopoly within the global marketplace of languages.

Finally, the debate shows that the application of theatre-to-film adaptation in Nigeria is not a sketchy process that carries smooth transfer of story but a ground where narration tussle occurs. Directorial vision acts as an intermediary between the traditions of the stage and the experimental features of film, on the one hand, and between the expression of local patriotism and the interests of the international audience, on the other hand. This dynamic process re-establishes the independence and imaginations of Nigerian directors in taking the African story to new levels outside the theatre onto the big screen.

⁴⁸Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 45.

⁴⁹Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2023), 100.

⁵⁰David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 94.

⁵¹Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 89.

⁵²FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 56.

Challenges and Implications for Practice

Although Nigerian theatre-to-film adaptations demonstrate unparalleled brilliance and cultural insight, this paper will bring out the existence of certain issues that determine how directors develop these productions. Such difficulties have far-reaching consequences with regard to future practices of adaptation and in defining the contemporary cinematic and theatrical industries in Nigeria.

The first issue is budgetary and technological constraints. In contrast to large-scale Hollywood productions, Nigerian production is usually limited in resources and may not have access to sophisticated equipment of cinematography, sound design, and editing.⁵³ Directors have to make artistic concessions, having to settle on symbolic rather than full-fledged visual effects. This limitation may impair the elements of tapping the full potential of space and imagery of cinema since some adaptations seem more theatre-like in filmed forms than creative cinematic works.⁵⁴

The second difficulty is coming to terms with fidelity and creativity. Directors often find themselves fighting the desire of the audience to see familiar stage plays reproduced on the screen, on one hand, and reinventing these pieces of works on the other hand. Exceptions made in the form of overly faithful adaptations may give an appearance of stagnancy and theatrical stitching, whereas reinterpretations that are too creative can be accused of twisting the intentions of the playwright.⁵⁵ This tension needs delicate directorial sense, which has not been well provided in the film schools and theatre schools in Nigeria.⁵⁶

The study finds that cultural authenticity and linguistic negotiation are issues that continue to persist. The postcolonial aesthetics demand the preservation of indigenous performance codes such as rituals, music and language as well as attracting audiences with international backgrounds who might not be conversant with Nigerian customs and practices.⁵⁷ Such a juggling exercise can mean sacrifices in the sphere of dialogue delivery, as directors switch between local languages and English or simplify culturally heavy symbols.⁵⁸ Such considerations beg the question of what extent to adapt to satisfy external listeners without compromising the integrity of culture.

⁵³TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 134.

⁵⁴Abdulrahman Musa, "From Stage to Screen: Reimagining Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*," *Nigerian Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 19, no. 1 (2023): 47.

⁵⁵Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 55.

⁵⁶David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 95.

⁵⁷Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 90.

⁵⁸FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 57.

The other difficulty is actor training and adaptation of the performance. Most of the actors received their training in front of the live audience and are unaware of film techniques of acting that involves different expressions, movement, and intensive emotions.⁵⁹ Directors will have to take more time to retrain actors in front of the lens which can be very taxing on production time and money. This proficiency breakage indicates the necessity of a comprehensive curriculum in Nigerian institutions of performing arts that would be able to offer a combined stage and screen preparation.

Nevertheless, despite these obstacles, there are significant implications for practice that the study shows. First, successful adaptations prove that it is possible to make deliberate use of the transformational process and bring about much more attention to the force of Nigerian theatre without being harmed by the process of cinematicization. Secondly, the integration of local culture in films through the application of contemporary cinematographic practice implies the prospect of developing a peculiarly Nigerian film language that is both culturally appropriate and internationally competitive.⁶⁰ Lastly, these adaptations make the prospect of cross-disciplinary collaboration between theatre professionals, filmmakers, and cultural policymakers clear in equipping adaptations with the infrastructure and training with which to be high-quality.

The key to curbing these problems would be to make the theatre-to-film conversion in Nigeria of much higher quality and with a greater effect. Nigeria can diversify the tradition of film and theatrical adaptation by making more use of technology, further developing actor training, and embracing directors as creative auteurs, a sustainable adaptation practice that will enhance the national theatrical and cinematic heritage.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that adapting the scripts of Nigerian theatrical plays into films is an interactive and intense process that mainly complies with the vision of the director. As the *Death and the King's Horseman* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* analysis has shown, however, the work of directors cannot be reduced to a task of translation of stage plays into a different context involving their performance adaptation to the conditions of the new media as directors are much more than that, they act as individual auteurs who shape the narratives through their creative work. This is a change in spatial organization, creative visual narration, subtle performance of the actors, and selective re-tainment of cultural and theme motifs.⁶¹

The results support the statement by Hutcheon who claims that adaptations are not derivative works but new creative acts that reinterpret original stories

⁵⁹IniobongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 123.

⁶⁰Emmanuel Adeighon, *Language, Culture, and Identity in African Theatre* (Lagos: Kraft Books, 2023), 70.

⁶¹TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 132; Chika Obi, "Directorial Choices in Adapting Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* for Film," *Studies in African Theatre and Cinema* 15, no. 3 (2024): 53.

within the flexibility and limitations of a new medium.⁶² Nigerian filmmakers are involved in the same drama of coming to terms with the manner in which they should represent the work of a playwright versus how they must adapt the work to perform within the limits of the screen. Creating so, they create hybridized texts which respect tradition in terms of cultural richness of theatre but use the property of film to provide visual immersion and greater mass appeal.⁶³

Besides, the paper emphasizes that postcolonial adaptation in an African context is not only a matter of aesthetics but it is also a cultural and political action. Directors are involved in the mediation of native methods of performance and the worldwide practices of cinematography, rejecting homogenizing western standards, and at the same time establishing the identity as Nigerian through language, costume, and ritualistic imagery.⁶⁴ Such hybrid nature not only expands the expressive means of the Nigerian cinematic experience but also helps raise the profile of African narration around the world.

In the end, theatre-to-film adaptations in Nigeria are identified as venues of artistic creativity and cultural compromise, rather than straightforward adaptations of stage productions. The dominating power forces such adaptations to be in no sense of medium, since it is a directorial vision that allows turning them into cinematic experiences in their cultural authenticity but with universally engaging appeal. Fattening up this form of creative practice by beefing up resources, actor training, and theoretical involvement will guarantee that the future adaptations of such material serve to further the cultural and artistic heritage of Nigeria.

Recommendations

In an effort to fuel the practice of theatre-to-film adaptation in Nigeria, this paper would recommend increased investment in the directorial capacity and the wider adaptation ecosystem in a more strategic fashion. On the one hand, more funding and access to updated technology of filmmaking is required in order to allow the director to explore all the possible cinematic elements without the need to sacrifice on the look of the film. Cultural agencies of government, as well as local and international film partnerships and sponsors, would increase investment towards ensuring that adaptations are done in technical adherence that is above the local and international expectation.⁶⁵

Furthermore, a new program of special training and curricular integration must be provided, to transition in stage and screen roles. These programs would train directors, actors, and designers on the abilities needed in adaptation and the art and technicalities thereof. Nigerian higher education institutions and film

⁶²Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2024), 21.

⁶³FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 56.

⁶⁴Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 4th ed. (London: Routledge, 2023), 89.

⁶⁵TundeFaleye, "Cinematic Translations: Challenges and Innovations in Nigerian Theatre-to-Film Adaptations," *African Screen Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024): 134.

schools must liaise and develop courses blending theatre arts and adaptation theory with film direction, to help raise a new breed of practitioners who master inter-medial stories.⁶⁶

Besides this, the next important suggestion would be the maintenance and recording of native theatre practices. The duplication of scripts, costumes, and performance recordings and oral history interviews would offer rich cultural stock to directors to use in genuine cinematic recreation. These projects should be assisted by national and regional institutes of culture so that the adaptations involved in the future are always based on the traditions of Nigeria but involved in contemporary cinematic styles.⁶⁷

In addition, the creation of opinionated platforms and adaptation-themed festivals would promote discussion as well as exchanges between theatre professionals, cinematographers, and researchers. The existence of such spaces would enable directors to exchange experience, conduct experiments with the hybrid aesthetics, and collectively hone practices in adaptation. The platforms can also act as incubators of cross-disciplinary projects that will stretch Nigerian visual storytelling.⁶⁸

The suggestions are meant to boost the capabilities of conversion of theatre art to that of film in Nigeria to become a worldwide acclaimed art. By helping filmmakers achieve their visions always by providing resources, training and other cultural custodians besides sharing ideas, such filmmakers will not only enhance adaptation practices but also enrich the cultural landscape of the Nigerian cinema and the global cinema.

⁶⁶David Okoro, "Performance Transformation: Training Actors for Stage and Screen in Nigeria," *Journal of Performance Studies in Africa* 8, no. 1 (2023): 95.

⁶⁷FolukeOgunleye, "Postcolonial Cinematic Aesthetics in Nigerian Film Adaptations," *West African Film Review* 10, no. 2 (2023): 58.

⁶⁸InibongUmoh et al., "Cultural Authenticity and Costume in Nigerian Stage-to-Film Adaptations," *Journal of African Media and Visual Culture* 11, no. 4 (2024): 124.