

Irreducible Africanness and Auteur Theory: Situating Tunde Kelani's Politically Committed Movies

by

Babatunde O. Onikoyi
babatunde.onikoyi@elizadeuniversity.edu.ng
Department of Performing and Film Arts,
Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin,
Ondo State, Nigeria

Babatunde Onikoyi is a lecturer in the department of Performing and Film Arts at Elizade University in Ilara-Mokin, Nigeria, where he teaches film production, transnational and African cinemas. He has previously published in the *Journal of Media and Culture*, *African Studies Review*, *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, *Ibadan Journal of Theatre Arts*, *Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*. He is also a book and film reviewer who also has publications in book chapters as well. His interests are in Postcolonial Studies, African literature, African and African Diaspora cinemas. He is currently writing a dissertation on "Nollywood and Auteursism" in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria.

Abstract

In this article an examination of various cultural/traditional tropes, and how they are employed to perform subversive functions in three of the Nigerian filmmaker Tunde Kelani's political films (*Saworoide*, *Agogo Ewo* and *Arugba*) in delineating the concept of *Irreducible Africanness*, and show how each of the film's constituent elements function. The conclusion argues that Auteur theory is only able to find apt expression and illustration through the cinematographer's filmic oeuvre built upon a *Yorùbá*/African aesthetic matrix, and an authentic *Yorùbá* /African aesthetic practice.

Introduction

The quality of scholarly attention devoted to Nollywood is not only timely, but interesting; especially as it concerns the various forms of creative outputs, and the receptions these productions have enjoyed in recent times. Nollywood is no longer a local phenomenon, but global phenomenon which has not only transcended the local limits and boundaries (Kring and Okome: 2013) that has influenced particular continents, with specific needs, and meeting diasporas demands in the most desirable of ways. Furthermore, Nollywood's hegemonic status has experienced a drastic and dynamic improvement; as quality filmmaking is being regarded as a paramount feature of the content of the films, as professionals and experts have taken over the industry. Various types of publics are emerging, a paradigmatic shift from the usual home video culture to the cinema going culture has become commonplace, and the veritable conundrum of piracy has constituted part our intellectual and academic preoccupation.

The focus of this paper is to examine the politically committed films of one of the most gifted cinematographers of long standing, Tunde Kelani, a household name in the growing and developing Nigeria film industry, whose forte (in the field) cannot be underestimated. Hence, Kelani in addition is also a storyteller, director, photographer, cinematographer and producer with a career spanning more than four decades.

This is an important statement because, the veteran cineaste, having played a part in various productions since the celluloid era simply "bridges the gap between cinema era and [the] video/digital period" (Akoh and Inegbe: 2013).

The issue of politics in Nigeria has become a matter of concern to filmmakers in Nigeria (Anuli Agina; 2013:2). From the era of military dictatorship to the present state of a stunted democracy, filmmakers exerted creative energies to "shooting home", and trying to find answers to various issues that have besieged inchoate politics, with reference to problems of bad leadership, "as a result of bad rhetoric" (Segun Ige; 2009:22). These categories of films are apt forms "for the political education of the citizens toward good governance and development" (Gbemi Adeoti; 2009:35). While some political filmmakers would choose to directly paint the picture from a more familiar and realistic perspective, filmmakers like Kelani, choose to employ specifically, traditional and cultural motifs that are located within Yorùbá cosmology, cultural society, and matrix. Hence, Tunde Kelani's, most engaging works are built upon the backdrop of Yorùbá epistemology, anthropology and ethnography, an affinity with culture that allows him to explore the themes.

Literature Review: Political Texts

There is an impression that themes on socio-political and economic realities in Nigeria are not illustrated in films produced in the industry. Olivier Barlet's in his book, *African Concerns: Decolonizing the Gaze*, opined that there appeared to be a shift in intensions and style in current African film making. Although he did not refer to Nollywood, he did argue that recent films show less concern now for ideological legitimization that was evident in early years.

He went on to say that while the first generation of African filmmakers considered themselves part of an emerging Third World cinema, they used the motion pictures as 'a tool of revolution, a means of political education to be used for transforming consciousness' (Olivier Barlet; 2000: 134-138). Eight years later, he argued in another work (and this time with reference to Nollywood) "that Nollywood does not offer a politically conscious or empowering agenda of some sort". (Olivier Barlet; 2008: 121-129).

Jordache Ellapen and Jyoti Mistry have hastily condemned the Nigerian film industry for its lack of 'revolutionizing ethos' to engage altruistically in the discursive arena of politics. They pointed out that; 'rarely do Nollywood films consider revisionist colonial histories, and that video film narratives are often informed by immediate social and cultural concerns facing the local community, and the inspirations for stories have localized appeal' Ellapen and Mistry (2013:48). While they commend Nollywood matters of production contents, production value and the industry's ability to function competitively at global level, they also condemn Nollywood cineastes for their refusal to participate in 'truly interrogating its political substance' (66).

The question one needs to ask is how much of adequate knowledge do they have about the individual mission of the practitioners of Nollywood, including the number of films that are made every year? To refute these claims, a long standing exponent and critic of Nollywood films, Jonathan Haynes had extensively critiqued a great deal of politically inclined works that were produced during the emergence of the video film industry. These works have been divided into four main genres, with particularly political leanings. In his 'Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films', Haynes, put in serious perspective 'the apolitical character of the Nigerian Videos'.... by way of trying to construct a critical apparatus 'that did justice to forms of popular political consciousness that may be familiar or disconcerting. The remarkable developments in the industry showed that filmmakers became increasingly interested in addressing political issues', which became 'safer to do since the end of military rule in 1999' (Haynes; 2006:513-514). Thus, Haynes came up with four distinct genres that slightly or overtly treat political themes. They are traditional rulers, crime thriller, family melodrama and the strictly political films.

Traditional Ruler Films

Ruler practices still matter a good deal in Nigerian life, and in the films it serves as a vehicle to illustrate issues of “political legitimacy, the health, welfare of the community, the character of ruler and so forth” (5). Among them are the works of Duro Ladipo and Hubert Ogunde. Other inspired works in this vein during the celluloid years were *Ija Ominira* (1978) made by Adeyemi Afolayan (Ade love) and Ola Balogun from a novel by Adebayo Faleti, and Ladi Ladebo’s *Vendor* (1988). The more familiar ones are the works of Tunde Kelani, like *Saworoide* (1999), *Agogo Ewo* (2002) and *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile*, hence, three parts and produced in succession, in 1993, 1994 and 1995.

Crime Thrillers

Such instances are also linked to filmmakers of the celluloid years notably; Eddie Ugbomah’s productions like; *The Rise and fall of Dr. Oyemisi* (1976), and with the emergence of Nollywood works like Ameka Igwe’s *Rattlesnake 1 and 2* (1997), Tade Ogidan’s *Hostages* (1997) and *Owo Blow 1 and 2* (1997 and 1998). These crime thrillers, specially identify the problems that vigilante are able to solve, and providing the solution, not in isolated criminal actions, but in an epidemic of local crime that authorities have failed to solve.

Family Melodrama

Themes in this category of film genre are illustrated by plots about the inflation and glamorization of lifestyle in commercial cinema and soap operas the world over. Because the number of Nigerians who actually live in such a manner is tiny and is in effect limited to those with close relations to the patrimonial state, “many Nigerian films have wondered into the political realm even if no political implications were intended”(11). For example, Kenneth Nnebue’s *True Confession* (1995) illustrate politics and election malpractices and the trappings and ineptitude of purchasing political seats in power; the same plot instances are found in Andy Amenechi’s *Dark Goddess* (1995).

Political Films

Emerging after the decline of the death of the late dictator Sanni Abacha in 1998, these works are the examples of the politically committed production that foster the agenda of the transformation in the post-colony. Filmmakers had a great deal of opportunity to explore freely their fundamental human rights, without fear of being harassed, incarcerated unlawfully or having their studios or film house closed down. Hence,

The widening of the democratic space as a result of the imagination of a civilian administration in May 1999 has led to the broadening of thematic possibilities in the reaction of home video. Events since then, in spite of the widely acknowledged imperfections, have demonstrated the preference of many Nigerians for a non-military, non-authoritarian mode of governance. They recognize the need to prevent a relapse into dictatorship. This reality has inspired video films that provide insights into how democracy as a socio-political culture can be cultivated and entrenched in the polity so that the nation can overcome the indices of under development nurtured in the three decades of military rule (from 1966, to 1979 and from 1983 to 1999). Adeoti (2009:38).

Jonathan Haynes observed how freedom of the press influenced the Nigerian film industry that 'naturally invaded this new territory. Suddenly filmmakers were no longer discreet about using military men or police officers as representative (big men, doing the things big men do, such as hiring University students a prostitutes at their parties (*Girls Hostel, Claws of Lion*)' Haynes(15). The political films that were produced since the advent of civilian rule in 1999 are numerous. Teco Benton's *State of Emergency* (2000), *The President's Daughter* (2002), *First Lady*(2002), Nnebue's *Rituals* (1997), *Time up---No Place to Hide* by Lancelot Imasuen (2001) and Ameachi's *The Last Vote* (2002), Sam Onwuka's two-part, *Stubborn Grasshopper (Loved power, Died in Power)* (2001) which is a parody of Abacha's rise and eventual demise with observable characters that replicated significant figures that were well known in Nigeria. Other works are *The Brave Soldier* by Don Pedro, Obaseki and *Dying for the Nation* (2001).

In response to Jordache Ellapen, Jyoti Mistry and Olivier Barlett, and to quickly add Frank Ukadike (2000), it is very obvious that they were not aware of the emergence of the political films in Nigeria, and the large number of extensive studies. Jonathan Haynes demonstrated in his critique that these films had features of the political in their plot treatment. Anuli Agina observed that screen makers concerned themselves more with the present political and economic events in Nigeria with the production of political satires (2013:2-3). Her criticism of the problems faced by inhabitants of the Niger-Delta is timely with regard to the oil exploration. Some major works she analysed in this context are, *King of Crude 1 & 2*(2007), *Militants 1 & 2* (2007) *The Liquid Black Gold 1&2* (2008) and *Crude War 1&2* (2011).

Akin Adesokan's essay: 'Practicing Democracy in Nigerian Films' (2009) is very significant as it examines 'two historical processes' which are 'the transformation of a social structure through the undemocratic regimes of global neo-liberalism and military rule in Nigeria, and the aesthetic possibilities in video and digital technologies' (2009:600). His essay praises the efforts of the self-consciously political directors, not just because of the subject matter they treated, but for the shift in quality and how the films had been made.

Onokome Okome thinks that opposing critics like Barlet, Jordarche and Ellapen have failed to realize the significance of interpreting Nollywood from the ‘cultural and artistic perspectives’ as the industry functions as art and by default, functions as “popular culture”(Okome and Newell; 2012: xv). Popular culture has a place in film studies and must be seen as part of a larger discourse of postcolonial studies. Nollywood is produced within the atmosphere of the “postcolonial condition”, and these conditions are experienced by the masses in different ways. These experiences are important and of greater concern to the filmmakers than the conditions that influence them (Matthias Krings and Onokome Okome: 2013). Take the theme of arm-robbery for instance. It is possible to come to an understanding that because of bad leadership, good jobs may not be at the reach of angry and frustrated youth. Therefore, there will be enough reasons for someone to go into arm robbery.

The Notion of Irreducible Africanness and the Auteur Theory

The notion of the *Irreducible Africanness* has been observed to be the paramount phenomenal feature that resonates with indigenous cultures, where African traditional essentialities, signifiers, tropes, features, codes, icons, symbols, motifs and belief systems are allowed to influence our various works of art, in spite of the employment of Western toolkits, and cannons (Ekwuazi; 1987: 47). Some scholars have opined that a functional African film cinema cannot survive within the shadows of Western orbit by reproducing its paradigms. Frank Ukadike in his seminal work, *Black African Cinema* (1994), examined the advantages of “Oral Traditional” as “aesthetic practice”, and Kenya Tomaselli illustrated how the theory of *orality* can help engender African film aesthetics (Tomaseli: 1995).

Originally espoused by Biodun Jeyifo in his article titled, “Ideology and Tragic Epistemology: The Emergent Paradigms in African Drama”, the *Irreducible Africanness* was conceptualized as an ‘African aesthetic matrix which foregrounds’ a then reigning ‘critical perception of the requirement for authentic African aesthetic practice’ (Oloruntoba-Oju Taiwo :2007). This essay was one of Jeyifo’s contributions in the debate around aesthetics, ideology and location. Accepted though, but it was fraught with inherent problematic issues within the cited context, when Jeyifo himself started with an exclusive illustrative text of this aesthetic matrix via Wole Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman* to western epistemological paradigms and reference to the Aristotle-Hegel-Marx continuum that impliedly cast a doubt on the possibility of attaining the essentiality inherent in the term. Hence, Jeyifo states that:

For what we routinely encounter is that no matter how strongly they call for an indigenous tragic art form, our authors smuggle into their dramas, through the back door of formalistic and ideological predilections, typically conventional notion and practices of rendering historical events in practices (Jeyifo, 1985:26-27).

We refer again to Ekwuazi's point when he advocates that filmmakers should look for equivalents from their cultures and that the signifiers can be drawn from the indigenous cultures (1987:48). Though what should be seen as *Irreducible Africanness*, may not totally ignore some signifying Western paradigms. After all, the technology we adopt is strictly Western (Esowanne, 2008:3, Osofisan, 2003:9), but for the film text, the icons, and the codified set of perceptions lead, and should interpret models that are 'unambiguously African.' It is a 'project consciously embarked upon by hordes of culture advocates in Africa as aesthetic praxis and continued reactive procedure against racial negation and cultural annihilation' (Olorunto-Oju, 2007:5).

Hence, the signifying paradigms of *Irreducible Africanness* involve language, environment, music/song, masks, and other motifs, indigenous language plays a major role in reflecting daily life, and literature and film that come in the form of proverbs, idioms, and incantations and rhetorical speeches (this is an aspect of language use that Wole Soyinka builds with English that serves the purposes of Yorùbá desires). Second, the settings and locations form significant tropes in Africa, and they are not taken for granted by the artist as familiar locations replicated in Nigerian films give relevance of an original cultural identity and gives recognition to a cultural ambience. Third, like most African societies, song in Nigeria is the soul's deepest expression, and also, music in film are included to play a functional role to play a cardinal role in authentic African film production, which must be entirely different from Western works. And next, in Nigeria, mask is a trope that forms part of what one can describe as a constituent cultural and historical retrospection that recurs constitutively in the various artistic and cultural products that have survived contemporary times. Other indigenous motifs that will pass for the African 'signifying paradigms for an aesthetic practice are: stories, fantastic and magic realism, Ifa-corpus, allusions to Yorùbá personages to replicate contemporary figures of note, festivals, the masquerade, and symbolic tropes and images inherent in relevant cultural products from basically drama texts to film texts that continue to surface through every single stage and development of drama, from the traditional and trado-modem theatre through the literary theatres with reference to the drama of English expression, and yet again, to Nollywood.

Auteur Theory

In the world of filmmaking studies, Auteur theory is a theory of filmmaking in which the director is considered the primary creative force in a motion picture. Arising in France in the late 1940s, it became a foundation stone of the French cinematic movement known as the *nouvelle vague*, or New Wave, a theory of the director-as-author.

Hence, Auteur theory is one of the most debated theories as far as world cinema study is concerned. It distinguishes the film artist as its writer and insist that films are works of a single individual's self-expression (Coughie, 1981:9) that is originally informed by Alexander Astruc's concept of a filmic author as director, and members of the *Cahier* critics in France, with Andrew Saris in America.

Thus, they argue not only that “an artist’s personality will manifest itself in his [her] works... (but that) there was, indeed, an artist at work where many had never believed one existed” (Brady, 2008). More than fifty years after, French critic Truffaut began the debate of the “Politique des auteurs” with his article “Une Certain Tendance du cinema Francais” (A Certain Tendency of French Cinema), the theory has become increasingly convoluted with various contributions by Peter Wollen, John Ellis, Thomas Schatz, and Michael Foucault.

Andrew Sarris, in “Notes on the Author theory in 1962” demanded a more detailed definition of the term, transforming “la politique des auteur” into an ‘auteur theory’. He proposes three premises to spot an author, the first is “the technical competence of a director as a criterion of value”, and he says “a great director has to be at least a good director”. The second premise is “the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value. Over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serve as his signature”. The third premise is a more mystic interior meaning. “Interior meaning is extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material. This conception of the interior meaning comes close to what Astruc defines as *mise-en-scène*, but not quite. It is not quite the vision of the world a director projects nor, quite his [her] attitude to life. It is ambiguous, in any literary sense, because part of it is embedded in the stuff of cinema and cannot be rendered in non-cinematic terms.” Sarris (2009: 452-453) It is significant to note here that all the premises as espoused by Sarris, are situated in the works of Tunde Kelani. No matter how different the narratives of most of his films appear, they ‘exhibit the same thematic pre-occupation, the same recurring motifs and incidents, the same visual style and tempo’ (Wollen: 2008).

The auteur theory in the films of Tunde Kelani finds adequate space in expressive explication through the commonality of thematic preoccupation, form style structural motifs, and ideological vision. Filmmakers like of Kelani advocate for a desirable society and political ambience. It is through the “Opomulero aesthetics” that he employs Yorùbá expressive tropes as a means to foster his mission of and for society. Opomulero aesthetics therefore, emerges from the auteur’s impression and the role Yorùbá culture plays in his films to become signifiers for the practice of *Irreducible Africanness*.

Another point is that this form of aesthetics comes in diverse dimensions, and is exceedingly identified in the thematic preoccupation, technical quality and deployment with a penchant for experienced application of ‘applied media aesthetic’, and in the ‘interior meanings’ coupled with the inevitable pressures of providing an audience with an impressionable production for genuine appeal. This challenging and herculean task, that every auteur gets involved in, approximates with what Andrew Saris idealizes as the ‘*élan of the soul*’ (2009:453).

Opomulero Aesthetics as ‘Irreducible Africanness’ and Harbinger to the Functionality of the Auteur Premises: A Synopsis of *Saworoide*, *Agogo Ewo* and *Arugba*

***Saworoide* (1999)**

First written and published as a literary work by Akin Ishola, *Saworoide*, produced and directed by Tunde Kelani as a film that illustrates the theme of politics and despotic tendencies of those remaining in power unconstitutionally. *Saworoide*, alongside *Agogo Ewo* have been grouped among the contemporary political parables that account for corruption, electoral fraud, and intolerance of opposition (Adeoti, 2009:45). Jogbo town, an imaginary location is the film’s setting that is searching for a suitable successor to the vacant throne of Onijogbo, after the demise of the old king. The successful candidate Lapite (Kola Oyewo) acting on the advice of Opalaba the court philosopher and historian, refuses to observe the traditional rituals connected with kingship installation. The ancient rituals includes incisions and oath taking that would jeopardize his desire for wealth and longevity on the throne. Unfortunately, his refusal has adverse consequences as he risks losing his crown soon after enthronement and may die of a headache, if Ayangalo beats Saworoide (the drum with Brass Bells) in his range of hearing. Lapite becomes overwhelmed with a sense of insecurity. His tenure witnesses burst of prosperity, especially among members of the ruling elite, on account of a boom in the timber trade, and it is equally by corruption, or bitterness and repercussion.

The recklessness of the timber merchants in causing environmental pollution and the depletion of Jogbo’s Flora and Fauna pitches King Lapite (aided by the timber merchants and some self-seeking members of his cabinet) against the youths, who demand a more transparent and humane economic order. They consequently spearhead a revolt and the ensuing political turmoil ultimately consumes Lapite. The commander of the timber merchants security forces Lagata (Kunle Bantefa), opportunistically uses the revolt to ascend the throne by force, in defiance of all traditional succession processes. His reign saw a gradual descent into authoritarianism and tyranny. It takes a counter insurgency by the youth to conquer Lagata and thereby, initiating a new order as suggested by the commencement of installation rites for young prince Adebola Adebami.

Agogo Eewo (2002)

A sequel to *Saworoide*, *Agogo Eewo* appears to be more of a prophetic futuristic idea of a country as wished by Kelani, and his notion of what political leadership should reflect. The story depicts corrupt figures that campaign for and later install their candidate Bosipo to do their bidding in the continuation of their shameless decadent ways. It turns out, surprisingly to be a shocking story because Bosipo emerges as an evolved soul, a no-nonsense leader whose gift as a consciously hard working farmer, seem to reflect in his impressive attitude towards his duties as expected of an active leader of the people. The nefarious activities and corrupt deals in the timber business from which the chiefs have benefitted in the past are stopped. Having lost much of their power and prestige the chiefs try as much as they can to hinder progress for Bosipo, by using idle youth to commit various social atrocities to discredit his government (when the citizens demand for Bosipo's head in a charger and also his impeachment having been accused of looting the treasury and dealing insincerely with the entire nation). Bosipo refuses to accept the allegations leveled against him and in order to find out the root cause of the various issues confronting the incessant regression of the nation, it is required that all members of the cabinet swear, including Bosipo as insisted by the Ifa, via the voice of the Ifa priest, with the *Agogo Eewo* (gong of abomination). In effect, anyone who is found wanting will die on the spot and the innocent and upright will live. All this will happen in full view of the people.

True to their praise names, in order to prevent the organized divine oriented ruling, the chiefs sent assassins to murder the Ifa priest and steal the *Agogo Ewo*. Unfortunately for the assassins, the chief priest who had anticipated such schemes was prepared, and intercepts the assassins with powerful incantation that charmed them; they become instantly powerless and were arrested the morning after. The culprits among them (the chiefs) meet their tragic end and die mysteriously, and Bosipo and the other upright members are found innocent and are allowed to run the country.

Arugba (2008)

Arugba, is a film with a disjointed string of events. According to the auteur, the work was actually created based on his thought process on the various issues that affected the nation as a whole. From political leadership to corruption, decadence, armed robbery, ineptitude, insurgences, insurrections, kidnap and so on (Atanda, 2014:164). The work brings to the fore the myth of the Osun river goddess, Yemoja, whose votary is a young virgin maid, Adetutu (Bukola Awoyemi), an undergraduate. In her dream, the contact and initiation is established in the montage of rituals and songs with reverence and panegyric to Yemoja the River's goddess.

At the market two females ponder and discuss the political climate and religious circles. Their comments about the white garment prophet are testimonies to the indecent dressing, among youths to which the Islamic clerics simultaneously reproach. The prophet warns, so that the malady would not lead the obstinate ones astray and be condemned to eternal doom. He observes, the indecent dressing would instigate promiscuous practices that would mostly cause HIV/AIDS. These women draw a link between the dreadful disease, to the political problems in the palace and the town that defiles solution. The cantankerous situation among the Oba's wives gives a symmetrical ambivalence to the political crises between some chiefs and Kabiyesi. Due to the inability of the government to solve these crises, Are Alasa, resigns his appointment as a chief, and he is consequentially assassinated by the power that be. Baba Kekere (Lere Paimo) is demoted and the paraphernalia of the office are confiscated. Are Onikoyi is courageous enough to tell the head-strong king, Kabiyesi that he cannot demote him, only his people have the mandate to do that thing.

The dance performances by Adetutu's group of *Afi fila perin*, and Makinma's group of *Mio ni Choice* reveal various violence of socio-political and economic decadence in the society to show the extent of decadence.

The hospital scene, the seminar on HIV/AIDS organized by the representatives of the World Health Organization, led by Dr. Adigun and the manifestation of HIV/AIDS on Adetutu's friend and family and the eventual death of her daughter, are all pointers to the reality of the dreadful disease in the society. In this regard Adetutu makes effort to assist her friend, but to no avail because Adetutu's friend, who claims that her husband was killed by misguided relations, is proved untrue. In several scenes at the University campus, Adetutu defends herself and her friends from external oppositions. Also, at the kidnap scene, Adetutu's mysterious and mythic power of the river goddess, Yemoja, is visibly illustrated.

Finally, when, the Oba decides to step aside, having realized he could no longer continue within the atmosphere of provocation, he becomes intolerant to all contrary forces; hence he decides to leave the country to America where he would enjoy his ill-gotten wealth. The film ends on the warm embrace between Makina and Adetutu, when there is a solemn nudge to live together as husband and wife, and more importantly, for Adetutu to run a Non-Government Organization (NGO) to alleviate the plight of women and children.

The Opomulero Aesthetics, Irreducible Africanness: Signifying Practice in Recurring Themes

One needs to observe that in the recurring themes, there is a timorous attitude of those in power towards relinquishing it or change from their ugly ways. To corroborate this in *Saworoide*, Lapita refuses to take oath and have an incision just because this inevitable rite will hinder him from staying much longer in power than usual, and to perpetuate his nefarious activities. Lagata, too usurps and looks determined to remain in power if he were not forced out, by all means. In *Agogo Ewo*, the chiefs who formed part of the cabinet of Bosipo, will always find a way of returning to power if not directly, but indirectly. They however use Bosipo, as a means of returning to power, after making him their own candidate and installing him. In *Arugba*, it was obvious that Kabiyesi could not stand his detractor's reactions to his unconstitutional governance. Before his resignation, he had dealt ruthlessly with opposing factions, who could not stand his reign.

Location and Settings

Settings and locations as depicted in all three works, are usually places like the palace or palace yard or court yard to show that the tradition of the Yorùbá people still live on in modern times and as such tradition could constitute a universal appeal given the nature of the relevance of stories. The use of metropolitan areas and dwelling places of specific characters is a means to portray contemporary times and the development of once rural areas. It also shows how the modern and traditional are linked together because of situations, history to help characters to remember that they have an origin that is essentially rooted in the fabric of cultural and indigenous life. The names of the towns sound even more localized in the works like *Saworoide* and *Agogo Ewo* and the town of Jogbo.

Magic Realism and Dreams

In most of Kelani's works dreams and magic realism have become not just a technique for him to drive home his messages but, to serve as a functional means to understand the real. In *Arugba*, Are Onikoyi's dream shows how deviant he can be, and his vision of society is far from what it is under the rule of Kabiyesi. His defiance in the dream alongside his colleagues in office is also reflected in the palace when he simply refuses to be stripped off his position unlawfully, especially when he is sure he serves the nation as a representative of the people that voted him to power as governor. He believes that, his uprightness has given him the power and the *rhetoric* to talk back to the king, and question his rule, much to the chagrin of other representatives, who are obviously corrupt.

It is because of people like Are Onikoyi, that Kabiyesi refuses to continue his tenure, and so resigns his kingship. Also in the same film, Adetutu, the Arugba, had a dream that she would be chosen as the votary. That is why when she was called upon she did not refuse. Her qualification stuns even her contemporaries because, in spite of everything, she stands as an epitome of uprightness, while others have proven to be unqualified due to their subtle promiscuous activities. In *Agogo Ewo*, Bosipo the King had a dream that his uprightness would bring him disaster if he does not find a solution that would curb the excesses of the corrupt chiefs and also exonerate him from disrepute and destruction. The old man in his dream, becomes some sort of savior and a link to finding a solution. Also, in all three works, magic is employed to the fullest, as a kind of *du ex machina*, a metaphysical intervention that is also not divorced from the efficacy of Ifa. In both *Saworoide and Agogo Ewo*, the use of the 'Saworoide'(Brass Bells) to unseat Lagata, and the 'Agogo Ewo'(Sacred Gong), to finish up and check government functionaries' excesses, in these contexts are used as interventions to solving issues that appear complex by mortal efforts. In both films attempts are also made by the antagonists' to get rid of the Brass Bells and Agogo Ewo, and this is because culprits are aware of the consequences if these divine tools were to be used. Not only did they want to confiscate these tools but, each group of antagonists in both films were determined to kill the custodians. They fail in their mission because of the divine powers of Ifa and through incantations, they are all disarmed.

In *Arugba*, Adetutu, it is always protected by the goddess when events demand such application. Her innate potentials are awesome, as a result of the divinity, and metaphysical essence that chooses her as the destined one. She is a social reformer, a musician, one with the foresight for progress, one who hates injustice, one who cares for the protection of lives and property; a descent lady, and an epitome of uprightness and genuineness. These qualities are rare today in most youngsters as portrayed in the character of Adetutu. Invariably, she also wields such divine powers and that is why she is able to single handedly deal with the boys who harass one of her schoolmates. In addition to that, she not only protects herself from the kidnappers, but also saves the little children from being murdered or/and used for some form of ritual or the other. Water, is the element of nature and it gives Adetutu power to deal with her enemies. It is this same water that she appeases when she is led astray or pressurized. It is the same water that energizes her to deal with the kidnappers when she requests for a drink that one of the assassins pours inconsiderably on her, instead of handing it over to her.

Language

All three works are produced in the Yorùbá language and thus, plays a vital role, in the defense of Tunde Kelani's authorial essence. Essentially, he produces works in Yorùbá language because, he believes that it is the best form of cultural bearer and people tend to understand themselves when they speak their own language. His decision to employ the Yorùbá language is not because of the direct meaning it conveniently conveys but because of its inherent and deeper meanings that establish the quality of that language.

Deep meanings are better illustrated through idioms, proverbs, rhetoric, metaphors, chants, incantations, renditions, poetry, and oral import etc. A greater part of the Ifa corpus is understood through the employment and understanding of the Yorùbá language. It is impossible to understand a literature of any society without first understanding its culture. It is part of what one can refer to as *asa ibile* (indigenous practice). For Kelani, it is simple enough to understand ‘the sources of his stories and in the use of materials based on oral discourse’, and that is why he says that

I work primarily in Yorùbá, my mother tongue. Therefore, I explore things that have a strong Yorùbá cultural base. You know, it is a pity that we were not taught these things in school. (2008:30).

What fascinates the critics about Kelani’s use of language is the precise competence inherent in the art of translation that goes beyond making meaning, as a postcolonial subversive strategy. The visual translation can be seen as an unconsciously employed *subversive visual aesthetic strategy* that the auteur employs for an indigenous purpose. An approach which insist that English, does not have the final say, but is compelled by the conventions instigated by opomulero aesthetics, to serve a subordinating role in the dissemination of messages. The Yorùbá language here is functional in two ways: first as the language used to pass across contemporary messages and secondly, as a subversive tool to strip the English language of its dominant hegemonic and metropolitan status.

Music

Music as used in Kelani’s films are functional. In *Arugba*, all kinds of songs compliment the development of the theme of festival songs, the songs that give credibility to the festival of Osun Osogbo, song in praise of the river goddess Yemoja, and the ones rendered for the procession when the votary performs the rite. There are also satirical songs by Adetutu’s musical group *Afi Fila P’erin* and the Makinwa group, with his protest and lamentation song *Mio Ni Choice* reveal the problems of corruption, decadence, and socio-political crisis that have engulfed the nation most terribly.

Protest songs are also used in both *Saworoide* and *Agogo Ewo* by citizens of Jogbo to express their numerous displeasures. And of course, songs of victory that comes here after. Tunde Kelani’s ingenuity has always involved culturally instigated and inspired composition. Sometimes they would only come in form of instrumentation, like the sound of a guitar, sekere, a bata drum etc. to give an effect of the cultural essence.

Story Telling

In *Saworide* and *Agogo Ewo*, the story teller is usually old, to show that knack for wisdom and knowledge of the worldview and the goings-on. He interjects with songs, aphorisms and proverbs at random, that at best sheds more light on the reasons for the main stories and their individual plot structure. There are also references, to special personages and the gods of the Yorùbá pantheon like Ogun, Sango, Obatala, Yemoja and so on to illustrate the various behaviors of the characters in modern times as created, by the filmmaker.

Symbols and Tropes as Meaning

We shall quickly refer to the Agogo Ewo (Gong of Abomination), in *Agogo Ewo* and the Saworoide (Brass Bell) in *Saworoide*. Ordinarily, the Saworide can be taken to mean a drum that performs a musical function. On the other hand the Agogo Ewo can also be seen as an instrument to call people to respond to meetings and or get together with the rulers of a community. The gong is occasionally carried by a town crier who is sent out to fetch the citizens, at the king's command. But in the context of the films, their uses go beyond their mere individual functions that reside in the metaphysical realm of the people's existence, and both serve the function of justice that is rendered accordingly.

In a film like *Arugba*, the major trope is Adetutu, who is the votary. The epitome of cleansing the society's sins and iniquities, a representative of Yemoja, and even her role in the film, surpasses a physical Yemoja. Not only does she wield physical power, but also spiritual power that seems mysterious to those around her, but well understood by her and her personal deity.

Concluding Reflections

This paper considers Tunde Kelani as an auteur that is fully respected among other African directors of note. There is still a paucity of study into the auteur criticism of Nigerian films and their makers. But it is pertinent to mention that Tunde Kelani, the last of the thriving modern celluloid Nigerian filmmakers, approximates as one to understudy as an auteur (Afolayan; 2014: 39) as he inscribes at the heart of Nollywood, an enormous signature and an intriguing cultural and artistic template within the digital alter/native technology.

An alien who lacks the conception about a different culture will find it difficult to understand the shape and organization of such cultural milieu. The Nigerian culture is different from other African cultures. To understand African aesthetics, there is a need to come to terms with the culture of each society, and its world view.

The common factor here is that they are African countries, and they have a common colonial experience. But in the scheme of socio-cultural existence the tendencies that emphasize their differences in the practice of unique traditions, specific anthropologies, ethnographies, and other epistemological essence cannot be avoided.

For Kelani's works, not only does the Auteur theory find space for expressive functionality in the opomulero aesthetics. In this critique, the theory proves insufficient to cater for the demands to examine his cinematographic oeuvre. These *exemplar* films refuse to conform to Western paradigms and are deliberately built upon backdrop of African philosophical conceptions and thoughts. Tunde Kelani's return to the source is in defense of a paradigm, which contains detailed knowledge, deeply rooted in Yorùbá cosmology and possesses a universal link. All this is actively achieved through the import of the productions of a digital native. Kelani's ability to examine significant socio-political issues through a body of works, has given him the opportunity to developed an instantly recognizable idiosyncratic style that has permeated everything he has touched.

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