Canonizing Trash: A Study of Three Nollywood Directors.

By

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Dedication

For Opeyemi Odunola Soetan, my friend and darling wife: the possessor of the àṣẹ that keeps the darkness at bay. For your love, sacrifice, and ìwàpẹ̀lẹ́ that have held our family together.

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Preface

In today's world, Nollywood is among the leading global film industries, and its audiences are scattered across the continents. From inception, Nollywood has enjoyed robust scholarship attention. Various authors and critics, including film and cultural studies scholars, have all published different articles and books on the vast Nigerian film industry. So, the tradition is no longer a mere flash in the pan, but a huge film tradition with national and international appeal. Also, the industry has engendered its own scholarship, which keeps growing from time to time. Since the scholarship on Nollywood grows in leap and bound, I am adding this dissertation as my contribution to the ongoing vibrant debates on the industry. However, unlike the other authors who focused on genre and other thematic components of Nollywood film, my project focuses on the filmmakers who use their artistic ingenuities to create the films. I made the filmmakers the focus of my research because I reckoned that previous scholarship attention focused on the films than they do on the filmmakers themselves. For me, Nollywood is now a global film tradition, and reading its films using the auteurist approach won't be a bad idea since some film directors in the industry make excellent films. Even though the theory is fraught with contentions, it is still a great theoretical model for reading movies globally. Because the auteurist approach is relatively new to Nollywood studies, what I have done here is to select three filmmakers and use their works to argue for auteurism in Nollywood studies. Although my selections and arguments are not entirely exclusive, yet I believe that my ideas in this work will lay the foundation for auteur criticism in Nollywood scholarship.

Chapter One. Canonizing Trash: Auteurist Criticism and Nollywood Films

Introduction: Contextualizing Nollywood Films

Nollywood, the appellative term for the Nigerian film industry, has been recognized in academic spheres for its substantial production of low-budget, narrative-driven, and serialized films. The tradition balances elements of cinema and television to emerge as the dominant producer of video-films in Sub-Saharan Africa. Often, existing scholarship on Nollywood lampoons its shoddy content, blurry images, garbled audio, and the entire low-quality production style. They thus dismiss the capability of the industry to represent little but low-level African cinema. Long-established African film criticism focused on celluloid movies. The narratives of those movies were of the conventional type modeled on traditions of European filmmaking. Dominant early trends in Nollywood criticism only acknowledge the discursive potential of Nollywood films in the (re)construction of African identity and as an indication of the creative potential of Africans, using the staggering number of Nollywood films released weekly, monthly or annually as familiar talking points.[1]

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[1] A few examples of earliest scholarship on Nollywood include: Abdoulaye, Ibbo. "Niger and Nollywood" in Barrot Pierre & Taylo Lynn (Eds.) *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria. 2008; Ajibade, Babson. "From Lagos to Doula: Seeing Spaces and Popular Video Audiences." Postcolonial Text. 2007; Barrot, Pierre. "Stress Warriors" in Nollywood: *The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria. 2008; Eghagha, Hope. "Magical Realism and the 'Power' of Nollywood Home Video Films". *Film International*. 2007; Evuleocha, Stevina. "Nollywood and the Video Revolution: Implications for marketing video films in Africa". *International Journal of Emerging Markets* (2008): 407 -417; Fuita, Frank & Lumisa, Bwiti

Beyond using Nollywood films as samples of creative hard work in Africa and Nigeria, documentation of African cultures and tradition, and the affirmation of its role in rescuing African cinema from the economic shackles of former European imperial colonization, serious research into the specific content, context, and the artistic plurality of the films themselves has been comparatively less frequent. Furthermore, Nollywood filmmakers are yet to be inducted into the canon of African cinema: their works have been studied in relation to themes and genres but not within the auteurist perspective that favors in-depth analyses of bodies of films about particular directors in the tradition. This absence constitutes a regrettable void in the world of African film study. If one could ask what the reasons are behind this scant research on individual Nigerian filmmakers, the answer would usually boil down to a seeming lack of production value in their films. While it is true that many Nollywood films suffer from a myriad of technical issues amidst an uncertain and competitive market dominated by distributors and pirates, there are a few examples that can boast refined cinematic qualities capable of making them appeal to discerning local audiences as well as international spectators.

Unlike the celluloid cinema that was introduced to Africa and Nigeria in the wake of colonialism, which requires some technical skills and massive capital investment to produce, Nollywood came to life through the appropriation of video technology.[2] And, today, Nollywood has become the most-circulated form of popular culture in sub-Saharan Africa—if not the whole African continent. Its narratives portray African experiences differently from previous celluloid cinematic representations in Anglophone and Francophone African films. In Nigeria, for instance,

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"Kinshasa & Nollywood: Chasing the Devil" in Barrot Pierre & Taylor Lynn (Eds.) *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria*. Ibadan, Nigeria. 2008

[2] The video technology is a cheaper alternative and a nondescript platform for filmmaking.

the celluloid film era that was popularized by the late Hubert Ogunde, Adeyemi Afolayan (Ade Love), Eddie Ugbomah, and Moses Adejumo (Baba Sala) began in the colonial period. It flourished from the early 1970s until mid-1980s when "the disastrous decline of the Nigerian Naira… made the importation of materials and equipment, and foreign processing, astronomically expensive" for the production of that type of cinema (Okome & Haynes 1). In most of these early works, the filmmakers represent different issues in their immediate societies—political liberation, ethnicity, leadership dispute, and socio-cultural anomalies—in lush images and artistically compelling narratives. Sometimes, too, the sacred is given prominence in the works as the filmmakers manipulate different binaries (e.g., malevolence/benevolence, white/black, bad/good, or ugly/beautiful) to foreground the tendentious relationship between the African traditions and the burgeoning European cosmopolitan elitism of the early independent period (that is the 1960s) to the mid-1980s. (See *Jaiyesinmi, 1981; Aropin N Tenia, 1982; Ajani Ogun, 1976; Taxi Driver, 1983;* and *Rise and Fall of Dr. Oyenusi, 1977*).

Similarly, francophone African filmmakers, notably, Ousmane Sembene, Jibril Mambety, Idrisa Ouedraogo, etc., flourished within a celluloid cinematic tradition that was rooted in Pan African ideologies. Almost all the filmmakers of that age subscribed to using cinema as a form of mass enlightenment and the re/creation of African identity in tandem with African mores and values. By representing Africans as humane, civilized and orderly, the filmmakers made a direct attack on their European and American counterparts who often depicted Africans as gullible buffoons and loud loafers. Sembene and a few other filmmakers, in cinematic representations, called for the total liberation of colonized African nations from the paternalistic yokes and cultures of their former colonizers and in the process, inlaid their works with themes of traditional African ethos, praxis, and innovations that support African identity and experiences (Fofana, 2012). For

Sembene, cinema should serve educational purposes beyond its entertainments farces; it should be a social weapon for mass enlightenment, an *Ecole de Nuit* (night school).

While Nollywood is different from the celluloid cinemas of the early 1960s and 1970s, it, nonetheless, mimics the irregular pattern of development in postcolonial Nigeria and Africa; it-narratives traces the contours of modernity in the rapidly globalizing world, especially the effects of neoliberal capitalism in the African continents and the social-political issues that are associated with it. The industry illustrates, vividly, the interests of its non-elite mass African audiences as well as their hopes and aspirations. Thriving on exigencies, the industry turns the everyday stress and struggle of the ordinary people into cinematic tales that reflect the socio-economic situation of the nation. In serialized and low-budget video films, Nollywood filmmakers project the quotidian peripheral existences of the ordinary masses and the smashing opulence of the affluent. Often, these representations reflect the chaotic everyday struggle for survival in Nigeria and the African continent in general, to the extent that one can aptly describe the Nollywood tradition as a cinema of carnival, in which impromptu events are blown out of proportion and scaled up as tall tales. Much like Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984) idea of the carnival which permits people to feast, drink, dance, make love, and satirize erring individuals and government establishments, Nollywood invites its audiences to take part in the everyday rituals of survival of the marginal people as they invent strategies to subvert economic barriers and social obstacles placed before them by the rich and the affluent. These series of coping mechanisms and survival strategies, often, result in beautiful melodrama, comedy and heightened tensions, all of which define the Nollywood corpus. In order for the industry to represents the rots in the Nigerian nations and the comedy that results from the atrocious behaviors of the ruling political class, it overhypes mundane and transcendental events: from wedding ceremonies, housewarmings, and chieftaincy celebrations to burial

ceremonies, Nollywood outrageously projects performances that highlight intense transgression of moral and religious norm, "often heightened by exaggeration and excesses" (Larkin 186).

From what it was, say some 25 years ago, Nollywood grew to become a dominant film tradition in Africa. In the early years of Nollywood, poor cinematography, disjointed storylines, and garbled audio severely marred productions. Even though the majority of the consumers of the old Nollywood films coped with the technical limitations, a few, especially the elite ones quickly dismissed the films and labeled them as "trashy." Trashy or not, notwithstanding, the industry continues to grow in leap and bound, adapting itself to new technologies, global cultures and the ever-expanding neoliberal capitalism of the twenty-first century. So, in recent years, because of the diversity in audience composition—linguistic, social, educational, and economical—Nollywood films have witnessed a great turnaround. While audiences of the formative years were pleased with film content that visualized ancestral worship, esoteric traditions, and gory details of epic narratives, the younger generation of Nollywood audience romanticize a plethora of themes that sum up their postcolonial yearnings and aspirations. These yearnings and desires are often cosmopolitan and tend to focus on the good life the big city or metropolis is capable of offering—mansions, beautiful women, handsome men, loaded bank accounts, and flamboyant display of meretricious wealth. In early Nollywood films, multi-storey buildings with Brazilian architectural designs and Mercedes-Benzes are projected as the symbols of opulence but, today, images of sleek and elegant automobiles such as Bentley, Bugatti, Lexus, high-end sports utility vehicle (SUVs), and walled palatial mansions delineate good life. In fact, the automobile has become essential in the aesthetic corpus of Nollywood to the extent that it is synonymous with ill-gotten riches, high economic power, and social status (see Green-Simms, 2009 and 2017). Through its camera lenses, Nollywood captures the "postcolonial incredible" in Nigeria and relays it to the audience to

consume (Olaniyan, 2004). Olaniyan, a prominent scholar of African literature and culture, in his book *Arrest the Music!: Fela and his Rebel Art and Politics* coined the term "postcolonial incredible" to describe the various political, social, and cultural anomalies that Fela Anikulapo Kuti sang about in his music. The postcolonial incredible, Olaniyan wrote, "inscribes that which cannot be believed; that which is too improbable, astonishing, and extraordinary to be believed" (20). From human beings who are transformed into animals and other inanimate objects to in-laws forcefully removing a legally married woman from her home, Nollywood films pump up the grandiose realities in Nigeria and, in the process, represents the "outlandish infraction of normality" on the African continent in different Nigerian languages and cultures (Olaniyan 2).

Borrowing from different Nigerian cultures and languages, Nollywood reflects myriads of cultural realities of the heterogeneous Nigerian ethnicities in dimensions that are different from socio-cultural praxis in other parts of the continent. From Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo languages to the Nigerian Pidgin English and over two hundred dialects and languages, Nollywood introduces its audiences to different cityscapes, fauna, and cosmology of the variegated Nigerian nation. It is a cinematic Venn diagram with many stylistic and cultural subsets. The industry has become the window through which to envision Nigeria and the frame to study, critique, and appreciate Nigerian cultures—traditional and cosmopolitan. Emerging as a crippled[3] tradition, given its video orientation, Nollywood rakes in a profit of approximately $590 million US dollars annually (see blogs.worldbank.org/category/tags/nollywood), a significant amount in the Nigerian context.

[3] Matthew Brown uses the term as a metaphor to discuss the national status of Nollywood within the frame of national cinema in a book chapter titled "Nollywood the Cripple Cinema of a Crippled Nation?" in Adeshina Afolayan (Ed.) *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on The Figurine*

Almost every week, Nollywood filmmakers churn out an average of five to ten films; thus, making Nollywood films the most consumed popular culture in Nigeria and beyond (Krings & Onookome, 2013).[4]

Nollywood has blossomed from a local phenomenon to a Pan-African affair: no wonder John McCall, a scholar of African arts, dubbed Nollywood "the Pan-Africanism that we have" (McCall 96). Pan-Africanism, as a socio-political term, has been in African discourse and scholarship since the first half of the twentieth century. From W.E.B. DuBois to Kwame Nkrumah, Pan-Africanism occupies a central position in black writings, especially discourses on African identity, ideologies of anticolonial and antiracist resistance, and rights to self-rule. Pan-Africanism, as an intellectual movement, defines the complexities of black political and ideological thoughts over decades. It reflects a range of black political views that relate to African conditions, both on the continent and in the Diaspora. Pan-Africanism hinges on the belief that "African people including those in the Diaspora share a common root and political destiny" (Shepperson 446-7). Perhaps Nollywood is a twenty-first-century Pan-Africanism because the concerns, hopes, aspirations, disillusionment, and tragedy Nollywood explore, are shared roughly continentally. The stylistic idioms and idiosyncrasies that audiences recognize in Nollywood films suture oral traditions, religious beliefs, social formations, and cultural practices, and diasporic experiences.

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[4] Krings and Okome (2013, 1) discuss the continental influence of Nollywood on African film production in recent years. Both scholars cite the examples of Tanzanian and Kenyan filmmakers who now mimic Nollywood’s film, since they claim audiences consume more Nollywood films than those locally produced in Tanzania and Kenya respectively.

Scholarship on Nollywood has expanded too, in recent times.[5] Perhaps, this expansion in scholarship is due to the call for new paradigms and reassessment of African cinema criticism in

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[5] The list of theses/dissertations and books on Nollywood is becoming inexhaustible in recent years. Here are a few examples: Alessandro Jedlowski, "Videos in Motion: Processes of Transnationalization in the Southern Nigerian Video Industry: Networks, Discourses, and Aesthetics," dissertation, the University of Naples ("L'Orientale"), 2011; Naomi Brock, "Representations of Nigerian Women in Nollywood Films," dissertation, Howard University, 2009. 1473423; 3) Brown, Matthew. "The Long Nollywood Century: Colonial Cinema, Nationalist Literature, State Television, and Video Film". The University of Wisconsin, Madison. 2014; 4) Dossoumon, Mafoya. *Class and Gender Representation in Nollywood Movies*. Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013. 1549813; 5) Kofi Asare. *Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in Video films: Audience Reception and Appropriation in Ghana and the UK*. University of Edinburgh. 2013; 6) Laramee, Michael. *Digital zoom on the video boom: Close readings of Nigerian films*. University of Miami, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013. 3563927; 7) Lindsey Green-Simms. *Postcolonial Automobility: West Africa and the Road to Globalization.* THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA. 2009; 8) McCain, Carmen. *The Politics of Exposure: Contested Cosmopolitanisms, Revelation of Secrets, and Intermedial Reflexivity in Hausa Popular Expression.* University of Wisconsin, Madison. 2014; 9) Offord, Lydia. *Straight outta Nigeria: and the emergence of Nigerian video film (theory). Lost and Turned Out (production)*. Long Island University, the Brooklyn Center, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2009. 1466053; 10) Onuzulike, Uchemnna. *Nollywood: The Emergence of the Nigerian Video Film industry and its representation of Nigerian culture*. Clark University,

the twenty-first century by cultural scholars and film critics on the continent and around the world. Initially, scholars held different opinions about the industry: while some were positive about its growth, some conceived the video film phenomenon as a flash in the pan that would disappear as

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ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2007. 1448670; 11) Otiono, Nduka. *Street Stories: Orality, Media, Popular Culture and the Postcolonial Condition in Nigeria.* University of Alberta (Canada), ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2011. NR89259; 12) Sophie Samyn. *Nollywood in the Diaspora: An exploratory study on transnational aesthetics.* Universiteit Gent Academiejaar 2009-2010; 13) Ugor, Paul. *Youth culture and the struggle for social space: The Nigerian Video Films.* University of Alberta (Canada), ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2009. NR51254; 14) Uwah, Ebere. *From rituals to films: a case study of the visual rhetoric of Igbo culture in Nollywood films.* Dublin City University (Ireland), ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2009. U589019.

Book publications on Nollywood from 2007 – 2015 include the following titles: (*Nollywood: the video Phenomenon in Nigeria (2008); Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics(2011)*; *African Film: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics(2010); African Video Movies and Global Desires(2013)*; *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Films (2013); Viewing African in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and The Nollywood Video Revolution, 2010; Trash: African Cinema From Below(2013)*; *New Paradigm for Nollywood(2013)*; *The Globalization of the Cultural Industries: Nollywood: The View from the South (2011)*; *Nollywood and Its Critics (2010); Letter From Nollywood (2007)*; *Nollywood (2009); Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on the Figurine (2014); Nollywood Stars(2015).*

quickly as it came. Armes Roy is prominent among the scholars who entirely dismissed the Nollywood tradition and its films. To Roy, "Nigerian video production is totally commercial" and hence, "have little artistic worth" (156). Roy, it seems to me, is indirectly referring to most Nollywood films as "trashy" and unworthy of academic attention. This, perhaps, explains his exclusion of Nollywood films and filmmakers from his book *African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara (*2006).

Similarly, Wole Ogundele, in his chapter contribution to Haynes' edited volume *Nigerian Video Films* (1997) said this about the burgeoning Nigerian film industry "the Nigerian video industry is indeed maddeningly exasperating as it is fascinating. It is full of contradictions that ordinarily should not hold together but somehow do: crass opportunism and commercialism mixing with and inseparable from some flashes of true art" (46). Ogundele, no doubt, casts aspersion on Nollywood in its heydays. Even though his criticism of the Nigerian film industry is not a total condemnation of the industry, it is evident that he, too, like Roy was uncomfortable with the amateurish productions that defined the tradition then. In fact, Ogundele refers to the birth of Nollywood films as "the aesthetic denigration of the vibrant Yoruba traveling theater of the 1960s to the 1980s" (ibid). Pierre Barrot, commenting on the Nollywood tradition and its films opine that "it would be unrealistic to attempt an exhaustive study" of Nollywood considering the thousands of films that would need to be viewed, many of which are debatably "disposable" (Barrot, xi). The 'disposable' in Barrots's musing is a negative term that points to his understanding of the Nigerian film tradition and its future. To Barrot, like Roy and Ogundele, Nollywood spins stories that are exasperatingly lacking in artistic worth. Hence, they are cultural materials with low life expectancy. Which means Nollywood films, as implied by the three scholars, are trashy, or short life cycle materials that are consumed and discarded.

However, few scholars including Foluke Ogunleye, Jonathan Haynes, and Kenneth Harrow shared different positive opinions about Nollywood. To Ogunleye, in *African Video Film Today* (2003*),* video film production, especially in the Nigerian context, is “Africa’s golden opportunity to have more than a salutary presence in [the] vast marketplace of globalization” (xi). And, consequently, she warns that the art must not be “disdained as a mere flash in the pan,” and that scholars and critics should make serious academic efforts to “elevate it from the current position of a mere craft and change the pariah status it occupies, especially among condescending critics, both from within Africa and from the Western world” (xi). In the same vein, Haynes submits in his article titled “Nigerian Cinema: Structural Adjustment” that the Nigerian film industry is an extraordinary “example of the sort of coping mechanism that keeps Africa alive: out of the impossibility of producing celluloid films in Nigeria (because of economic collapse and social insecurity) came a huge industry, constructed on the slenderest of means and without anyone’s permission” (Haynes 1995). Constrained thematic preoccupations and low artistry notwithstanding, Haynes reads Nollywood films in laudatory terms, claiming that “it [Nollywood] is a heroic act of self-assertion—on the part of Nigeria in general, and of the individual filmmakers” (132). Following suit, Harrow in *Postcolonial African Cinema: From Political Engagement to Postmodernism* vehemently argue for the dismantling of the hegemonic readings of African cinema, and subsequently calls for an expanded reading of African cinema/films to accommodate all forms of film production on the continent. To this clarion call, he writes “It is time for a revolution in African film criticism. A revolution against the old, tired formulas deployed in justification of filmmaking practices that have not substantially changed in forty years. Time for new voices, a new paradigm, a new view” (xi).

As could be seen, there exists an ideological dichotomy between the groups of scholars and film critics who have over the years nursed the fear that Nollywood is but a temporal phenomenon that was bound to dissipate over time, and those who are hopeful that the tradition has all it takes to grow to become a leading film tradition in the world. Whichever camp one belongs to, what is apparent is the fact that scholars of Nollywood are divided over the industry, especially in the areas that they thought the industry could improve on. In light of this dichotomy, existing scholarship on Nollywood has focused on three aspects of the film tradition—content, style/technical quality, and the popularity of the tradition. Among the leading scholars whose works focus on the content analysis of Nollywood films are Jonathan Haynes, Pierre Barrot, and Manthia Diawara.

In his volume *Nigerian Video Films* (1997), which was the first edited work on Nollywood, Haynes undertook a historical and thematic examination of Nollywood films. He attributes the birth of the Nollywood industry to the global economic recession of the 1970s and the entrepreneurial sagacity of a few diligent local businessmen who took bold steps to adapt video technology to a filmmaking format. Commenting on the content and thematic composition of the films, Haynes describes the tradition as "a rehash of television programs packaged as movies," claiming that "video films are closer to serial television forms than to the Aristotelian form of the feature film" (25). Recently, Haynes released his monograph on Nollywood titled *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genres* (2016). The book is the latest addition to the expanding scholarship on Nollywood; it details the different genres in Nollywood, using content analyses of the films. The book systematically identifies and categorizes the many genre types that the Nollywood tradition creates, including the "Nollywood diaspora" genre. Dating back to the moment that *Living in Bondage* was made in 1992, the book provides newcomers and experienced scholars a refresher course on the conditions that laid the foundation for the Nollywood tradition.

For the second time since scholarship began on Nollywood, after Adesina Afolayan's use of "auteur" in his book titled *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspective on the Figurine* (2014), Haynes' new book directly refers to Tunde Kelani as an "auteur," even though he didn't put Kelani's film within the auteurist critical framework. More or less a recapitulation of all his previous publication on Nollywood films, Haynes sum up the Nollywood tradition and provides his comments about the future of Nollywood.

Pierre Barrot's *Nollywood: The Video Phenomenon in Nigeria* (2008) is mainly geared towards thematic analyses and the presence of film conventions in Nollywood films. Barrot, in his critical view, submits that "it would be unrealistic to attempt an exhaustive study" of Nollywood films, given that many of the films are "disposable" (xi). By referring to the films as "disposable" materials, Barrot seems to be focused on the content of the films and subsequently, fails to imagine the possible stylistic insight "disposable" films can provide through close readings.

In *African Films: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics* (2010), Diawara recognizes Nollywood films as new forms of cinematic and cultural aesthetics that reflect the quotidian lives of African citizens. He speculates that Nollywood films provide Africans with images and language "to represent this new imagined community with the same frustrations and aspirations" and that they are "a copy of a copy that has become original" through the embrace of its spectators (185). Subsequently, he points attention toward recurring elements of the films and certain acting styles that are constitutive of Nollywood's narratives: the naïve village girl, the slick city dwellers, the witch doctors and priests, and the crooked chiefs or politicians (177). Diawara concludes that Nollywood films remake American action dramas like The *Fugitive, Scarface*, and *Fatal Attraction* into localized stories, and that "some of the soundtracks and special effects of Nollywood movies are lifted from American popular music and films" (177).

However, other scholars including Foluke Ogunleye, Femi Shaka, Brian Larkin, Akin Adesokan, and Kenneth Harrow critique the stylistic and technical qualities of the films. In her 2003 publication, *African Video Film Toda*y Ogunleye directs her critical attention to the inadequate technical structures that mar production output in the industry and, in response, solicits more serious academic efforts on the tradition to "elevate it from the current position of a mere craft" (xi). Femi Shaka, in his chapter contribution to *African Video Films Today* titled "Rethinking the Nigerian Video Film Industry: Technological Fascination and the Domestication Game,"hit the nail on the head when he writes that "technically speaking, most of the video films of the late 1980s and early 1990s were of poor production quality." He further affirms that the films were "hastily shot with VHS cameras, which resulted in extreme depreciation and poor picture quality after editing (46). Larkin, in his volume *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (2009) describe the thriving production style in Nollywood as that of an "aesthetic of outrage" (172). The "aesthetic of outrage" Larkin explains, is about narratives that are organized around a series of extravagant shocks designed to outrage the viewers with a composite of different elements key to which is "the intense transgression of moral and religious norm, often heightened by exaggeration and excess" (186). To Larkin, Nollywood films not only reflect the quotidian realities of Nigeria, but they also exaggerate these multiple realities beyond the height permitted by the principle of verisimilitude. On his part, Harrow, in *Trash: African Cinema from Below* (2014) coined "trash" as a metaphor for reading afresh African cinema since "the old paths of celebration are no longer living" (5). About Nollywood, Harrow calls condescending critics to order saying, "Nollywood is not the answer to trash" it is the answer to African culture's quest for a viable economic basis that rests upon an African audience and its taste (60).

Adesokan's book *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (2011), however, diverts from these critical trends of content-based analysis and technical qualities to focus on the style and aesthetic formation of the industry by devoting a chapter to Kelani's *Thunderbolt: Magun* (2001). In a well-grounded auteurist framework, Adesokan situates Nigerian video-films and African celluloid films within the same paradigm of aesthetic formation and draws meaningful connections between the two styles of filmmaking on the continent. The work is the first attempt at reading Nollywood films beyond content analysis to include stylistic forms and other artistic nuances.

Also, due to the sporadic growth of the Nollywood industry and the prevalent star system that has endeared Nollywood films to audiences across national and geographical boundaries, an increasing amount of scholarship is now being devoted to the global popularity of Nollywood and its stars. Among the leading scholars whose works reflect the colossal presence of Nollywood in the global film arena and the star system are Mathias Kring, Onokome Okoome, and Noah Tsika. Krings and Okome, in their 2013 publication *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimension of an African Video Film Industry*, detail the growth of Nollywood and its ability to spur greater cinematic progress in Africa and beyond. In the book, both authors put in plain terms how Nollywood films have become a model for film production in other African nations like Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. In a similar vein, Tsika's *Nollywood Stars* (2015) surveys Nollywood actors and actresses and subsequently provides a list of "stars" in the film tradition whose images and acting styles have endeared Nollywood films to local and international spectators. The book is the first of its kind in the history of scholarship on Nollywood to adopt the "star system" in describing, contextualizing, and analyzing cinematic actors/actresses in Africa. Despite the laudable achievements recorded by francophone African actors/ actresses including Thiemo Ndiaye, Safi

Faye, Venus Seye, Ndiagne Dia, etc., there is yet to be a single monograph or edited volume on their arts and contributions to African cinema.

These rich scholarly attempts notwithstanding, representative in-depth film analyses of Nollywood films and the filmmakers are surprisingly absent from most literature on the vast African video film industry. While these recent works have demonstrated and suggested that a booming film industry exists in Nigeria and that its metanarrative is uniquely African in composition and representation, there is still a need for a methodological shift toward close readings of individual filmmakers and their works. Only a small portion of scholarship has been dedicated to the Nollywood filmmaker: Uzoma Esonwanne's published interview on Amaka Igwe, Tunde Kelani, and Kenneth Nnebue; Harrow's article about the proclaimed history of Nollywood in which he alluded to Kenneth Nnebue's effort, and Adesokan's in-depth analysis of Kelani's *Thunderbolt* are the first few examples of scholarship on Nollywood filmmakers. The most significant scholarly investment in the work of a single Nollywood filmmaker happened recently when Adesina Afolayan edited *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on the Figurine* (2014). Even though Haynes refers to Kelani as "auteur" in his latest work, *Nollywood: The Creation of the Nigerian Film Genre* (2016), rather than read the films through the auteurist critical paradigm, he merely classifies Nollywood films into genre categories, using the content and form approach. This absence, perhaps, may be due to the general notion in academic circles that Nollywood films, which are video-films, are not worthy of such serious academic attention given that celluloid cinema is often rated the modus operandi of African cinematic production. By no means is this true, but rather, in my opinion, a canonical hegemony that must be dismantled. Dismantling the canonical hegemony that describes video-films as unworthy of auteurist appreciation will not only accommodate Nollywood films as "authentic African films—that is,

true to its historical and sociological context in its themes, styles, distribution, and consumption—it will also enable its filmmakers to be appraised and referenced within a tradition that gives the most meaningful substance to their art.

In his essay titled, "The Crippled Cinema of a Crippled Nation?" published in Adeshina Afolayan's edited book *Auteuring Nollywood: Critical Perspectives on the Figurine* (2014), Matthew Brown asks whether Nollywood could pass for a national cinema. Highlighting the various parameters that define a national cinema, which include linguistic homogeneity, contribution to national income, and articulation of national ideology, Brown posits that Nollywood, currently, is not a national cinema. In Brown's explanation, Nollywood fails all the parameters that describe a national cinema. First, the linguistic situation in Nigeria is heterogeneous. There are more than three hundred indigenous languages in Nigeria, which explains why there are films in English, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba languages. Second, it is doubtful whether the Nigerian government ever depended on the income generated by Nollywood films as a substantial portion of the national income. Lastly, it appears the Nigerian nation has not delineated known national ideologies that Nollywood filmmakers can subscribe to and represent in their films. However, in his concluding remark, Brown succinctly articulates one thing that Nollywood films are doing that is worth mentioning, that is: how the films consciously expose the weakness of the Nigerian state, especially its inability to equally distribute the national wealth, plundering of the national resources, and the wanton accumulation of public wealth by politicians and career civil servants. In Brown's words, "We can use the study of Nollywood to point out where the state continues to fail Nigeria, particularly in ideological spheres" (288). These remarks paint Nollywood films as sociocultural and political texts that greatly influence the masses' understanding of the state apparatus. Also, it aptly captures the truth about Nollywood as a cultural

medium that continually (re)presents the struggle between the state and the masses. This representational logic, although critically interrogated and described as lacking in "artistic worth" by film critics and scholars (prominent among whom is Roy Armes), functions beyond the beauty of art to the extent that it helps the audience to reimagine their identities within the protracted state formation (Brown 156).

While it is not my interest in this work to debate whether Nollywood is a national cinema or not, I invoke Brown's essay to point scholarly attention toward the usefulness of Nollywood films in local contexts of consumption. Most scholars and critics of Nollywood films often argue that the films are of low artistic value and lack sophisticated cinematic appurtenances. They often ignore how the films function in the local contexts they are made for. It is this direct error of omission about the functionality of Nollywood films in local settings that is of interest to me here. It is of importance to me because, as Brown notes, these films "point out where the state continues to fail Nigeria" and that, to me, is also important as aesthetic sophistication or lack of sophistication in the films. Irrespective of their low artistic quality, Nollywood films perform a function of critiquing the Nigerian state and exposing the grandiose atrocities of career politicians and gullible individuals in the nation. However important it is to consider the functional roles Nollywood plays in critiquing the Nigerian government; it is not my intention here to speculate that critics of the industry should become "functionalist" readers concerned with only the social function the films are serving. Far from it! Specifically, what I am saying here is that while it is essential that critics pay close attention to the artistry and the technical sophistication of the films, they should also look for stylistic forms and narrative techniques that make Nollywood the screen through which we can read the Nigerian state.

Measured by the enormous amount of attention the Nollywood tradition has attracted in recent time, especially in the past two years, one could comfortably surmise that Nollywood is no more a "crippled cinema of a crippled nation" (Brown 257) but a continental film giant that has outgrown its formative years to become a self-conscious and independent film industry, globally acclaimed among the leading film traditions of the world. Lately, there has been a vast improvement in technical quality compared to the bland analog equipment of the 1990s, thanks to advanced camera and audio recording and editing equipment, and post-production possibilities. Regarding capital investment, filmmakers now expend millions of naira in making their films. For instance, Kunle Afolayan spent more than thirty million nairas to make *Phone Swap* (personal communication, 2015). Since these technical improvements and industrial growth are monumental, how do we read them? Positively or negatively? I opine that we can understand these monumental changes as both positive and negative. By positive growth, we are saying that the once crippled film industry is fast becoming an organized and well-structured sector rebranded and repackaged in line with global cinematic practices. That it has evolved a character trait of its own and it has become recognized in the global film arena. The negative side of it connotes a growth on the wrong track: cinematic practices or technical gaffe that is tethered to the blurry images and bland cinematography of its formative years.

In other words, the better side of Nollywood's growth and development indicates various cinematic, artistic, and industrial changes that continuously refine film production in the industry. With Nollywood's growth, we have seen artistically appealing representations of African cultures, customs, and traditions that serve both sacred and secular ideological permutations and socio-philosophical thoughts. For instance, Rasaq Olayiwola's film, *Arinjo,* (re)presents the Yoruba Egungun (masquerade) cult as a religious model with the capacity to foster group unity and

cohesion. Other examples include Kingsley Ogoro's *Osuofia in London*—a comic rebuttal to the West's stereotypic gaze on Africans as gullible, loquacious, and puerile population. These films provide audiences—Africans and non-Africans—different perspectives about African cultures and ideologies. The Nollywood cinematic tradition has radically shaped the circulation of African images around the continent by providing African audiences the cultural capital to reinvent and reimagine African identity in the twenty-first century.

As a screen for reading the Nigerian state and its affairs, be it social, economic, cultural, and political, Nollywood has evolved as a film tradition that should not be judged and interpreted in tandem with its unusual pattern of production or its spectacular style of filmmaking. As a good book is not often judged by its cover, cultural scholars and film critics ought to read the industry with new critical frameworks capable of teasing out different production nuances in the industry. These new analytical frameworks will help to provide a panoply of discursive perspectives that can further improve spectators' understanding of the industry. An improved understanding of the industry will engender spectators' development of nuanced attitudes to Nollywood films and also facilitates sound understanding of the symbols, images, and ideas that Nollywood films represent. Without these shifts in critical perspective, Nollywood films and the entire industry are likely to remain in the bog of lopsided critique and negative labeling that have dogged their steps all along. Among the many critical frameworks that could be adopted to reread Nollywood in light of its function within the protracted Nigerian state formation—cross-cultural analysis, discourse analysis, auteurist analysis, etc.—the most suitable is auteur criticism.

This dissertation, therefore, examines the artistry of the three selected Nollywood filmmakers—Amaka Igwe, Kunle Afolayan, and Tunde Kelani—as well as a multitude of the signifying elements these filmmakers use in their films to communicate in different ways with

their audiences. I interpret meanings conveyed by visual images in the context of their placement and functions in the individual filmmaker's work. Using the auteurist framework—content and form analysis, and integrating biographical details and personal artistic choices and idiosyncrasies I examine how Tunde Kelani, Amaka Igwe, and Kunle Afolayan use indigenous languages, mise-en-scene, creative editing, cinematography, and perspectives in their films to create narratives that contribute new insights into the study of Nollywood video film tradition. From my point of view, this approach is more pragmatic in dismantling the 'old tired formula' that has over the years, privileged celluloid films hegemonically, as the authentic African cinema. By reading individual Nollywood filmmaker's work independently, in critical terms, we take a step forward in the quest to comprehend the full potential of the Nollywood traditions, especially in relation to interpretation of cultural practices and the meanings the filmmakers, individually and collectively in comparative terms, ascribe to social behaviors in Nigeria, Africa, and the diaspora that more than exceed the low artistic sophistication that Nollywood critics decry in the industry. Also, since "Nollywood has garnered more attention than, possibly, any other Nigerian cultural phenomenon before it" (Brown 88), auteur criticism will further help both scholars and spectators to catalog Nigerian filmmakers into categories for ease of assessment. The need to categorize Nollywood filmmakers is, to me, an academic attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff; just as scholarly attention is increasing on Nollywood's stars and the different genres in the tradition, there is also a need to provide a neatly winnowed list of Nollywood filmmakers and the category they belong to and assess their creative contributions.

Because I am arguing for the possibility of reading individual Nigerian filmmakers as independent artists whose works ought to be read independently, I deploy the term "Nollywood" to refer to all Nigerian films, irrespective of the language in which they are made. I am adopting

this generic reference to make it possible for me to avoid any labeling constraints that terms like "Kannywood" and "Yollywood," which refer to Hausa and Yoruba films, respectively, might impose. Also, I see the variation in labeling as unnecessary because Nollywood, an appellative term, is catchy and big enough to accommodate all forms of film production in Nigeria. To me, such separation of terms is too narrow and lean more toward ethnic alignments. That being said, films made in English, Yoruba, Igbo, and the Nigerian Pidgin are the subject of this dissertation. Owing to a matter of linguistic competence, I leave out Hausa films. Also, I use "video-film" to refer to all Nollywood films that are not celluloid, while I deploy "cinema" to delineate celluloid productions.

Dismantled Hegemony: Nollywood, Trash, and Auteur Criticism

In this dissertation, I use two distinct terms, *trash* and *auteur criticism*, as conceptual handles that fit particularly well with the new model of studying Nollywood films that I argue for in this dissertation. I am borrowing "trash" from Harrow (as used in his book, *Trash: African Cinema from Below*) as a useful paradigm for understanding Nollywood as an independent film tradition. Harrow conceptualized "trash" in a dissident manner in his study of African cinema, and that is its biggest attraction for me. It is the biggest attraction for me because he uses the term to clear space for the recognition of other forms of filmmaking in Africa. As a visual metaphor, Harrow uses *trash* to discuss issues of cinematic aesthetics in African cinema. About Nollywood, Harrow posits that the Nollywood tradition exemplifies African coping mechanisms with the economic realities on the continent. He reads Nollywood films as cultural productions that aggregates, supposedly, trashy materials to create a thriving tradition. He [Harrow] asks whether the fact that Nollywood films are different from the stock of African celluloid productions with

ideological foundations make them less African. He contends the border between such genre movies as melodramas and serious auteur films, that is the ideological films that are formatted in celluloid. To Harrow, the border between genre movies, the type produced by Nollywood, and the serious auteur films is “largely permeable, if not sensibly collapsed” (Harrow, 243). Even though some sections of African audiences refer to Nollywood films as “trashy,” that is disposable films with a short lifespan; whereas, Harrow argues for the removal of the definitional border that separates African cinema into high/ low art dichotomy.

For me, collapsing the border between celluloid and video films is both logical and beneficial. It is logical because it removes the rigidity associated with defining African cinema. And it is beneficial because it will allow for the recognition of other forms of filmmaking on the African continent that uses alternative filmmaking techniques and conventions. Importantly, Harrow’s arguments open up the discussion on African cinema and its mode of aesthetics formulation, especially what constitutes cinematic aesthetics and who determines such aesthetics for African cinema. In my view, it is appalling that in the twenty-first-century global modernity, outdated parameters modeled after Euro-American film traditions still serve as standards for critiquing African cinema. Often, the argument is that most African films, especially video films, do not reflect the critical socio-economic issues facing the continent. However, “when African cinema is judged to be adequately serious, successfully raising social issues but failing to meet aesthetic standards, it is taken as a second-rate cinema that must resort to special pleading in order to be taken seriously as art, as ‘cinema’” (30). Whereas, cinematic aesthetic is relative: what is cinematically appealing to a particular group of audiences, may not be appealing to another. In other words, to bifurcate Africa cinema into high/low art serves no useful purposes in contemporary times. Film styles connote cinematic tastes. The way human taste buds reflect

culinary choices is similar to how audiences' visual orientations predispose them to make cinematic decisions that reflect their artistic tastes. And this is the more reason why African cinema should be inclusive; it should reflect the different methodologies adopted on the continent to create multiple cross-cultural cinematic aesthetics that satisfy the artistic tastes of the African film audiences.

Here, I will like to make some clarifications between my use of trash and Harrow's deployment of the same. Even though there are convergences in our views, yet there are divergences, too. Let me start with the convergences. Firstly, I agree with Harrow that the definition of African cinema should recognize other forms of filmmaking on the continent. Secondly, Harrow's ideas about African cinematic aesthetics resonates with my arguments and opinions on the matter. While Harrow argues that there are existing aesthetics protocols for judging African cinemas, I say that there are fixed critical models with foundational roots in celluloid filmmaking that film critics and cultural studies scholars deploy to critique Nollywood films. Thirdly, while Harrow is of the firm opinion that trashy films "enable us to rethink what we encounter when we view African cinema today" (6), I argue that the term "trash" is a rhetorical metaphor that I am employing in this work to reread Nollywood and advocate for a place for video filmmaking in African cinematic art, as well as the recognition of some notable Nollywood filmmakers as canonical figures of African cinema.

The convergences apart, my use of trash in this work is rhetorical: it does not suggest that I agree with Harrow that Nollywood films are trashy. Instead, what I am arguing for in this work is that we can ride on the popularity of the term "trash" to ironize the peculiarity of the Nollywood film industry. Again, I am using "trash" here as a term that I borrow from Harrow to signal something different: that is, to make a case for Nollywood as an independent film tradition. So,

the "trash" in my title does not suggest that I am parroting Harrow's notion of the same, but rather to claim that Nollywood is not trashy. In other words, what I argue for in this work is the recognition of the Nollywood tradition as an independent film industry with its peculiarities, idiosyncrasies, and characters. So, instead of running with the term "trash" as a signifier for the types of films made in Nollywood, I would rather suggest that scholars read the films as either good or bad; after all, that is what obtains in other film traditions, even the big and famous one like Hollywood and Bollywood. To me, there is no justification for referring to Nollywood films as "trashy" just because of their differences. Bollywood films are different from Hollywood films—at least with the choreographed songs and dance that are hallmarks of Indian films. Do we say Indian films are trashy because of the songs and dances? No! We regard the long love songs and superhero dances as essential elements of Indian films; we don't compare them with Hollywood films that lacked such types of songs and dances. And it is this divergent of opinion that separates my use of "trash" from that of Harrow.

Therefore, the term "trash" provides a conceptual framework for reading Nollywood films on their terms and not as the opposite of other types of filmmaking efforts in African and elsewhere. This is because the generic rubric of assessment that scholars have deployed in critiquing Nollywood is no longer adequate in contemporary times where there have been tremendous improvements in both artistic and thematic formulations in the industry—the use of advanced technical equipment, availability of written scripts and good screenplays, and the use of advanced editing software. As a result of these recent improvements, Nigerian video films are worthy of serious study in the manner in which film classics have historically been treated, to update the "outdated" and "old tired formulas" that have previously labeled the Nollywood industry erroneously. Here, "trash" is a metaphor for understanding Nigerian films as a space of

inclusion: one that allows the possibility of academic viewing and popular viewing concurrently. For me, Nollywood is a tradition that parades professional filmmakers who make quality films; semi-professional directors who operate between high professionalism and amateurish productions, and the amateur filmmakers who make films for the sake of creating a cultural product with little or no regards for artistic aesthetics and textual metaphors.

The irony about the Nollywood is that most of its audiences do not understand the taxonomy in the industry, especially the marginalized masses, who have not had the opportunity of viewing quality Nollywood films that are now readily available in multiplex cinemas, and through online vendors such as Irokotv, Ibakatv, Netflix, and Amazon Prime Videos. As a result, the poorly made ones make the rounds in local television and satellite stations, and they become the regular talking points for the industry. Also, too, critical audiences who binge watch the Italian telenovelas, Mexican soaps, and the popular American television series, often, disregard a lot of Nollywood films just because the films lack crisp pictures, beautiful mise-en-scenes, advanced lighting, and sophisticated visual effects: features that are staple of the imported films and telenovelas that they consume. Regarding this arms-length attitude, the question I have always asked is: why compare Nollywood films with Hollywood or films from other traditions for that matter? While it is good to keep Nollywood filmmakers on their toes at all times, I also think it makes more logical sense if the histories of film traditions blend with the tenor of criticism. This is important because no matter how we argue it, films and cinemas are cultural products, and they trace both the economic and political histories of their nations. In Nigeria, as it was in all other places in Africa, the indigent people did not develop the technology that birthed cinema, the Europeans did. So, for decades, the global North has mastered the art of filmmaking before its introduction in the South. Similarly, in Africa, cinema production came with different histories:

while it was sponsored and legislated by colonialists in the French-speaking regions of Africa, it thrived at the mercy of individual citizens in Nigeria and Ghana (see Manthia Diawara's *African Cinema: Politics and Culture*, 1992; and Frank Ukadike's *Black African Cinema,* 1994*).* Because of this history and the gap in both economic and technological achievements, comparing Nollywood films to any film tradition, be it continental or intercontinental, serves no useful pragmatic purposes but to show the hegemonic relationship between the film traditions. Perhaps, by striving for something that is uniquely different from the dominant film production the world has known and by making concerted efforts to tell stories at any cost, Nigerian video films have created a new structure for a scaffolding of new critical methodologies to handle films of a different kind.

As a result, instead of interpreting whatever attempt is made by Nollywood filmmakers to advance the industry as a sheer imitation of Western film traditions, concerted efforts should be made to tease out the "visual poetry of true cinema" presented in the films. Therefore, the idea of "trash," here, is not to further condemn Nollywood films as drossy cinematic attempts but a subversive insistence on the need to critically engage their inner meanings that have been trivialized by scholars and critics who hitherto focused on what the industry lacks. If we are to understand the Nollywood tradition as an independent film tradition that emerges and is construed differently from Hollywood, Bollywood, the Italian film tradition, and the Asian film industries, we have to dismantle the hegemonic relationship between the film industry and other traditions while focusing on how Nollywood filmmakers have readapted the video technology to make movies that function as resonant cultural texts in their local contexts as well as abroad. When we refer to Nollywood films as "trash" because of their composition and the informal style of artistic creation, we are not only reifying Western hegemony; we also cast aspersions on the creative

efforts of the Nigerian filmmakers. Incontrovertibly, when one considers films like *Eje-Ibale (2015)* and *Glamour Girls (1994)* for example, overstretched narrative, rough editing, and poor cinematography—lighting and camera movements—are common production patterns that cut across the films. These production inadequacies notwithstanding, the garish, avuncular, and jocular representations of quotidian African experiences in Nollywood films are useful in their terms: they define and paint the social realities of the postcolonial African world. Since the realities and social formations in Nigeria and most of the other African nations stand in sharp contrast to those of Europe and America, why should Nollywood resemble Hollywood? And why should its artistic signature blends with global cinematic aesthetics standards that are set and controlled by European and American film industries? Until we can answer this question, we are more likely to continue labeling Nollywood films as trash. Whereas, Nollywood films are not trashy: they are just being Nollywood films. And there are just two types of Nollywood films: the bad and the good. From the exasperating grammatical blunders of Jenifa (*Jenifa, 2008; Jenifa's Diary 2015)*, the unrealistic pranks of Aki and Pawpaw (*Aki na Ukwa, 2002*), and transformational magical power of Dr. Oyenusi (*Oyenusi,2014)* to the hedonistic serial killing spree of Prince Ropo (*October 1, 2014*), Nollywood films reflect myriad cinematic aesthetics and film tastes in Nigeria. The nonsensical in Nollywood films serve purposes in the contexts of their production: they define peripheral lives and the conditions of their existences. What these films do is reflect certain socio-cultural realities in Nigeria about the imaginations and aspirations of the people. The tradition's positive contributions to African filmmaking and culture overwhelms the film's supposed "trashy composition."

Auteur Criticism and Nollywood

Regarding auteur criticism, I consider the theoretical model a fitting critical framework for engaging filmmakers and their works, especially in the context of expressing filmmakers' artistic creations. Auteur criticism, though it appears to be a newer framework for studying Nollywood films, is a standard concept that has been used severally by scholars around the world to critique literary and film texts. The term was made famous by the idea of art as a form of individual expression that Romanticism gave birth to around 1780–1848.[6] The word "auteur" is associated with many creative attempts both in literature and cinema study. It is a nuanced term that could refer to any instance of creative attempts by individuals and groups. "Auteur," as a term, is synonymous with the artistic creation of an individual whose creative ingenuity stands out from the crowd. What the theory argues for is that a film, like any work of creative artists such as novel, drama, and poetry has its author (auteur), and that the author is the director of the film. What the

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[6] In this period, several characteristics of art emerged—originality, individual expression, emotion, imagination, and political radicalism (Grant, 2000). Due to these several characteristics of art, especially, its creative essence, ownership of artwork moved away from what used to be a collective and/or joint ownership to sole ownership. Individual artists began to claim ownership of their works and get credit for it. Artists became freed from the authority of their patrons and began to distribute and exhibit their work in public instead of the usual commissioning. At liberty to express their artistic imagination beyond the dictates of patrons and monarchs, artists began to make and sell their artwork (paintings, drawings, etc) to the general public

theory suggests is that since a writer of a novel is the principal creative agent for his/her work, it also holds that the quality of a film is a responsibility of the director.

Historically, auteur criticism has its root in the French academic circle. France, over the years, has played pivotal roles in the development of cinema, starting with the Lumiere brothers who gave the world the first film exposition in 1895. Although the American film industry, Hollywood, also played significant roles in the development of global cinema, the French film culture is credited with avant-garde films that revolutionized global film culture and criticism with films such as *Un Chein Andalou* (1929) and *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) directed by Luis Bunuel and Carl Theodor Dreyer respectively (see Peter Graham, *The New Wave*). As the silent film era gave way for films with sounds, two international film companies set up studios in France and its suburbs to make motion films. In 1929, a German film company known as the Tobis-Klangfilm opened a studio in Epinay, France, and produced a film by the title *Sous Les Toits De Paris* (1930), which was directed by Rene Clair. Similarly, the American Paramount film company opened a studio in Joinville-le-Pont, France to make films in different languages. As would be expected, immediately French films converted to sound, filmmakers began to adapt literary and stage dramas into films. And before long, grandiose artistic composition became a staple of the French film culture. And around 1934, there began a creative movement to downplay the grandiosity of musical films by focusing on what was known as “Poetic Realism.” Poetic realism in the early 1930 French culture had a fatalistic view of life: it contrasted the themes of utopian pleasure. A prominent poetic realist director of the 1934 French film culture was Jean Renoir whose films gained international recognition, especially his *La Grande Illusion* (1937), which was nominated for an academy award in the US. Due to the second world war, the popularity of poetic realism waned as many directors fled France to escape the German Nazi soldiers. However,

immediately after the war, French filmmakers began to make films about hopes, aspirations, and nationalism: films that distracted national attention away from the grim realities of the war. (see Barrett Hodsdon, *The Elusive Auteur*, 2017). A particular production that highlighted the peculiarity of the 1940s was the *Les Enfants Du Paradis* (1945) directed by Marcel Carne. Following the release of the *Les Enfants Du Paradise*, in 1946, a national cinematography center was created by the French government to support the nationalist movement that the film industry began. Also, after the war, American films, once again, became popular in France, since they have been barned during the war.

Furthermore, after the world war, the French film industry became more sophisticated and well crafted, and the industry went back to the pre-war "tradition of quality." The "tradition of quality" focused more on the literariness of films, and it celebrated montage, that is sceneries that were inserted in the films. The "tradition of quality" was a formulaic way of reading films and scoring them by noting the sheen and polish of the films and how the directors nicely resolve the conflicts at the end of the films. Because of this formulaic approach to film criticism, a group of young critics, who desperately wanted to become cineastes, condemned the "tradition of quality" arguing that it lacked the space for artistic creativity. These group of outsiders conceived a new way of thinking of cinema as art (See Peter Graham and Ginette Vincendeau, *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, 2008).

The "outsiders" were a group of young film critics who published their articles in *Cahier du Cinema,* one of the few leading film magazines and journals established in the1950s. The post-war period in France witnessed a great cultural transformation, and film criticism grew exponentially. The vibrant new film culture greatly motivated film critics and scholars to found film journals such as *La Gazette du cinema*, *La Revue du cinema*, *Les Cahiers du cinema,* and

Positif (*The New Wave*, 2). The *Cahiers du cinema* (founded in April 1951) was established by Andre Bazin with supports from Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, Francois Truffaut, Jean Luc-Godard, Claude Chabrol, Jacques Rivette, and Eric Rohmer (*The French New Wave*, 2-3). Writing for the *Cahiers*, Bazin wrote articles that argued for cinematic language and aesthetics in French films, and he rejected the montage editing, a dominant feature of the "tradition of quality" for the mise-en-scene. Importantly, Bazin claimed that the mise-en-scene would allow film audiences to witness scenes as they unfold in real natural settings (*The New Wave*, 27). Even though other critics who wrote for *the Cahiers* later condemned his middle-of-the-road approach, he seemed favorably disposed to the tenets of the *Nouvelle Vague (*New Wave*)* directors.

In critical terms, the foundation for auteur criticism was laid by Francois Truffaut. In his 1954 essay, "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema." Although the article was not the first to make a radical claim against the "cinema of quality," it contributed significantly to the evolution of auteur criticism. Before Truffaut's essay, Alexandre Astruc, a critic of the French cinema, has, in 1928, expressed the idea that cinema was a means of expressions, so, therefore, directors should consider themselves as artists by viewing cinema as a language through which they express themselves. Astruc regarded cinema as art, and he coined the term "Camera-Stylo" (camera-pen). By the term, Astruc proposed that a director should be able to use his camera creatively, similar to how a writer would use his pen. He claimed that in the future, "cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language" (*The New Wave*, 18). Even though many French directors embraced Astruc's ideas of cinematic creativity, it was Truffaut who argued for the recognition of the director as the central figure responsible for artistic creativity in film production. Later on, both Astruc's 'Camera-Stylo

and Truffaut's 'A Certain Tendency in French Cinema' became widely circulated as the aesthetic manifesto of *La Politique des Auteurs*: a very significant talking document for writers who published in the *Cahiers du Cinema*.

Truffaut and his colleagues continued to attack the French cinema of quality, claiming that the tradition overemphasized plot and dialogs in films, an approach they found too dull and overdetermined. To Truffaut, the directors of "cinema of quality" added no meaningful artistic contributions to stories beyond pretty pictures, since the scripts were either adapted novels or written by novelists. At best, Truffaut regarded directors of the cinema of quality as *metteur en scene*, that is mere scene directors (Caughie, 9). For many years, Truffaut continued to criticize the French cinema, especially regarding funding. However, in the early 1950s, the government made funding available for filmmakers with track records and experiences, but withheld grants for independent filmmakers without track records. Although the French government modified its funding law in the late 1950s by making funding available to filmmakers based on the merit of their scripts regardless of the filmmaker's track records, Truffaut would turn a $75, 000.00 (seventy-five thousand Dollars) investment deal into a $500, 000.00 (Five hundred thousand Dollars) through his independent film *Les Quatre Cents Coups* (1959). Truffaut's 1959 film revolutionized the French film industry as more private funding became accessible to filmmakers without established track records. Not only that, the success of the Les Quatre Cents Coups motivated radical film directors to form the Nouvelle Vague, that is the French New Wave. The New Wave directors made films that were different from the cinema of quality, as they wielded their camera as a writer would use his pen (Caughie, 9-25).

The effects of the New Wave movement was also felt in the United States of America. Even though not so many French filmmakers embraced the idea of the New Wave directors that

gave agency to the film director, yet, the idea flourished in the US through the works and writings of America film critics—Andrew Sarris. Sarris, in his 1962 essay, "Notes on the Auteur Theory" made an elaborate argument to support the legitimacy of the auteur theory. Riding on the theses of Bazin, especially his support for mise-en-scene, Sarris distilled the overarching arguments of the radical writers of *Cahiers du Cinema* and put forward a comprehensive description of the auteur theory. Before Sarris, Truffaut and his colleagues never considered the auteur filmmaking as a theoretical paradigm, but more of a manifesto to guide French filmmaking. In his essay, Sarris argued that the auteur theory is critical to film criticism, in the sense that a film should be judged by way of its director. Paradigmatically, Sarris provided a structure for the auteur theory and conceptualized it. According to Sarris, auteur theory has three conceptual premises:1) technical competence of the director; 2) director's distinguishable personality, and 3) interior meaning. It is in the totality of these three concentric circles that make up the auteur theory.

In summary, Sarris propounds that a good director should have at least a minimal understanding of the technicalities associated with filmmaking such as lighting, camera positions, and the juxtaposition of perspectives. And that across a selection of a director's works, the director's personality and idiosyncrasies should be distinguishable. Furthermore, he posits that beyond the surface interpretations of films, films should carry other inner meanings that the director embeds in the story (see Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema: Directors and Direction, 1928-68*).

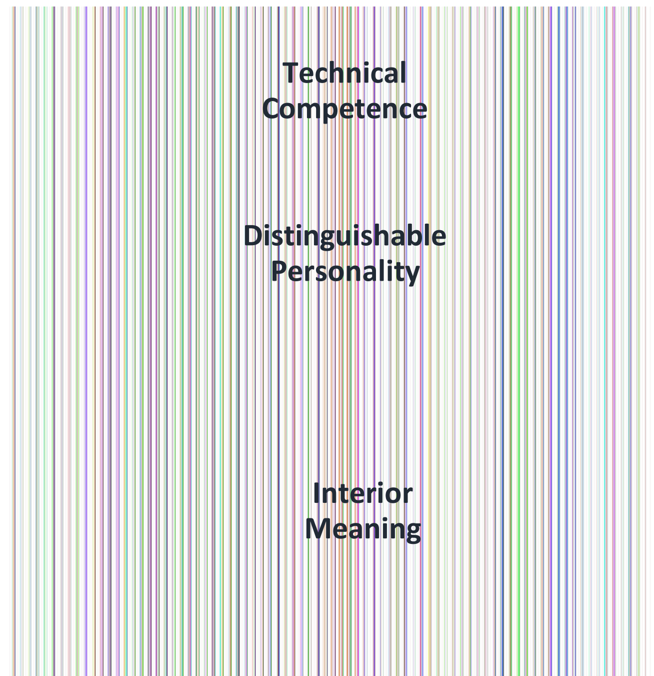

Figure 1 Auteur Theoretical Paradigm

Auteur Criticism and its Critics

Even though auteur theory became a universal concept and a model for judging films, yet there were backlashes against the approach. While some film critics embraced it, a few others dismissed it, claiming that it was too vague and that it glorified film directors. Pauline Kael, writing for *Film Quarterly*, in her 1963 essay "Circles and Squares: The Joy and Sarris" ripped apart the three core ideas that make up the auteur theory. For Pauline, a film is good not because its director has some level of technical competence, but because the film works well and the audience can engage with it. On the second premise that a movie should possess some distinct personalities of the director, Pauline asked why a film could not be judged on its own merits! She questioned the critical need to look for stylistic consistency across the films of a particular director. To her, film audiences should not be bogged down with the hidden messages a director hides his/her works. Instead, Kael argued that critics should judge film directors by their works, and not the other way

round; that is, critics should desist from judging films through the personalities of the directors. The back and forth arguments and rebuttals, notwithstanding, the introduction of the auteur theory changed film criticism in the US and globally (see Barry Grant, *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader,* 2008: 48-53).

Some Notes on Auteur Criticism.

As Caughie (1981) rightly says, "auteur" theory/criticism is not a representation of the "cult of personality" or the "apotheosis of the director." Rather, Caughie posits that in the presence of a director "who is genuinely an artist (an auteur) a film is more than likely to be the expression of his/her personality; and that personality can be traced in a thematic and/or stylistic consistency overall (or almost) the director's films" (9). What this assertion implies is that there exists in film production a central figure who is responsible for creating and achieving cinematic aesthetics. The central figure, to me, is a creative tinker-man/woman who has both the innovative capacity and the psychological freedom to manipulate other cinematic resources—actors/actress, camera, location (natural or artificial), technology, and stories (fictional or real), and transform them into series of visual images that combine to form narratives within the precepts of the director's imagination.

The central figure's ability to conceive ideological, historical, and social discourses differently from others and interpret them aesthetically without any constraints/boundaries is what gives his/her agency a solid backing in film study and also constitutes his artistic signature. David Wharton and Jeremy Grant (2005) recognize and categorize as an auteur any filmmaker who is "the principal source of meaning in a film" and "who demonstrates technical excellence" (16). The summary of these definitions points attention to the importance of the director in any film

production. Though cinema/film is often a product of many hands and professionals, it is the director's composed visuals and sounds and their arrangements that, in the end, become visible and audible as the final product, a movie. I am quite aware of the complications with auteur theory, even from its heydays. But I am mostly interested in the theory because, despite its shortcomings, it is the most suitable theoretical paradigm for critiquing films globally. What I mean by this is that it is the auteur theory that provides a universal template for film criticism. Although there are many theoretical frameworks for studying and critiquing films, for me, though, none recognizes the importance of the film director as the auteur theory.

A significant criticism against the auteur theory is that it is director-centric, that is, it focuses too much on the personalities of the directors in the overall discussion of their artistic creativities. I do not consider the near apotheosis of a film director as a major critical issue in film criticism. In my view, film critics and cultural studies scholars should be free to grant agency to filmmakers if they wish to do so; after all, literary scholars often confer artistic agency on novelists, poets, and playwrights. That being said, what I consider to be the challenge of auteur criticism is the identification of the central figure responsible for cinematic aesthetics in a film. In this age of new media and technology, the central figure responsible for the cinematic aesthetic in a movie may not be the director; it could be any of the editor, the cinematographer, or the visual effect artists. Whomever that person is, critics ought to recognize his/her artistic ingenuity and give him/her credit for it.

Regarding Nollywood, the auteur theory is a critical conceptual framework for reading the various cinematic styles and filmmaking ideas that different filmmakers express in their works. For many years, scholars of Nollywood paid little or no attention to the personalities of Nollywood directors and how the personal experiences, personalities, and social views of the directors

influenced their films. With this work, I aim to direct attention back to the agency of the directors by studying their practices to see how much of their personal experiences, training, educational and cultural backgrounds are reflected in the stories they tell. Without auteur criticism, it would be hard, if not impossible, to determine how much of the directors' ideology filter through their films. How do we weigh the impact of the director's psychological and socio-political perspectives on the film he/she makes? There is no other way except by sieving through the body of works credited to individual directors.

For sure, I know that Nollywood will pose a challenge to auteur criticism, especially in determining who is an auteur filmmaker in the tradition. I have proposed two approaches to dealing with the challenge. The first approach is to provide a taxonomy of filmmakers in the industry by using specific rubrics that best define the industry: which is what I will be doing shortly in the next section. The second approach is a more complicated one, and it requires a fresh set of arguments to justify its usage, if at all. The second approach is to regard all Nollywood filmmakers as auteur. I know that it is a scandalous statement to make, but it is a possible proposition. For now, my discussion of auteur theory and Nollywood films will adopt the first approach. The second approach I will explore later, at some point, in my career.

My Intervention and Contribution to Nollywood Studies

The dearth of publications on Nollywood filmmakers attests to the need for focused attention on Nigerian filmmakers. For example, in 2007 when David Murphy and Patrick Williams published their book *Postcolonial African Cinema: Ten Directors*, no Nollywood director was included in the study, even though Nollywood films had become famous beyond Nigeria before the book's publication. Before 2007, when Murphy and Williams published the book, Kingsley Ogoro had produced *Osuofia in London* (2003), and Kelani had also released both *Saworo-Ide* (1998) and *Agogo Eewo* (2001) to the Nigerian market. Seven years earlier, *Thunderbolt-Magun* had been acquired for distribution in the U.S. by California Newsreel. My point here is that the exclusion of Nigerian film directors from the book was a deliberate one.

This exclusion, in part, underscores the differences in the qualities of filmmaking that have been made famous on the African continent. The first strand is the "big budget" films which were predominantly made popular by francophone filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene, Jubril Mambety, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, and Souleman Cise. The other strand is the video film effort, which flourished through the artistic efforts of the Nigerian filmmakers. Usually, the tendency is to uphold the big-budget filmmaking practice as the "norm" when it comes to discussing African cinema while video film is dismissed and trivialized. The ostensible reason for upholding the big-budget films as the standard bearer for African cinema is due to their auteur orientation. The big-budget films are expensive to produce, and they are regarded as serious cinema. The video films, on the other hand, are economical to produce and they are often about mundane socio-cultural exigencies. The dichotomy in both filmmaking efforts notwithstanding, video films are rich in cultural philosophy, and they are capable of foregrounding social behaviors in multiple national contexts. Unless critics are deliberately setting up hierarchies and upholding the superimposed

authorities to be true, not because they are but because critics so desire to bifurcate the efforts into high art and low art binaries, Nollywood films, in recent years, can boast masterfully crafted cinematic aesthetics and focused ideologies.

Part of the problem with Nollywood, when it comes to assessing it, is the lack of systematic archiving and cataloging of Nollywood directors. The archiving and cataloging issues are, in part, due to dividing films into many parts so that the people remember famous movies by title rather than the director. Also, because Nollywood films are genre-based (epic, drama, action, comedy, and thriller), the genre becomes the most critical structure that sells Nollywood films and not mainly the thematic commitment of the directors (Haynes 74). In other words, Nollywood films are hyped and rated around the familiar faces of actors and actresses that are associated with each genre. And unless concerted efforts are made to place Nollywood directors in discourse, there is a looming danger of submerging the agency of directors in the vast Nollywood ocean.

The other benefits of using auteur criticism to appraise Nollywood films are that, besides rescuing the agency of Nollywood directors from obliteration, a renewed and dedicated attention to Nollywood filmmakers will help film and cultural studies scholars and literary critics to (1) classify Nollywood films in terms of cinematic aesthetic and artistic ingenuity associated with each director; (2) provide film students and instructors with shared clearer access to the cinematic landscape in Nigeria; and (3) identify particular trends and ideological differences that set the directors apart. Such a study will also help to distinguish political commitments and cultural engagements of individual Nollywood directors who have significantly shaped the Nollywood tradition and readily make available a comprehensive list of professional Nollywood film directors for more global comparative studies. Above all, a study of Nollywood directors is worth attention as Nollywood metamorphosed to its present form through the efforts of the directors, who turn

familiar parlor clichés, rumors, and political events into filmable storylines under economic and social conditions utterly different from the Western world—noisy mega-cities, corrupt social systems, and inadequate social infrastructures. In conclusion, it is my opinion that Nollywood filmmakers are auteurs in their rights and that there exist brilliant cinematic efforts in Nollywood, and that instead of putting a blanket tag of "trash" on Nollywood films, critics must take individual filmmaker's artistic endeavors into consideration.

Selection of Studied Filmmakers

There are more than one hundred filmmakers in Nigeria—from student filmmakers to professionals. Nollywood provides a vast menu: the amateurs who have little or no knowledge of filmmaking, the semi-professional who have learned from studying with a professional master, and the professionals who have acquired formal training in filmmaking. In precise terms, these filmmakers—the amateur, the semi-professional, and the professionals—represent different efforts in the Nollywood tradition, because each of the filmmakers is different in their artistic orientations and critical perspectives. Because of this divergence, the task of identifying quality films is increasingly becoming daunting. The task of sieving through the list of movies in Nollywood is daunting because of the lack of centralized cataloging procedure, on the one hand, and inadequate record-keeping by producers and distribution outlets, on the other. Also, there is always confusion about who is a director and who is labeled as such owing to the disturbing practice of skill-morphing. This concept of skill morphing describes the practice in Nollywood in which one starts his/her film career as actor/actress and later transitions to become a director without necessarily attending a film school but because of accumulated experiences gathered over the years of working with directors on films sets. Unlike Hollywood and Bollywood where there is, to a great extent, a

demarcation in skills and job description, there is little or no job demarcation in Nollywood, especially in film directing/acting. Though the structural organization of the industry indicates the presence of specializations—actors' guild, directors' guild, producers' guild, and the editors' guild—yet very often these demarcations are only recognized as political platforms for the practitioners to come together to form alliances rather than perform in the context of the skill description.

As part of the gap this work intends to fill in the study of Nollywood film, I divide Nollywood films and filmmakers into different categories. It is this categorization that informs the selection of the three filmmakers (Amaka Igwe, Tunde Kelani, and Kunle Afolayan) I studied in this dissertation. This approach is different from the usual descriptive analysis of Nollywood films where, in the past, critics and the majority of the scholars descriptively commented on the contents of the films without putting into consideration the films' forms, the biographies of the filmmakers, and their manifested personal and artistic orientations. My classification and categorization of the filmmakers and their films provide a useful model for discussing other technical features present in their films—camera movement, lighting, effects, and sound/music. In the end, it enables me to classify Nollywood filmmakers into two groups: mainstream filmmakers and auteur filmmakers.

By "mainstream filmmaker," I mean any filmmaker in the Nollywood tradition who had no formal training in filmmaking. Also, the mainstream definition covers films that are made on a shoe-string budget and divided into parts for commercial gains as opposed to artistic necessities. The auteur category, on the other hand, refers to "big budget" filmmakers in the context of Nollywood filmmaking—they expend millions of naira on their project and use big cinematic equipment and apparatuses (with the aim of creating high art). The category extends to films that have strong political, ideological perspectives as well as films that are standard feature-length films

and not divided into parts for commercial purposes, but due to disc space and modern convention. Having highlighted the two categories that I divide Nollywood filmmakers and films into, I will now discuss the characteristics of each of the categories.

The Dominant/Mainstream Category

The mainstream category is visibly marked by its size of production capital and the filmmaking conventions it adopts. Mostly, filmmakers in this category make their films on shoe-string budgets and divide them into parts to maximize profits. The mainstream group is the dominant category in the Nollywood tradition, and it is aptly described by Ames Roy (2009) as "lacking in artistic worth" (79). Essentially, these films reflect a common trait that indicates why they are popular among Nigerian spectators—they circulate common cliché and different thematic preoccupations (e.g., witchcraft, sorcery, religious struggles, occultism, co-wives' jealousy, etc.—cultural notions that the spectators readily and spontaneously identify with). The narratives are structured around everyday rumors and exigent events in their immediate societies and abroad. Regarding artistic refinement, the films do not respect conventional rules of filmmaking. At best, they could be described as "guerrilla filmmaking" in the sense that the camera is blandly utilized to capture actors'/actresses' actions on set without consideration of aesthetics. The concern is often to represent heated current events in the society for immediate consumption and to maximize gain. In the past, these representations were marked by blurry images, noisy soundtracks and garbled audio, and error-ridden subtitles. In recent years, even with improved digital video cameras, balanced color saturation and fitting soundtracks are still a rarity in most of the mainstream films.

Importantly, films in this category are not formatted for large-screen viewing at the cinema. They are low-budget films recorded on VCDs, DVDs (digital video discs) and online streaming platforms such as YouTube. The movies are made for individual consumptions at homes and other private settings. Usually, films in this category are genre-based and have become successful through the star system. The star system, Tsika (2015) argues, "demonstrates not simply the transformative potential of several top talents, but also a broadly anti-essentialist approach to screen acting" (24). The anti-essentialist approach, that is, the collapse of ethnic obstacles and language barriers, has greatly contributed to the genre model of filmmaking in Nollywood. Unlike the past when actors/actresses were constrained by linguistic, cultural, and social hierarchies, today's actors/actresses have learned to surmount various institutional obstacles that essentially limited performance about two decades ago. It is now a common feature to see actors and actresses from different cultural backgrounds playing major roles in Yoruba and Igbo language films. Examples include Funke Akindele, the eponymous character in *Jenifa,* who acted Angelina, the wife of Highjack (John Okafor/Mr. Ibu), in the film *Sheri Koko* (2010), and Ramsey Nouah who played the role of Femi in *Figurine* (2009). What is fascinating here, though, is that the mainstream films introduced the Nigerian film industry to other African nations, and as well as the Diaspora. In fact, slang, idiolects, speech mannerisms, and other idiosyncrasies that mainstream actors/actresses use on set are gradually becoming part of the urban lexicons in Nigeria and other African countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania.[7]

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[7] I have encountered colleagues from these African countries interspersing their speech with words like *Chineke* (God), *Ewoo!* (Exclamation for a bad incident), and *I don hammer* (I've made big money/I am now rich).

The mainstream category is a potpourri of sorts, a mixture of the good, the bad, and the ugly. It represents a section of Nollywood that is the most watched and interpreted by critics and scholars. While most films in this category fit perfectly into Roy's pigeonholing of Nollywood films because of their garish, avuncular, and dark gurgling violence, a few are not. Essentially, mainstream films could be divided into two types: amateur and semi-professional. The amateur category describes films that are loose in structure and narrative composition—predictable plotline, rough editing, poor lighting, blurry images, and lengthy dialog. Regarding camera movements, almost all of the time, wide-shots, and close-up shots are dominant with intermittent establishing shots of places—town, villages, and cities. Usually, films in this category have a peculiar soundtrack format in which the diegetic sounds retell the actions of the film. Besides retelling the stories, these soundtracks are, often, a cacophony of voices that lack musical harmony and they play over voices of actors and actresses. At times, the soundtracks run for the same duration as the real actions of the films. My point, here, is that amateur filmmakers do not only digress from the plotline, but there is also often a lack of dramatic principles and narrative technique in their works. What is often displayed is individual talents where actors/actresses (especially the "stars" among them) readily impose their "celebrity" status above that of the directors by acting flippantly outside of the directors' directions.

Regarding frequency of production, the amateur filmmakers release more films to the market than the professional group. Because they work on shoestring budgets, they use cheap equipment and financially reward their actors/actresses meagerly. Filmmakers in the group flood the film market with films on a weekly basis. These films have an average lifespan of two to three weeks before they are forgotten and another title is released. It is in this capacity that the mainstream filmmakers sustain the Nigerian film economy. In fact, the Nigerian film marketers

love to patronize the amateur filmmakers more because of their limited access to production capital.[8]

A significant distinction between the mainstream amateur films and the mainstream semi-professional films is capital investments. The amateurish films are limited in their artistic refinements mainly due to lack of substantial capital investment required to pay for quality equipment and juicy compensation of the film cast and crew members. Also, the amateur filmmakers not only lack formal filmmaking training, but they are also illiterate or semi-illiterate people who have just picked up the art through apprenticeship. To sell their films, the amateur filmmakers rely more on their featuring of star actors/actresses and the genre they produce than the thematic preoccupation and artistic worth of the films. In fact, sometimes, the amateur filmmakers go to the extent of deceiving their audience by printing on the cover of video CDs pictures of a big movie star(s) without featuring the celebrity in the film. Examples of films in this category include *Ejide Alakara* (2014) and *Eje-Ibale* (2015) directed by Tunde Ola Yussuf; *Aki na Pawpaw* (2006), directed by Prince Emeka Ani*; Sunday Dagboru* (2010) and *Emi ni Irekan* (2010), directed by Odunlade Adekola; and *Old Ukwu in School* (2014) directed by Okey Zubelu Okoh.

[8] In the summer of 2015, I was at the shooting location of a Yoruba-language film *Eje-Ibale* in a village located somewhere in Oyo Town, Nigeria. At the location, I interviewed the producer of the film, and she told me how she had to personally fund her film when she was disappointed by film marketers who had offered her ridiculous amount for the script. It was from the interview that I gathered that film marketers had started offering some filmmakers about three hundred thousand naira to make films (about $1,000).

The other category represents and describes filmmaking attempts by semi-professional Nollywood filmmakers. This category of mainstream films features semi-professional filmmakers who are either university graduates of theater arts or are university graduates with varying degrees. Unlike the amateur type, films in this category are cinematic and artistically compelling to some extent. There is always a lavish display of beautiful montage and elegant mise-en-scene. Meretricious wealth, sleek and stylish automobiles, beautiful women, and gigantic mansions are common currency of films in this category. Most of the films in this category represent all that is glamorous about the Nollywood industry—material wealth, diasporic connections, and tantalizing social images of Tinseltown. Mostly, this category of mainstream films circulates the perception of Nollywood beyond the Nigerian shores and produces the highly rated Nollywood stars and celebrities like Genevieve Nnaji, Richard Mofe Damijo, Liz Benson, Pete Edochie, Joke Silva, Jim Iyke, Mercy Johnson, Omotola Jolade, and the others. Even while still circulating familiar clichés and exposing the culpability of Nigerian politicians and career civil servants, films in this category adopt visual representations that are cinematic and artistic with gripping effects on the audience. Most of the films in this category are produced in English language or Pidgin. In recent years, there have been a few examples of this type of production in the Yoruba language as well. Examples of films include *Burning Bridges* (2014), directed by Okechukwu Oku; *The Last Flight to Abuja* (2012), directed by Obi Emeyon; *Knocking on Heaven's Door* (2014), directed by Desmond Elliot; *Osuofia in London* (2003), directed by Kingsley Ogoro; and *Omo Ghetto* (2010), directed by Abbey Lanre.

Despite its shortcomings, the mainstream category is the most prolific category that contributes immensely to the Nigerian economy and provides materials for the rich Nigerian popular culture. These films offer artistic representations in which most African spectators

recognize their quotidian struggles with immanent elements and transcendental forces. The films often represent "something deep in the psychology of spectator; something that cannot be explained away with a dismissal of the proliferation of Juju and Christianity in the films" (Diawara 179).

The Auteur Category

Nollywood auteurs sound like a fanciful buzzword for a film industry that is mainly video. For reasons that I have explained earlier, the term auteur is often considered useful for big-project filmmakers. Despite the oddity, Nollywood has produced its auteurs. Auteur efforts in Nollywood are only a rarity, but their existence is undeniable. Unlike the mainstream category which has many filmmakers, auteur filmmakers are limited, and their works represent the finest cinematic arts Nollywood is capable of producing. Filmmakers in this category are highly trained individuals, who have undergone formal education and cinematic training locally and internationally. A distinguishing trait of this category is the recurrence of artistic patterns and visual symbols that become iconic in the works of the filmmakers, and which subsequently constitute their creative signature. Essentially, films in this category represent the desire to locate aesthetics within the local hermeneutic of everyday praxis and global perspectives. A significant difference between auteur films and the mainstream ones has to do with the formatting of the films. Almost all the auteur films, especially those released as far back as the late 2000s, could be described as festival films. The consideration for film festivals informs the formatting choice for the films as they are often mastered in widescreen aspect ratio (16:9), and as a result, they require substantial capital

investments that far exceed the shoe-string budget of the mainstream ones. Beyond moralizing, auteur films are artistic in composition: the directors pay meticulous attention to technical, visual, sound, and diegetic elements.

The few Nollywood auteurs that I have identified are Kelani, Amaka Igwe, Kunle Afolayan, Emem Isiong, and Mahmood Ali-Balogun (there may still be other auteur artists in the industry whose works have not come to the fore). Examples of auteur films include *Saworo-Ide, Thunderbolt, Dazzling Mirage, Figurine, October 1, Violated, Kiss and Tell, Traumatized, The CEO, Taxi Driver: Oko Ashewo, The Wedding Party, and Mum and Dad Meet Sam.*

My Selections and Justifications

The filmmakers that I have selected for my dissertation are chosen from the auteur category. I made that choice in part because of the limited scholarship on that group of filmmakers and because the mainstream films have been extensively analyzed by scholars and film critics. In my quest to contribute to the frontiers of knowledge in Nollywood scholarship, I anticipate a shift towards auteur criticism and the useful insights it will provide scholars and cultural study critics to interpret Nollywood films. The three filmmakers I study in this work are Tunde Kelani, Amaka Igwe, and Kunle Afolayan; they are selected from the auteur group based on their technical experiences and the popularity of their works, both within and outside Nigeria.

Chapter Breakdown

I divide my dissertation into five chapters. The first chapter is my introduction, and it focuses on the explanations of the theoretical frameworks that I adopt in this study. This opening allows me to contextualize the critical terms in my dissertation—trash and auteur. Through this contextualization, I am able to explain the meaning of trash beyond a general understanding and everyday use of the term to how it describes explicitly Nollywood films, not in the negative but positive considerations. Leaning on the positivity that the trash metaphor creates in the contemporary currents of Nollywood studies, especially, in Harrow's deployment of the term, I argue for the auteur critical paradigm as a useful canonical tool for assessing Nollywood films and the filmmakers in contemporary times. The chapter also examines the current changes in Nollywood and comes up with rubrics of categorization to differentiate between mainstream/dominant filmmakers and auteur filmmakers. The chapter thinks through the various scholarship on Nollywood and how relevant they are to the theme of this dissertation. The subsequent chapters—chapters two, three, and four—discuss the artistic creations of the selected filmmakers—Kelani, Afolayan, and Igwe. Each of the three chapters details the cinematic innovations of the filmmakers while foregrounding the iconography of each one of them. The last chapter, chapter five, is my conclusion, in which I reiterate my claims about Nollywood and the usefulness of auteurist framework for reading Nollywood films in the twenty-first century.

In chapter 2, "Tunde Kelani and the Nollywood Aesthetics," I categorize Kelani's films into three and also divide his career life into three phases. In particular, I use Foucault's "governmentality" and Fanon's notion of "national culture" to closely read both *Saworo-Ide* and *Agogo-Eewo*, two of Kelani's acclaimed masterpieces.

In Chapter 3, “Emerging Perspectives on Kunle Afolayan: Disruption, Displacement, and Identity,” I examine how Afolayan uses the concepts “disruption” and “displacement” as narrative devices to interrogate different realities in his society and, especially identity reclamation. I also discuss how he uses concepts such as “Origin” and “Fate” to examine multiple identities from a cosmopolitan perspective. Stylistically, I am interested in how Afolayan stitches shots together to form his narratives. In essence, my analysis will focus on his use of camera and the dominant camera angles that he privileges in his work; interpreting such in tandem with my understanding and interpretations of the filmmaker’s cultural ideology and orientations. To do this, I will analyze, in detail, two of his films: *Phone Swap* and *October 1.*

In chapter 4, “Amaka Igwe: Towards a Feminist Filmmaking Practice,” I look at the representation of the female body in Igwe’s films. I examine other critical representations that are dominant in Igwe’s films that are lacking in another filmmakers’ work, especially the concepts of love and family. Incorporating writings from scholars on African feminist filmmaking such as Sheila Petty, I underscore how Igwe, in her films and soap operas, represents traditional cultural practices that obscure the agency of the women. I point out that, as one of the first female filmmakers in Nigeria, Igwe portrays women as the pillars of the family and she condemns their domination and exploitation. The films that I analyze are *Rattle Snake* and *Violated.*

In chapter 5, “Sustaining Trash: Auteur Criticism and Nollywood’s Future,” I conclude that there are more useful insights that auteur criticism will likely engender if allowed to flourish in the Nollywood scholarly tradition. In my conclusion, I posit that the Nollywood has yet to attain its global height and, unless critics adequately make concerted efforts to study each filmmaker and his/her films, Nollywood is more likely to remain dwarfed by the crisis of massive amateurish

productions which are currently trailing it. However, Nollywood filmmakers have the artistic potential to take the industry to the top of the table of global film traditions.

Chapter Two: Tunde Kelani and the Nollywood Aesthetics.

Tunde Kelani is to Nollywood what Steven Spielberg[9] is to Hollywood. He is an outstanding Nigerian video filmmaker. He combines celluloid filmmaking strategies with video production knowledge to create artistically appealing audio-visual narratives that endear the Nigerian film industry to the global world. He is, as Jonathan Haynes (2016) puts it, "the most celebrated Nigerian video film director and the one on whom the mantle of a film auteur fits most naturally" (113). Perceptibly, Kelani is not only the most celebrated Nollywood filmmaker but also the most prolific African filmmaker. He has produced more films than the canonical figures of African cinema, including Ousmane Sembene. From 1993 to 2016, Kelani has directed more than sixteen[10] feature-length films. He has "since the mid-1990s been the regular subject of

[9] Steven Allan Spielberg born December 18, 1946, is an American director, producer, screenwriter, and editor. He is considered one of the founding pioneers of the New Hollywood era, as well as being viewed as one of the most popular directors and producers in film history. He is also one of the co-founders of DreamWorks Studios.

[10] *Ti Oluwa ni Ile (1993),Ayo Ni Mo Fe* (1994), *Ko See Gbe (1995)*, *O Le Ku* (1997), *Saworo-Ide* (1999), *White Handkerchief* (2000),*Thunderbolt/Magun* (2001), *Agogo Eewo* (2002), *Campus Queen* (2004), *Abeni 1 &2*, *Efunsetan Aniwura* (2005)(2006), *Narrow Path* (2007), Life in *Slow Motion* (2008), *Arugba* (2010), *Maami* (2013), *Dazzling Mirage* (2014), and *Yeepa Solarin N Bo* (2015).

university theses," and remains an iconoclastic image of video film production in Nigeria and beyond (Haynes 113).

Ogundele, while commenting on the films of Kelani as far back as 1997, said that "Kelani's work deserves more critical[11] attention that it has so far gotten" (x). Perhaps, Kelani's works deserve more critical attention because, over the years, he has provided innovative technical ideas that significantly elevated the Nollywood tradition from "the position of a mere craft" to a globally acclaimed film tradition (Ogunleye xi). Roy Armes (2006) while claiming that "most Nigerian video films have little artistic worth," exempt Kelani and his art from his trashing of the Nigerian film industry to say that "the occasional exception has emerged. Tunde Kelani, a fifty-seven-year-old Nigerian London Film graduate, has developed a mode of production adapted to the Nigerian economic conditions, directed at a popular audience and local video market" (*African Filmmaking: North and South of the Sahara,* 156-7).

What Haynes, Ogundele, and Armes point attention to is the unique space Kelani's cinematic art occupies in Nollywood, which calls for reading his films differently from the mainstream ones that lack the MainFrame (Kelani's film company) technical excellence. These critical observations fit well with the focus of my dissertation that there are striking exceptions to the general assumption of Nollywood as low-quality film industry. There are individual directors whose works cannot in any way be regarded as low quality or as the opposites of the dominant and highly venerated African celluloid cinema and its Western equivalents. Instead of bland and stereotypical condemnations, film critics and cultural scholars (both inside and outside the

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Nigerian nation) should attempt to make sense of "the conundrums that give rises to the fantastical and extra-materialist spectacles" suffusing a popular form like Nollywood. (Adesokan 67).

In the Nigerian academic circle, Kelani's films have, for over two decades, provided alternative perspectives to the readings of the Nigerian film tradition. His films are the best examples of video-films in the nation and beyond. In Nigerian universities and colleges, MainFrame films have been regular topics of academic theses, book reviews, and journal articles. Examples of these academic reviews and research papers that focus on Kelani's art include Akin Adesokan's 2011 *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics,*[12] which reviews *Thunderbolt* (2001) as exhortatory cultural text that aim to moralize the audience and enchant them to the richness of Yoruba culture that forms the backdrop of Kelani's films. Also, Debra Klein's published an article on how Kelani incorporates culture in his films titled "A political economy of lifestyle and aesthetics: Yoruba artists produce and transform popular culture" (2012). Apart from her examination of how Kelani treats the Yoruba culture in *Arugba,* she further argues that there is a connection between "lifestyle" and "aesthetics" and she makes attempts to foreground how the film, *Arugba*, foregrounds the connection. Similarly, Rotini Fasan's (2016), in his article titled "Arugba: Superwoman, power, and agency," argues that Kelani, often, represents the Osun goddess in duality: as benevolent spirit and as a malevolent power that destroys. Lastly, Jonathan

[12] Before he published his book in 2011, Adesokan, had, in 2005 written about Kelani and his cinematic art in his PhD dissertation. The title of his chapter on Kelani in the dissertation is "Forests of enchantment: Tunde Kelani and the persistence of "visitors" in Nigerian videofilms."

Hayne in his latest book *Nollywood: The Creation of Nigerian Film Genre* (2016), extensively details the canonical features in the films of Kelani, noting their genre features.

These academic interpretations and the insights they provide focused more on Kelani's appropriation of cultural materials in his works and how his films fit into different Nollywood genres; they do not address, in holistic terms, his exceptional use of cinematic elements such as lighting, music, camera, and narrative devices. As a result of this gap in critical appraisals of his films, this chapter, using the auteurist framework, examines how Kelani responds to matters of indigenous languages and identity in his films. To buttress the claims this chapter is making on how Kelani responds to political issues in his films, I analyze *Saworoide (1999)* and *Agogo Eewo* (2002) using Michael Foucault's notions of 'governmentality,' 'discipline,' and 'punishment' (*The Foucault Effect*, 1991). Overall, this chapter discusses Kelani's artistic efforts in Nollywood, his biography, career evolution, classification of his films, language matters and the representation of Yoruba culture, camera movement/shots, lighting, music, and dream sequence, and Kelani's political ideologies.

Abeokuta: A filmmaker's Cultural Biography.

Kelani was born on February 26, 1948, in Lagos State. His father was an Egba man from the Ijaye Kukudi compound in Abeokuta. When he was five years old, Kelani moved from Lagos to Abeokuta to live with his grandparents. He lived for about twenty years in Abeokuta. And it was at Abeokuta, where he had his primary and secondary education, that he got the chance to fully participate in the Yoruba culture that he represents in his works. Keenly inquisitive, Kelani, during his final year in primary school discovered photography, and before he graduated, he

bought his first semi-professional camera Halina35—a single lens reflex. After his secondary education in 1966, he became an apprentice photographer for two years (1966-1968). In 1970, he joined the then Western Nigerian Television as a trainee cameraman, and he was part of the film unit. In 1976, due to his exposure to filmmaking at the Western Nigerian Television, he enrolled at London Film School to study filmmaking. He spent two years in the school, and he returned to Nigeria and worked on bond with the Western Nigerian Television management for two years. Upon the completion of the bond terms, Kelani resigned from the television station and began practicing as an independent filmmaker. In 1992, he established his production company, "MainFrame Film and Television Productions—Opomulero," and has since produced series of blockbuster films.[13]

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[13] In the summer of 2015, I conducted a research interview with Kelani. The biographical information presented here is sourced from that interview. Also, Kelani is the only practicing Nigerian director to have experienced shooting celluloid films before the switch to video films. He had worked with great filmmakers within and outside Nigeria. For instance, he was the cameraman for late Adeyemi Afolayan (adelove) in *Taxi Driver (1987)*; he handled the camera for Late Hubert Ogunde in two of his celluloid films – Jai*ye Sinmi (1981), and Aropin n Tenia (1982)*. He was also part of the crew that shot the film adaptation of Joyce Carey's novel – *Mr. Johnson (1990).* Both Ade Afolayan and Ogunde were among the pioneers of early cinema in Nigeria. Ogunde made political films that put the Nigerian nascent democracy of the first republic (1960-1967) up for public scrutiny. His films were loaded with cultural elements, especially Yoruba mysticism—ethereal lives, witchcraft, wizardry, and magic. As Manthia Diawara puts it, "it is interesting that Tunde Kelani, one of the best known directors among Nigerian video makers today, has also

Kelani: A Career Trajectory in Phases

From 1993 to 2016, summing up all his films, I have categorized Kelani's career trajectory into three phases: Explorative, Combative, and Reformative/ Global. Each of the phases details his cinematic evolution in Nollywood and regarding his artistic maturity and creative prowess. The explorative stage, which is the first phase, started the moment he produced *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1993). The phase reflects a series of cinematic experimentation that relied on Yoruba culture and religion as metanarratives for his films. The first phase is as well concerned with the blending of celluloid filmmaking techniques with those of video filmmaking to create artistically appealing films. No wonder Adesokan (2011) submits that "*Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* aspires to be cinematic" (86). Most of the films he directed during this phase highlight themes that contest erroneous notions about the African space, epistemology, and philosophy. The films explore contending binaries—tradition/modernity, good/bad, us/them, etc. However, the films share similar characteristics of other mainstream Nollywood films, and they were in parts (*Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* 1, 2 &3; *Ayo Ni Mo Fe* 1&2; and *Ko See gbe* 1&2). Also, the films project images of ancestors, traditional healers/priests, and ritual rites. The period covers 1993- 1997.

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worked with some of the giants of the golden era of Yoruba theater, film and videos (1960s, 70s and 80s). Kelani was the cameraman in *Efunsetan Aniwura*, (1981, by Bankole Bello and Akinwunmi Isola), a classical historical drama about an evil queen in Ibadan *(New Forms of Aesthetic and Politics*, 169).

The second phase, which is the combative phase, describes Kelani's cinematic growth and artistic maturity and the boldness to make films that expose the "postcolonial incredible[14]" of his immediate society and the articulation of African cultures, especially the usefulness of traditional values in the realization of a just and egalitarian nation state. During this phase, Kelani produced films that speak to the conscience of the Nigerian power-brokers and the ruling class through allegorical representations of real-life political actors and arbiters. The stage is considerably marked by the production of artistically sophisticated films that boast of balanced color saturation, incorporation of diegetic and non-diegetic music, and extensive crosscutting and stitching of shots beyond the Nollywood aesthetics standard. The phase is the most critical in Kelani's career because of his outstanding cinematic representations of issues bothering on corruption, social dysfunction, culture, and politics. The phase starts in 1997 through 2010, and the films that he made during this phase include *O Le Ku* (1997*), Saworo-Ide* (1999), *White Handkerchief* (2000), *Thunderbolt* (2001. The other films are *Agogo Eewo* (2002), The *Campus Queen* (2004), *Efunsetan Aniwura* (2005), *Abeni* 1&2 (2006), *Narrow Path* (2006), *Life in Slow Motion* (2008), and *Arugba* (2010).

The last phase, the reformulation/global phase, is a period in Kelani's career where he foresees hope for Nigeria as well as the people of the nation. The films that Kelani produced in this phase are spurred critical thinking among audiences and offered African and non-African audiences a dynamic opportunity to learn about Nigeria and its many cultures. The stage also announces Kelani's global presence in the cinematic arena apart from the initial presence that

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[14] Tejumola Olaniyan coined the phrase to describe the various socio-political abnormalities that the late Afrobeats maestro, Fela Anikulapo Kuti sang about in his musical albums.

Thunderbolt (2001) spurred.[15] The year 2010 ushered in this phase in his career, and it is ongoing. *Maami (2012), Dazzling Mirage (2014), Yeepa Solarin N Bo (2015), and Sidi Ilujinle (2017) a*re films credited to his efforts in this phase.

Classification of the Films of Tunde Kelani

There exist common narrative patterns and stylistic signature in all of the films of Kelani: gods, ghosts, greedy leaders, bad followers, and abused women. These artistic and narrative patterns informed my classification of his films into three main categories namely Mythical, Historio-Political/Marxist, and Socio-Psychological. Kelani's mythical films directly or indirectly appropriate mythical figures to recast and re-contextualize modern political events and social maladies. They include *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (The earth is the Lord's) and *Arugba* (The Votary Maiden). In both films, sacred elements are inscribed into the narratives to serve the purposes of (re)affirming the potency of African myths and liturgical observations, especially matters that relate to the gods/goddesses and ancestors.

Films in the Historio-Political /Marxist category thematically represent issues about politics, class struggle, exploitation, and revolution. Most of the movie are allegorical

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[15] In 2012, he served as a jury at the Dubai International film festival. [15] In 2015 alone, his films were nominated and won the Audience Choice Award in Nollywood week in Paris Film festival and he featured as the guest speaker at the seventh annual film conference in London, United Kingdom

representations of the Nigerian state and its politics, especially with significant characters such as Lagata and Bosipo in *Saworo-ide* and *Agogo-Eewo.* Allegorically, Lagata, in *Saworo-Ide* represents the late Abacha who, as a military dictator, ruled Nigeria with iron-hand and later aspired to become the civilian president, but died mysteriously before the election was conducted. Also, in *Agogo Eewo*, Bosipo's image and the regime, equally, represents the democratic administration of Olusegun Obasanjo, who took over the mantle of leadership after the demise of General Sanni Abacha and the termination of military rule headed by General Abdul Salam Abubakar in 1999. Other films include *Efunsetan Aniwura*, *Campus Queen*, and *Arugba.*

His films in the socio-psychological category direct attention to the social ills of the Nigerian state. They comment on social conditions of marginalized members of the Nigerian society—women, the have-nots, and people with health challenges. Films in this category highlight the psychological trauma people, especially women, experience as victims of imposed cultural sanctions and social expectations. The films detail the various ways social status, class, cultural taboos, and sexual stereotypes obscure women agency, frustrate female empowerment and freedom. The list includes *Ayo Ni Mo Fe, Koseegbe, O Le Ku, Abeni, Thunderbolt (Magun), Narrow Path*, and *Dazzling Mirage*.

Stylistic and Narrative Devices in the Films of Tunde Kelani

Kelani is an accomplished storyteller both at the levels of theme and style. While mainstream Nollywood privileges theme in its rush to tell a story, Kelani's work demonstrates

acute attention to both theme and technique. His cinematic art shows visually arresting uses of lighting/color, music, dream sequence, and camera angles.

Lighting/Color

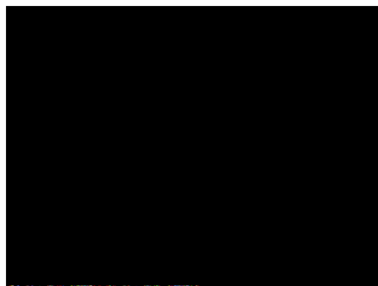
Figure 2. 5

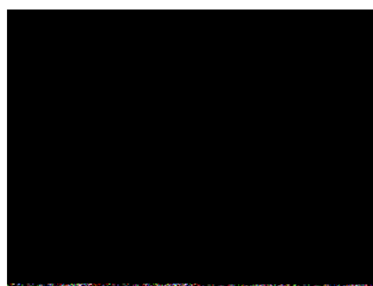
Figure 2.6

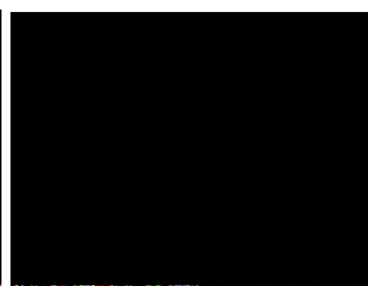
Figure 2.7

Lighting, as a cinematographic element, adds temperature to films: it creates moods and "correct facilitated exposure for filmmaking" (Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink 53). In Nollywood, Kelani's use of color contrasts sharply with other mainstream filmmakers. While other filmmakers regard lighting as essential to filmmaking to capture clear images, Kelani treats lighting as a vital filmmaking element that allows him to highlight mood and affect in his films. In *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile,* for example, he uses color to establish the threshold of the living and the underworld—the ethereal domain of the dead souls that haunt the principal culprit, Asiyanbi. Also, in *Saworo-Ide*, Kelani profoundly contrast color through lighting to demarcate historical space and time. In the opening sequence, he juxtaposes color to demarcate temporality and to create effects, especially in the dying moments of the first Onijogbo (figure 2.5), and those scenes that detail the chaotic reign of Lapite and his corrupt Chiefs (figure 2.6). To close *Saworo-Ide*, Kelani symbolically frames Opalaba as the voice of change and wisdom. As Opalaba emerges on the frame, he faces the camera to give the epilog, resting his right hand on a beam. It is, therefore, possible to interpret Opalaba's iconic posture to read that —the dark backdrop against which Opalaba stands, represents the violent regimes of both Lapite and Lagata, while the illumination that highlights Opalaba's face

and provides his point of view could be taken to symbolize hope for the Jogbo people. Put together; the lighting provides a narrative of someone who is emerging from a dark tunnel into light (figure 2.7). Lighting greatly marks time in almost all the films that Kelani directs, and it is in this way that he exploits “the capacity of cinema to be a total art form, incorporating many others, as a way of representing the fullness of his [Yoruba] culture” (Haynes 136).

Camera-Movement/Shots.

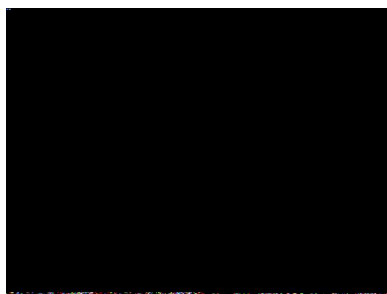
Figure 2.8

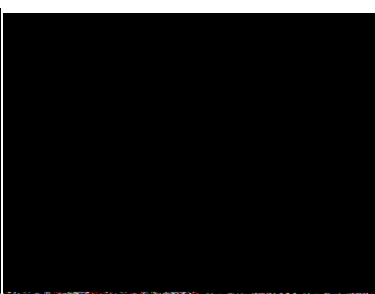
Figure 2.9

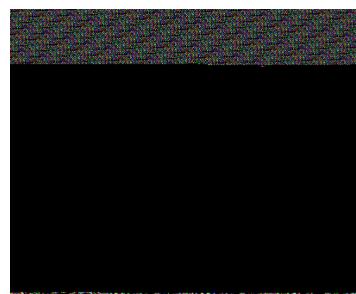
Figure 2.10

The prodigious spread of Kelani’s films in Nigeria and abroad has to do with his style of filmmaking that extends beyond his appropriation of Yoruba language and culture. His professional handling of the camera occasions his success as the most celebrated Nollywood filmmaker. The camera, unlike any of the production equipment, significantly set apart filmmakers in the Industry. Good filmmakers utilize the camera to provide detailed narratives to the audience as well as provide extra-diegetic information that adds visual aesthetic to their works. While scholars have studied Kelani’s films, only a few have paid detailed attention to the different shots that he [Kelani] stitches together to create artistic excellence in his works. From the inception of his Nollywood career, Kelani has always aspired to capture shots that are cinematic. A comparison of *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* with, say Kenneth Nnebue’s *Living in Bondage,* will show a weighty difference

in the sophistication of camera use. At best*,* *Living in Bondage* appears more like an upscale recording of a stage play. For example, in the occult house, during the numerous nocturnal meetings, the video camera was framed at eye-level and in a static position, thus placing the leader of the cult in the background. Ideally, the camera should pan across the room to capture different shots of the members and the leaders—from a wide shot to medium shots and close-up shots—that way, members' reactions that were not verbalized but useful in the overall aesthetics of the film could have come to the fore.

On the other hand, *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* "aspired to be cinematic" because Kelani deployed the camera to function beyond capturing bland images of the scenes (Adesokan, 86). Stitching different shots together—establishing-shot, jump-shot, cut-away shots, etcetera, Kelani's representation evokes feelings and emotions of reality through different camera movement and positions. For example, he uses the "establishing shot" in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile to* introduce the setting of the film. It is a style that correlates with the oral storytelling technique, where storytellers at the onset of their stories begin with either "once upon a time" or "in a particular place" to warm the listeners to their story and to engage them mentally. Because he understands the communicative potential of the cameras, Kelani invests heavily in filmmaking cameras, and he has acquired many of them including Black Magic, Red one, Canon 60D, Canon 5D, Canon 7D, Z5, Z6, Z7, Sharp HD, and Panasonic MD 10000).[16]

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[16] This is because he uses a new camera for each of his films. He told me in a personal interview that he rented cameras when he cannot afford to buy them, but that he strives to buy the latest camera for each production.

Importantly, Kelani privileges the extreme close-up shot in all his films to show empathy and emotional connection to different protagonists in his films. Of examples are his framing of Jumoke in *Ayo ni Mo Fe* and Ngozi in *Thunderbolt*. When Jumoke suffers emotional-induced psychosis, her mother takes her to a psychiatric hospital for treatment. In one of the ward-rounds, Jumoke is asked to sing a song. Rising melancholically, she sings "Ayo ni mo fe,'' and her colleagues join her in unison. As she makes an effort to sit, Jumoke becomes tearful and props her head against the wall. Through the extreme close-up shot of her tearful face, the audience can feel her agony and empathizes with her, especially her referencing 'Ayo,' her philandering boyfriend whose sexual indiscipline leads to her mental sickness. (Figure 2.9). Similarly, through detailed camera movements and angle shots, the audiences are drawn closer to Ngozi in *Thunderbolt* as she goes through series of trauma in the film, especially at the clinic where she is supposed to copulate with doctor Oladimeji. Through crosscutting of shots, Kelani can paint visual images of the agony and pain Ngozi undergoes in her attempt to be cured of the magun affliction. Without a doubt, a feeling of empathy wells up in the audience the moment Kelani zoom-in the camera on Ngozi's tearful face; through this extreme close-up shot of her face, the pain and trauma Ngozi passes through becomes visceral and almost contagious. The scene has psychological effects on the audiences, I believe, in the way Kelani positions the camera to frame Ngozi's body, demeanor, and helplessness to establish her innocence in the story (Figure 2.8). A similar effect is achieved in *O Le Ku* when Lola uninvitedly, bursts into Ajani's room and finds him and Asake in a romantic embrace. She closes the door and hastily returns to her dormitory room to nurse her disappointment (Figure 2.10).

It is in these series of camera movements and shots that Kelani draws his audiences into his stories and, possibly, provides extra-diegetic details beyond the limit permitted by dialog and

conversation. This way, he can avoid the lengthy dialog that is rampant in mainstream Nollywood films, while retaining patterns of communication that set his art apart in the industry.

Dream as Narrative Technique

Kelani's projection of ghosts, apparitions, and masquerades in dreams covers his first film *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* to the latest release, *Dazzling Mirage*. Kelani has never missed the opportunity to incorporate dream in his films, thus making the device a recurrent element in his works. The dream sequence is majorly a flash-forward technique in Kelani's artisanal arsenal, and its incorporation in the films is different from the psychoanalytic understanding. As a narrative technique, Kelani deploys dreams to foreshadow future events or to connect occurrences of specific actions. While psychoanalysts regard dreams as the imagination of the subconscious (Freud, the *Interpretation of Dreams*), I am reading its manifestation beyond the latent conditioning of the dream-work; it functions as a warning sign emanating from the ancestors, deities, and gods. In my understanding of the cultural context in which Kelani is working, dreams are not the manifestations of repressed *id* or *Thanatos*; they are symbolic communication medium through which the transcendental heaven transmit revelational messages to the immanent earth. It is against this backdrop that Kelani adopts dream sequence as a mechanism for revealing future circumstances in his films. In *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile*, for example, Otun dreams of a white-robed ghost chasing him along a windy river-bank. As he makes frantic effort to free himself from the tormenting spirit, a continuous knock on his door wakes him up. As he opens the door to the visitor, J. P's son told him that his father has just died. It turns out that the dream is a warning to Otun about the looming calamity that is about to come upon him. To heed the advice, he visits a herbalist, who reveals to him that his death is imminent.

In the films of Kelani, the dream becomes the portal through which living beings and the dead communicate. It is a medium through which troubled individual crosses the thresholds of the living to commune with the spirits of departed ones, either for guidance, warning, or for the revelation of reprehension. Kelani provides numerous instances of dream manifestations and the possible meanings they carry and the functions they perform. In *O Le Ku,* for example, Ajani's mother dreams about his husband. In the dream, the late husband is dressed in a richly embroidered *agbada* as he eagerly awaits Ajani and his mother at the river bank. Ajani's dead father scolds his wife for her failure to press it on Ajani to provide him a horse to ride homeward. The "horse" in the dream is a metaphor for a "child," which Ajani is yet to have due to his prolonged bachelorhood. The dream suggests that Ajani's dead father is ready to reincarnate in his grandchild, but that Ajani must be married for that to happen. The dream sobers Ajani up, and he considers his philandering ways and seeks a wife to marry. In the end, he marries Sade to fulfill the wishes of his dead father and his aged mother, when Asake, his long-time girlfriend was proving recalcitrant.

Again, In *Magun*, Ngozi is warned by the ghost of her departed grandmother of the deadly affliction put on her. When she narrates her dream to her landlady—Mama Tutu—both Ngozi and Mama Tutu visit the ifa priest to find out more about the dream. Without the dream, Ngozi probably would not have had any hint of the deadly affliction, and possibly would have died from it. Also, in *Narrow Path*, Awero learns of the impending calamity that is coming her way in her dreams. Few days before Dauda rapes her, she suffers fits of bad dreams with a hanging noose dangling from her head. The rope symbolizes death and calamity. In *Agogo Eewo*, Bosipo receives ancestral counseling through the spectacle of Areku, the masquerade. When his benefactors threaten Areku—the people who borrowed him their shoes—he returns the shoes and opts to dance barefooted before spectators who admires his dance styles voluntarily offer him shoes. By

interpreting the dream as a revelational insight from the ancestors, Bosipo can extricate himself from the menace of Balogun, Seriki, and Bada and, in return, he rules over Jogbo successfully with the help of pious Chiefs and priests. Also in *Arugba* and *Maami*, Kelani inserts the dream sequence to inform protagonists about their identities. Adetutu learns of her mysterious power of the water goddess, Yemoja, in her dream. Similarly, Kashy is tormented by a masquerade in his dreams, and this made him press his mother for the whereabouts of his biological father.

In all of these films, dream helps the protagonists to discover, hitherto, unknown facts about themselves and the situations that surround them. Dream functions in these contexts as the revelational knowledge that predicts future events, whether good or bad. And, it is through it that Kelani provides the behind-the-stage information to the audiences about his characters.

Music/Songs and Performances in the Films of Tunde Kelani

Music/song is the heartbeat of Kelani's cinematic art. While it is possible for one to omit the various artists that often make cameo appearances in his films, one cannot omit music and performances in Kelani's films. Of all the Nollywood filmmakers, Kelani has consistently projected the intricate relationship between music and film. In *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile,* for example, before any visual image, the audience is introduced to the film through eerie sounds that foretell the spiritual domains of the ancestors. Combining the visual image of a night and a close-up shot of a ghoulish woman, Kelani creates a suspenseful atmosphere and fearful fright in the minds of his audiences. Because images tend to dominate sounds while we're experiencing films, the effects of sounds in films are felt subconsciously (Giannetti, 216). The eerie sound in the opening sequence

of *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* is dramatic and ominous. According to Adesokan (2011), "*Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* was the first film to consciously and extensively mix diegetic and non-diegetic music" (86). Essentially, diegetic sound refers to music/sound that are composed specifically for a film, which provides ominous clues to the audience or tells about the possibilities of future events, which may be unknown to the characters themselves. Non-diegetic sound/music, on the other hand, are random sounds that are useful in some filmic contexts, they're mostly made for the general audience, but occasionally they provide a shade of verisimilitudes in films since "film's relationship with music is so complex" (Monaco 62).

There are mainly two types of song/music that Kelani often incorporates in his films—secular and sacred songs. These two types of music could either be traditional or modern songs in diegetic or non-diegetic formats. Although Haynes (2016) recognizes two kinds of music/dance in his study of Kelani and his art—traditional and modern—he did not go further to explain how the music/song are used in the films. Instead, he submits that "all of Kelani's films include musical and dance performances" (128). Yes, Kelani includes music and dance in his films, but how and why? I think these are two critical questions that are germane to our understanding of Kelani cinematic art in Nollywood. First, contrary to some scholars' suggestion, including Haynes (2016), that Kelani carries over his use of music from the traveling theater tradition of Ogunde and his colleagues, Kelani has never been tethered to the dramatic practices of the traveling theater in his perspective of video-film production. In my opinion, what informs his incorporation of music and dances in his film is the rich Yoruba culture that he witnessed and lived while in Abeokuta. In other words, the two types of music that Kelani incorporate in his works are reflections of his childhood experiences. However, the incorporation is deliberate, and it serves two primary

purposes: to document and preserve the fast disappearing popular culture of the Yoruba people and to archive quintessential social urban culture that rapidly changes with time and modernity.

Secular Music and Performance

By “secular,” I am referring to all musical songs and performances rendered outside the contexts of religion or any other sacred observations in the films of Kelani. They are songs/performances created for social purposes in his films, and they are different from the electronic sounds that he occasionally inserts in the films. Secular music and performances in Kelani’s films appear in two forms: traditional and modern. The traditional performances incorporate elements of traditional Yoruba songs, dance, and mime to add cinematic flavor and as well educate the audiences about the richness of the Yoruba culture that serves as the generative canvass on which Kelani weaves his art in Nollywood. Examples of these performances include: exhortative musical performances for Adewale, heir apparent, in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile,* the *Ero-Oja* song rendered in the drama performance Ajani and Asake attend in *O Le Ku,* the Ogodo musical performance in *Saworo-Ide*, and the *Ijala* musical chants in *Narrow Path*.

The modern type includes all the musical performances of popular urban artists who have retired from active musical career due to old age, and the songs composed and sang by individual students and college dance groups. The modern musical performances are many in the films of Kelani—the Obokun jesters, a ragtag comedy band that plays in part 1 of *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile,* is not a traditional band but a modern orchestra. The band featuring in the film, no doubt, is to document their art. Their artistic style is phenomenal and different from what contemporary musical band

always wear. Wearing goofy costumes, using improvised instruments, and singing introverted lyrics of popular contemporary songs, in a fashion that stimulates authenticity while remaining comical, was an uncommon musical phenomenon in the early 1990s when *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* was produced.

While modern secular music entertains audiences in the films of Kelani, they also spotlight contemporary urban culture in Nigeria from time to time, and they serve as archival materials for generations to come. Modern music that spotlight creative talents in young and upcoming artists are mostly located on campuses, and they include all the campus musical performances in *Campus Queen* and *Arugba.* Other examples of musical incorporation document performances old artists that are no longer active in the musical arena or who are deceased include—Sir Shina Peter in *O Le Ku,* Tunji Oyelana in T*hunderbolt,* Yinka Davies, Fatai Rolling Dollars, and Sikiru Ayinde in *Maami,* and Adewale Ayuba *in Dazzling Mirage.* Of these artists, only Yinka Davies is still active in Nigerian musical arena. My point, here, is that Kelani incorporates secular music in his films in an attempt to document unique urban popular culture or to archive songs of legendary musicians that are old or no more.

Religious/Sacred Music/Performances

By religious performances, I refer to, here, songs, performances, and musical ensembles that highlight religion and any liturgical phenomenon in Kelani's films. These songs and performances can be categorized into two types: the traditional religious songs and the modern orthodox religious songs/performances. However, the dominant of the two type is the religious

songs, which are very ceremonial. Often, they are sung by a crowd and are accompanied by other indigenous ensembles like drums, timbres, and gongs. While they function to drive the plotline forward in the films, they reflect the Yoruba cultural aesthetics that are so important to Kelani cinematic ambition. The mostly displayed sacred musical performance is the masquerade/Gelede songs as could be seen in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile, Agogo-Eewo*, *Arugba,* and *Maami.* Sacred musical performances are very detailed and elaborate and they relate to names and praise-names of gods, goddesses, and deities "which the priests and worshippers recite at the beginning of any worship," including those special songs that are "dedicated to and sung in honors of the divinities as occasions demand" (Awolalu 105).

At other times, the gelede performance functions in the films of Kelani to signal the beginning of a cultural cleansing process. This usage is evident in *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile, Narrow Path, and Maami*, where gelede performances mark the re-establishment of peaceful coexistence and equilibrium among communities and social classes. Similarly, there are occasions when Kelani uses church music and Islamic songs in his films to demarcate Christian affairs and to comment on Islamic activities. Example is the Christian hymn "a n soro Ile Ibukun" that is sung during the burial service of JP, one of the accomplices in the land-speculation deal.

Table 1. Types of Music/Song/Performances Incorporated in Films of Tunde Kelani.

	Secular		Sacred	
	Traditional	Modern	Traditional	Orthodox
Ti Oluwa Ni Ile 1-3		X	X	X
Ayo ni Mo Fe 1&2	X			
Ko See Gbe		*X*		
O Le Ku		*X*		X
Saworo-Ide	*X*		X	

Thunderbolt		X	
Agogo-Eewo	*X*	*X*	X
The Campus Queen		X	
Efunsetan Aniwura			
The Narrow Path	X		
Abeni 1&2		X	
Arugba		X	X
Maami		X	
Dazzling Mirage.		X	

The Hearthstone: Language, Culture, and Politics in the Films of Tunde Kelani.

Language, Culture, and Politics are the hearthstone of Kelani's cinematic art in Nollywood. Besides the beautiful images and quality audio that distinguishes his trade in the Nigerian film industry, culture, language, and politics are the essential elements that bind his art together to give his production the appealing artistic aesthetic that the MainFrame production company creates. In this section, I will be discussing language matters, culture, and politics in the films of Kelani.

Language, no doubt, is a critical component of contemporary African literary discourse: it spurs contentious debate whenever African literary production is concerned. Language, of course, signifies and points to selfhood and the question of identity not only in African literature but globally. However, in Postcolonial African states, "the choice of the language of expression is itself a political statement" (Fofana 93). Language matter is political in postcolonial Africa because many African nations are multilingual states, including Nigeria. Therefore, choosing an

indigenous language as a national language is, often, a choice that is complicated and highly contentious due to disagreement among the major advocates of indigenous languages. Perhaps, this explains why South Africa adopts all her indigenous languages as an official language to overcome the linguistic barrier that multilingualism imposed on the nation. The inability of most African nations to amicably resolve the language matter in their countries is still the reason why European languages—English and French—continue to function in official capacities and literary culture in Africa. Despite intense agitation by indigenous scholars such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, that African languages are capable of representing African literature and scientific ideas (see *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*), African countries are still caught up in the thorny brush of Linguistic imperialism.

However, the European languages that come to be "associated with power and prestige exacerbated identity crises among the new African elites" (ibid). For the most part, African elites and, even the semi-educated African, still hold the European languages in high esteem and, often, view their mother-tongues as inferior to English and French. Since language goes beyond communication to function as the repertoire of culture, indigenous values, and philosophy, its treatment in Nollywood films has not been exemplary: Nigerian languages often signify for the lowliest place in social spaces and contexts. In most of the representations, speaking indigenous languages means mediocrity and poverty, while the ability to communicate in the English language reflects power status and high-class. In the next several pages, I discuss how, through his films, Kelani promotes a cultural agenda to teach, use, and value Nigerian languages, especially Yoruba language instead of English, the official language in Nigeria.

Frantz Fanon, in *Black Skin White Mask (1986)* underscores the importance of language in the development of any nation and its implication for the process of modernity and civilization.

He writes that "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of civilization" (17). Here, Fanon touches on fundamental contributions of languages to a community of speakers and the overall progression of the nation that resonates with Kelani's agenda in Nollywood. To Kelani, to speak African languages does not stop at the recognition of the syntactical and morphological processes in the languages, which is often projected by the mainstream films. Instead, he posits that it also extends to how well the indigenous population can think scientifically, culturally, socially, and politically in the languages to the extent that the language helped them to form sets of values on which they premise the day-to-day affairs of their nations. Perhaps, the other motivation for Kelani's penchant for the inclusion and representations of African languages in his films is to confer agency on African languages, especially the Yoruba language. For according to Fanon, "a man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed[17] and implied by that language" (18).

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[17] The language situation in Nigeria is worrisome: first, various government regimes paid lips services to the development of indigenous language in Nigeria, especially in the South West where Yoruba language is widely spoken. In 2012, the Raji Fasola led administration of Lagos state proposed the teaching of Chinese language in Lagos schools (http://www.osundefender.org/?p=37294). Although it could be argued that the move was innovative and a foresight that will allow Lagos State Citizens to take advantage of economic and educational opportunities that will be available in China in a future time, yet, it is, to me, a premature move that was driven by political rhetoric. I would rather want to see a strong language policy that grows Yoruba language and other major Nigerian languages—Hausa and Igbo—to the

To project "a world expressed and implied" by the Yoruba language, Kelani approach his films as teaching materials for the general public (ibid). Like a teacher, he loads his films with linguistic contents that turn around the gaze of the spectators to the richness of African languages. More than any Nollywood filmmaker, Kelani has been so consistent with his language choice in his works to the extent that he finds a place for the Yoruba language in his English films. First, to contest the erroneous notion that the multilingual situation in Nigeria complicates effective communication between ethnic communities, Kelani represents, in *Thunderbolt (*2001) and *Abeni* (2007), the possibility of linguistic border crossing among multilingual populations through the experiences of Ngozi and the herbalist, and Ogagu and Laku. In the two films, the characters resolved their linguistic differences through empathic listening and gestural representations. To me, these representations are symbolic, in the sense that they project the apprehensions associated with terms like multilingualism— the existence of multiple languages in a nation with many cultural contexts—they also foreshadow possible attempts to overcome barriers of communication in multilingual settings (a post-global yearning). This implies that indigenous languages and their dialectal variants can become national languages once there is a societal need for them.

Before *Thunderbolt* and *Abeni,* Kelani, had, in *O Le Ku* (1997) demonstrated his commitment to the documentation and advancement of Nigerian national languages. In the film, Ajani, the protagonist of the story, and his colleagues are seeing recapitulating a lecture they just

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status of global languages before the adoption of any foreign tongues. Second, more and more Nigerian children cannot communicate in Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa; the English language is fast becoming the first language of new generations of Nigerians—a precarious situation that pose potential threats to the development and growth of indigenous languages in Nigeria.

attended where a professor, Larinde, speculates that the root of two English words "immunity" and "me" are "imuniti" and "mi" in the Yoruba language. Of course, we know that there is a paucity of linguistic data or research evidence to support that unseemly claim; nonetheless, Kelani deserves to be applauded for the audacity to re/invest rhetoric that seeks to 'possess the world expressed and implied" by Yoruba language (Fanon 17). *O le Ku* expresses the act of being Yoruba, both regarding the product and process of the Yoruba culture; especially regarding how the actors and actresses articulate their point of views in 'undiluted' Yoruba language. Speaking about the strict adherence to the monolingual mode of communication in the film, Adesokan (2011) opines that "the strict use of Yoruba language brings certain stiffness into the film" (86). I doubt if the language choice in O *Le Ku* affects the performances of the actors and actresses. In fact, O *Le Ku*, in my experience as a Foreign Language teacher, is among the pedagogically relevant indigenous films that teachers have successfully adopted to teach foreign learners of Yoruba language in the United States of America and other European nations. The reason for the classroom adoption is due to the standard Yoruba that the actor and actresses speak, which is a rarity in Nollywood.

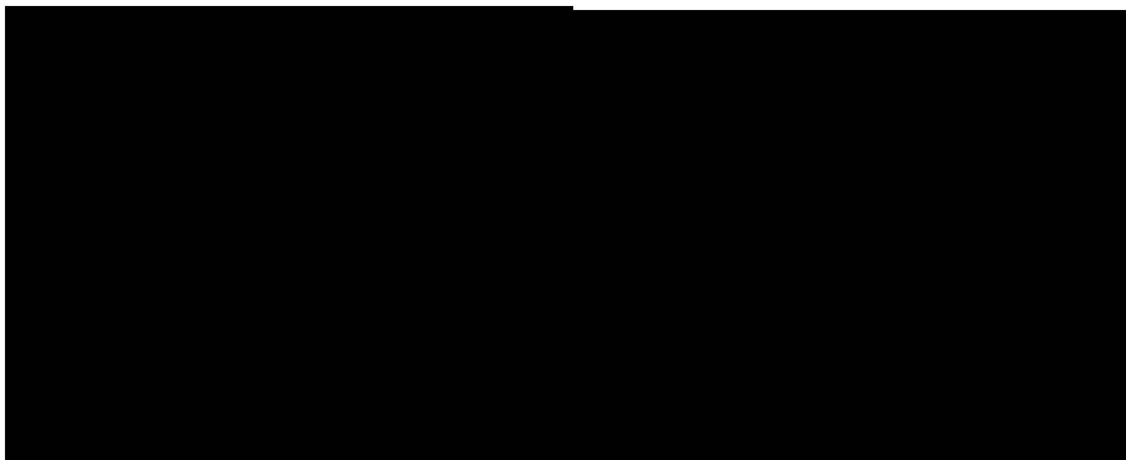

Figure 2.1 Figure 2.2

Apart from his exhortatory projection of Yoruba language in his films, Kelani, also, at other times, chides Nigerian elites for their condescending attitudes towards indigenous languages. In *Arugba,* Kelani frowns at the extent to which indigenous languages have been denigrated in modern times and lampoons the custodians of African cultures for their failures to secure indigenous languages through practice. To show that influential citizens contribute to the denigration of African culture and language, Kelani paints moving images of two grandchildren of the king in *Arugba*—Adeolu and Aderinsola—who as future kings and queens cannot greet in Yoruba nor speak fluently in the language. Instead of prostrating and kneeling to greet the king, both children stand erect and echo "good morning, grandpa!" (Figure 2.5). And despite the pleas from the queen to the children to greet appropriately in the Yoruba language, Aderinsola refuses the appeal on the ground that her teacher "forbids them from speaking [that] uncivilized tongue." (Figure 2.6). Also, the efforts of the two little children to identify the animal-skin that decorates the palace wall ends in a linguistic disaster (Figure 2.7). Aderinsola says "it is kiniun" [it is a lion], but Adeolu counters his sister to say "no, it is a ologbo" [it is a cat]. Dumbfounded, the king asks his chief to remove the children from his presence.

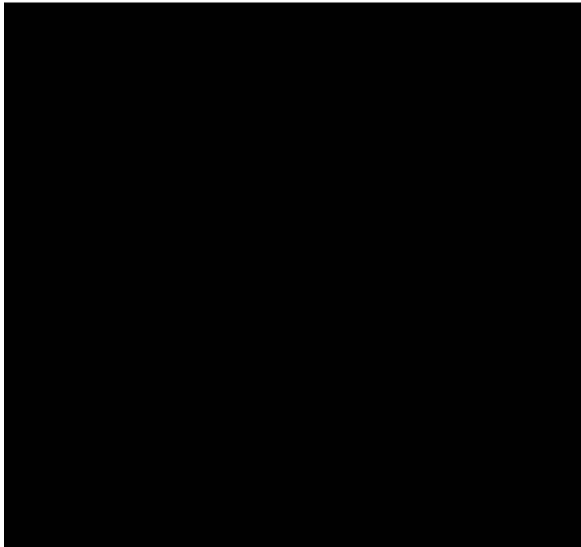

Figure 2.5

Figure 2.6

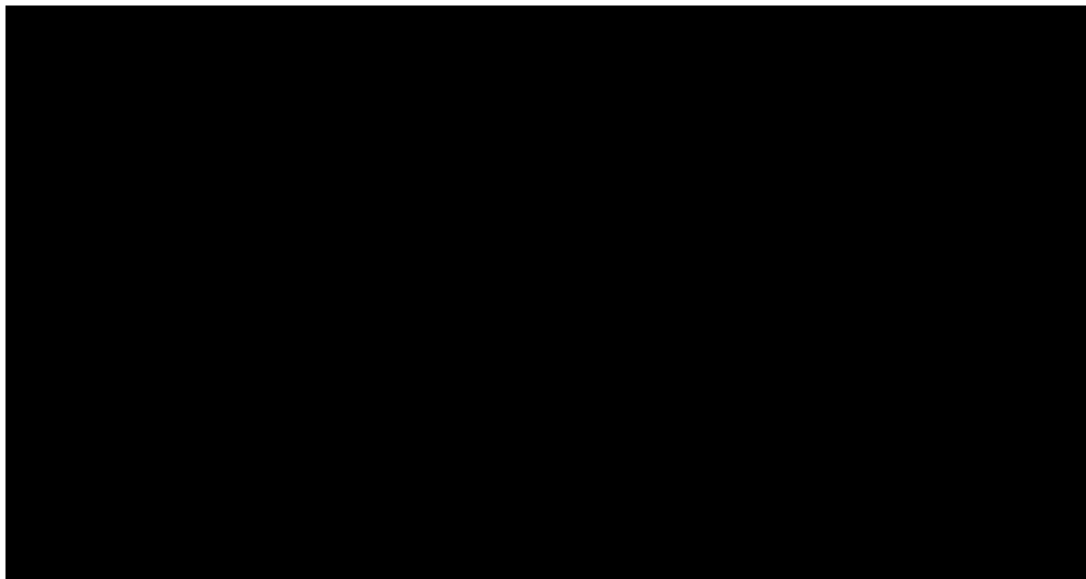

Figure 2.7

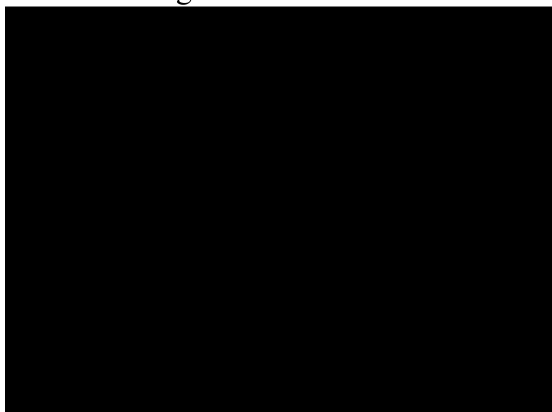

Figure 2.8

Figure 2.9

Kelani's representation of the indigenous language attrition in *Arugba* is similar to the language matter Sembene projects in *Guelwaar (1976)*. In *Guelwaar,* Sembene paints the pitiful image of Barthelemy, the son of Pierre Henri Thioune, popularly known as "Guelwaar" (the noble one), the eponymous character of the film, who is suspected to have been murdered by the elite government because of his acerbic criticism of the state. Barthelemy returns from Paris to attend his father's funeral, but surprisingly, he has become Europeanized to the extent that he is no longer able to relate to his African families in the contexts of the local culture and language. He does not speak Wolof, the local language of the Sereer community he belongs to but only French and even claims he is a European, a French citizen "Je Suis Francais, Européen" (I'm French, a European). While his long absence from Senegal could suffice for his language loss, yet, his arm-length attitude suggests otherwise. What is observable is a promotion of classism, self-delusional psychological feelings of belonging to an elite culture with a refined language.

Like Sembene, the images that Kelani provides in *Arugba* suggests the impact of globalism on African languages and culture. The representation also exposes the new generations of Africans, especially the elite class, as hybrids citizens, who can neither communicate in African languages nor successfully navigate the cultural terrains of their communities. These new Africans, Fanon describes as "the newcomer, [who] no longer understands the dialect" but who "talks about the Opéra, which he may never have seen except from a distance, but above all [that] he adopts a critical attitude toward his compatriots" (13). In other words, both Aderinsola and Akinade, like Barthelemy, are newcomers/foreigners in their cultural domains. As foreigners in the contexts of the Yoruba language; they are grossly inadequate at sustaining the Yoruba culture. Since there exists a link between language and culture, where "language carries culture, and culture carries,

particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 16).

My point, here, is that instead of pandering to elitist film taste to produce films that boast of characters who speak in impeccable European languages and accents, Kelani settles for a communication mode that employs Nigerian indigenous languages. An example is *Thunderbolt,* where Ngozi and her father speak the Igbo language, despite their advanced education and claim to elitism. Perhaps, Kelani has taken it upon himself to teach the audiences about Nigerian indigenous languages. And this motive explains his incorporation of a Yoruba classroom scene in *Arugba*, where a professor of Linguistics explains the regional classifications of Yoruba language (figure 2.10). In other words, language matters, and because it matters so much, it is at the heart of Kelani's Nollywood filmic preoccupations. His use of the Yoruba language, notwithstanding, Kelani subtitles his Yoruba language films in the English to reach out to multilingual audiences. Also, he incorporates the French language, and other dialects of the Yoruba language spoken in the Benin Republic, a French nation that has historical ties with the Yoruba culture of Nigeria, in his films.

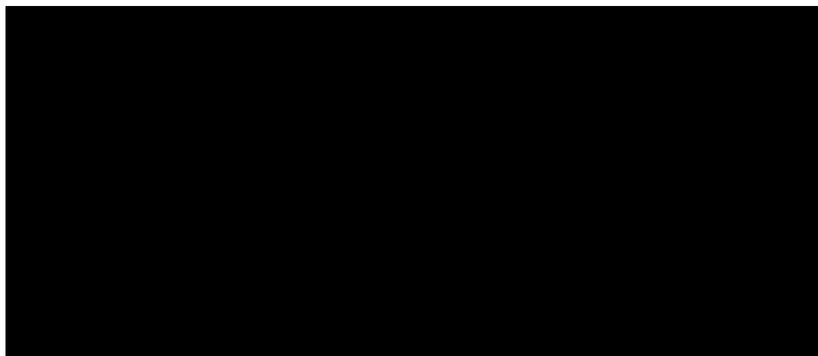

Figure 2.10

Culture in the Films of Tunde Kelani.

There is no doubt that creative works in Africa (songs, music, painting, drama, written and oral literature, etc.) are cultural productions that play an essential role in the social discourse of African communal life. In Nigeria, literature, both oral and written, serve as vehicles through which the Nigerian nation is carefully examined and critiqued. Drawing attention to the connection between literature and modern-day politics, Kelani, through his films, foregrounds the impossibility of discussing contemporary political life in Nigeria in isolation from the culture of the people and the meanings these cultures carry. In the words of Nobert Elias, the German sociologist, "the concept of Kultur mirrors the self-consciousness of a nation which constantly had to seek out and constitute its boundaries anew, in a political as well as spiritual sense, and again, had to ask itself: 'What is really our identity?'" (5-6). Culture is the DNA of communities and societies; it distinctly distinguishes nationalities and social identities. Culture, summed up, is "the measures of what constitutes a people's specificity: their customs, traditional values, art, cuisine, forms of communication, and elements of social contacts" (Vetinde and Fofana ix).

Since culture is indeed "the window through which we can understand the way a society perceives itself and in relation to others," its representations in films not only provides external participants and foreign audiences information about African cultures; it as well indicates how cultural mediators/creative artists are willing to critique it [culture] in modern times (ibid). While most Nollywood filmmakers represent culture in their films in opposition to modern conventions, or as immutable, Kelani projects African culture, especially his Yoruba culture, as transient: able to adjust to modernity and social changes. Similar to Fanon's view that "national culture is no folklore where an abstract populism is convinced," instead, Kelani represents culture in his films to underscore the fact that "…culture is the collective thought process of people to describe, justify,

and extol the actions of the nation" (xi). In his artistic attempts to represents culture in such a way that it extols actions of the Yoruba people and the Nigerian nation, Kelani, views culture as an all-encompassing concept capable of promoting the Yoruba concept of *omoluabi*[18]. To him [Kelani], African cultures have the potentials to reform individuals as well as the entire nation. However, Kelani's treatment of Nigerian cultures is quite unusual in the Nollywood industry, where the format for representing culture is, often, to place it in a diachronic relationship with modernity and contemporary ideas.

The uniqueness about Kelani and his projections of Nigerian cultures is his critiquing of obsolete and outdated cultural practices on the one hand, and the projection of useful cultural observations that are coterminous with contemporary innovations and postcolonial modernity, on the other. Essentially, Kelani condemns cultural ideas that are either unhygienic and stereotypical, especially cultural practices that fetishize women in our rapidly transforming postcolonial societies. Two classic examples of cultural beliefs that Kelani projects as inadequate in contemporary times are presented in *Ayo ni Mo Fe* (1994) and *Narrow Path* (2007). In *Narrow Path*, Kelani, similar to Sembene's Moolade *(2004)* projects the agony and the pain specific cultural practices inflict on individuals and groups of people, especially women, in Nigeria. In the film, he provides ample audiovisual images that query the usefulness of the "virginity test'—a cultural practice that requires women to keep their virginity until their wedding night when they are expected to have the first sexual experience with their husbands, and which punish and disgraces any woman with a ruptured hymen. Though a celebrated practice in the pre-colonial

[18] *Omoluabi* is a term that describes a just, hardworking, civic, responsible, morally upright, and psychologically balanced man/woman in Yoruba culture.

period and early independence, the "virginity test' is grossly outdated in today's world and its core values commodify women's body.

Kelani, through his projection of Dauda's vaginal rape of Awero, queries the lopsided cultural arrangement that fails to hold men accountable for their philandering attitudes, but sanctions women heavily for breaking cultural protocols which, often, are forced upon them by men or other social, cultural, and religious institutions that mostly men dominated. *Narrow Path* centers on Awero, the coveted beau of Orita village, who is wooed by three prospective suitors—Lapade, the wealthy gold trader; Odejinmi, the jealous brave hunter; and Dauda, the philandering city rascal. Few weeks before the bride price is paid and the wedding date fixed, Dauda lured Awero into a thicket and rapes her. With ruptured hymen and bruised ego, Awero goes about in pain and agony, for she is ashamed and afraid to tell anyone that she is a rape victim. Aware of the shame and disrespect that will follow her wedding night, once the village discovers that she is a 'broken pot' (as a new bride with ruptured hymen), Awero sinks further into despair. As she expects, the wedding night is chaos, Odejinmi, despite Awero's entreaties, forced himself on Awero and upon discovering that her virginity is gone, announces to the waiting crowd that she is a "broken pot." Sad that the new wife is a broken pot, the wedding ceremony comes to an abrupt end as guests scurry away to their homes. With a bruised reputation, Awero finds herself knee-deep in a bog of inter-communal hostility as both Agbede—Odejinmi's village and Orita, Awero's village seek each other out in arms duel.

While men of both villages declare war against each, Awero declines to reveal the identity of the person who defiled her as required by the custom. According to the tradition, Awero must disclose the identity of the man that raped her and dance naked around the village in the scheme of the atonement ritual. As men of both communities are ready to lock horn in battle, Awero leads

a peaceful procession of women bearing leaves and offers herself to be killed instead of the innocent civilians. Moved by her action, the blood-thirsty men sheath their swords and leave the battlefield. As a lesson from Awero's dilemma, the village of Orita abolishes the culture of virginity test, and peace returns to the communities.

Unlike many of his films, *Narrow Path* is symbolic because of its critique of the patriarchal system that supports the fetishization of women's bodies in Nigeria. It is a film that projects ideas that provide insights for rescuing the agency of women in a male-dominated society. The film also spotlights the Manichean perspectives that privilege the male child over the female regarding education, social participation, and freedom of expression. When the village council members discuss Awero, no woman is present; they are removed from the decision-making process, while the same system allows a little boy to witness the arbitrating procedure. In that instance, the views of Awero and those of her friends and the women are not relevant in this male, hegemonic decision—it seems women are to be seen and not heard. Reacting to the gendered contexts that frame the identities of African women, Dominica Dipio (2014) posits that "the gender socialization process makes the women accept their non-decision making the position as a given" (102). It is this "given status" that Kelani reacts to in his films, where he projects the uncanny ability of women to return peace and stability to societies, as presented in Narrow *Path.* And at other times, by portraying witty women who outperform their male counterparts (as projected in *Campus Queen)*. Or through possession of unusual physical strength and mental energy to outmaneuver phallocentric permutations (as is the case in *Dazzling Mirage*). Above all, what Kelani highlights in the film is a gender discourse that "seeks a greater valuation for women in a patriarchal order" (Adeoti 31).

Apart from critiquing culture in his films, Kelani also projects African culture as viable, and sources of functional knowledge, especially the Ifa divination system. In *Thunderbolt* (2001) for example, differently from the standard practice in Nollywood where Pentecostalism is, often, the preferred mode of curing ailments and diseases that defy Western medical knowledge, Kelani projects the Ifa divination system as a constitutive practice that has both religious and therapeutic aspects. In the film, when the orthodox medical understanding is perplexed, the indigenous medical knowledge stepped in to save doctor Oladimeji, who had, earlier in the film, doubted the etiology and the medical existence of Magun[19]. Without the usual friction that attends to representations of modernity and traditional values in Nollywood films, Kelani underscores the importance of (re)reading African indigenous knowledge afresh. He projects that useful insights can be drawn from them, which have potentials to advance medical knowledge and other forms of curative ideas in contemporary times. What seems to be relevant to Kelani is the idea that the definition of "medical knowledge," all too often, has a narrow bend to it, whereas, 'medical knowledge' is complex and nuanced.

While Kelani seems to be suggesting the efficacy of traditional medicine in modern times, he, in *Ayo ni Mo Fe* (1994), condemns the manner in which Yoruba traditional doctors handle psychiatric patients. In the film (*Ayo ni Mo Fe*), Kelani projects images that underscore the inadequacy of the Yoruba traditional practice at curing psychiatric patients, where, instead of a

[19] Magun is a sexually activated affliction that a promiscuous woman is laced with. Magun can be remotely placed on any woman by making her to cross over any charmed material that contains the magun formulae. There are different types of Magun in Yoruba land but the common type is the one exhibited by doctor Oladimeji in the *Thunderbolt film.*

clean and rehabilitative environment, dirty and unhygienic homes with old structures housed the patients. Through Ewejoko's unconventional approach that is rooted in mysticism and maltreatment—beating, isolation, and confinement—Kelani further establish that traditional psychiatric practice is lacking in research and unpopular for curing mental illness in the modern age. In that context, the healer lacks training in psychology and other related medical fields, but instead claim that *Anjonu aagana* (the spirit of mental illness) is the source of the disease. Incidentally, this view, "that [mental illness] is said to be caused by physical or spiritual forces," and that one can only exorcise the spirit by beating the patients with a cane, is widely shared by the Yoruba people. (Makinde 2007). But, here, Kelani is advocating for orthodox treatments of psychosis and not the traditional alternative model that he projects as inadequate and antiquated.

Apart from his representations of cultural practices that bother on the affairs of women, health and healing, Kelani's films are filled with other process and products of Yoruba culture, and they include greetings, drumming, singing, clothing, art and craft, and oral literature. The incorporation and representations of these process and product of culture explain why his films are useful in foreign language classes to teach Yoruba language and culture to foreign learners of the language. Take dressing/clothing and greetings for example, in each of his films, Kelani inserts the Yoruba traditional style of dressing in contexts, such as naming, wedding ceremony, leisure time, and work time. If one considers *Narrow Path* for example, in all the scenes where the women are framed working, particularly at the dye pit and palm-oil refinery, they wrap iro, tied above their cleavages without any buba. However, during festivals and ceremonies, they wear *ofi*, *sanya* or a*lari* as the occasion demands. In both *Saworo-Ide* and *Agogo Eewo*, Kelani pays close attention to dressing, to the extent that two or more scenes are dedicated to the different styles of head-wrap and their symbolism in Yoruba culture. These consistent representations of Yoruba clothes "is a

powerful signifier of culture with its rich symbolism," as deep as the language matters he addresses in his works (Hayne's 136).

In addition to clothing/dressing, Kelani loves to showcase the richness of Yoruba body adornment in his works, especially hairdos. Different from the mainstream films, where characters show off different tattoos, and foreign hairstyles, Kelani's actors showcase Yoruba hairstyles such as *Kolese, Olobameta, Suku, and Korob*a. A classic example of this representation occurs in *Saworo-Ide and Narrow Path,* where Lapite appreciates the hairdo on the new olori, Tinuola; and in the case of Awero, who shows her dislike for the *kolese* hairstyle respectively. My point, here, is that Kelani represents every aspect of the Yoruba culture that the mainstream filmmakers seldom pay attention to in his films.

Politics and Transformative Agenda in Films of Tunde Kelani: *Saworo-Ide and Agogo Eewo*:

The general maxim about Nollywood is that it is "apolitical" and unconnected to any serious national ideology. This argument is referring to only one kind of politics, that is, anti-state politics. But it is essential to make it clear that all art is political, to the extent that representations affect people's thinking and actions in the real world. The critical issue is what kind of politics. There are films of Tunde Kelani that are very political in the dominant sense of being anti-state or against the ruling political establishment. They include *Saworo-Ide (1999)* and *Agogo-Eewo (2002).*

Saworo-Ide, according to Adesokan (2011), is a "political thriller that allegorizes corruption" (87). The film X-rays the contemporary Nigerian state and critiques its political-economy. Even though the films are rich in Yoruba culture, its main import is moving towards transformational practices that can correct corruption in Nigeria. *Agogo-Eewo*, on the other hand,

is a political film that utilizes Foucault's ideas of "discipline' and "punishment'' to paint in bold relief, issues of governance and political power as it relates to the Nigerian state. There are two primary transformative agenda that Kelani projects in *Saworo-ide* and *Agogo Eewo*: the possibility that African culture can help solve the malaise in contemporary Nigerian Political landscape and the usefulness of practical punitive measure in curbing corruption in the nation. These films—*Saworo-ide* and *Agogo Eewo*—convey meanings beyond the tradition versus modernity theme that is overtly expressed, they project pragmatic steps that are useful for the masses to reclaim their agency in the lopsided Nigerian political landscape.

In the opening sequence of *Saworo-ide*, Kelani projects Nigerian cultural past as an edifying piece of history with orderliness, a political state that is mutual and symbiotic in operation. In series of shots, he highlights the serene atmosphere that pervades the precolonial Nigerian state through the fictional image of Jogbo, whose sociopolitical representations detail Nigerian postcolonial realities. The lukewarm color saturation suggests that Kelani is deliberately contrasting temporality—a comparison of the historical past and the present in chronotopic paradigm. The chronotrope, as Mikhail Bakhtin (1996) argues "expresses the inseparability of space and time" (84). To Bakhtin, both time and space are fused, and as a constitutive matter, the chronotope category, "determine to a significant degree the image of a man in literature" (85). This temporal contrast is further foregrounded in the activities of two kings and the deeds of their followers. In the first representation, Kelani provides the audiences with the image of a dying king, whose majors focus, it seems, is to provide a sustainable system of governance for his people. The subjects, who are concerned that the king is about to join his ancestors, lament the chaos and cluelessness that will follow, "father, you must not leave us without any guidance, we would be lost" (*Saworo-Ide*). In a swift reaction to their request for leadership guidelines, the King forged a

pact between the masses and the gods, “there will be a pact between the people of Jogbo and their kings” (*Saworo-Ide*). The “pact” is a cultural one, as the series of shots reveal, and it is through it that Jogbo maintains law and order.

The first representation details the activities of a functional government, one in which the leader listens to his subjects and provides them with a strategy that will guide their day-to-day affairs. Michel Foucault aptly describes this representation in “Governmentality” (1999) as follows:

> The problem and concerns of the state is not always about how to govern but the strategy employed by the state where all the citizen without exception “obey the laws, accomplish the tasks expected of them, practice the trade to which they are assigned, and respect the established order so far as this order conforms to the laws imposed by God on nature and men” (95).

In basic terms, what Foucault points attention to is a strategic understanding of governance: what works, what will not work, and how best to rule over people. A political arrangement in which all citizens, including the leaders, are aware of their rights, responsibilities, and limitations. It is the orderliness that Kelani hints at in the opening sequence through the figures of the old king and the “sacred materials—ade-ide, ado-ide, and saworo-ide” that form Jogbo mythology. In order words, Kelani approaches the political relationship between the king and his subjects via mythology, which includes the suzerainty of the deities in the affairs of man.

The represented past contrasts sharply with the modernity Lapite, and his cohorts—Seriki, Bada, and Balogun represent in *Saworo-Ide*. And Kelani seems to be suggesting that, in reality, the political history of Nigeria has seen some better days than what is now being witnessed in the nation. This reading is possible because of two referents that Kelani insert in the memorial song:

"to find the elephant, go to the forest. To find the buffalo, go to the grassland" (*Saworo-Ide*). *Erin* and *ẹfọ̀n* literary translated as "Elephant" and "Buffalo" respectively carry cultural meanings beyond the grammatical category of nouns and wild animals. In Yoruba culture, *Erin* signifies surplus size and gargantuan abilities that are unparalleled. While *ẹfọ̀n* denotes a ferocious attitude and grace. It is at this level of meaning that one can extrapolates the rare qualities of the past that the old king embodies. Even though Kelani does not provide any screen texts to demarcate time in the film, he uses the camera to separate the times—the historical past, which he represents in sepia color, and the modern time he represents in bright colors. Also, remarkably, Kelani freezes the frame and fades out the camera to a solid black color before he opens up the camera to capture the new Jogbo nation.

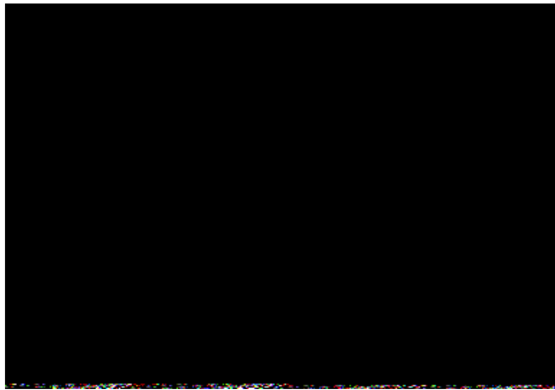

Figure 2.7 (Balogun and Opalaba)

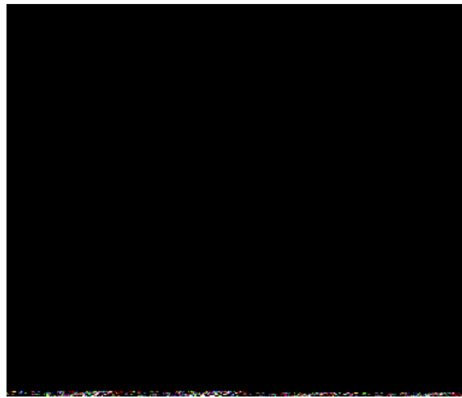

Figure 2.8 (Lapite threatens the Regents)

The new Jogbo is introduced to the audience through the deeds and actions of Chief Balogun, especially the lobbyist roles he plays in the film. The stairway scene is where we first have a hint of the possibility of the "outlandish infraction of normality" that Olaniyan describes in his book *Arrest the Music!: Fela and His Rebel Art and Politics* (2004). The "outlandish infraction," to Olaniyan, is not just about the usurpation of the resources in postcolonial African states. It describes how the government and its various agents disregard normative laws and

existing protocols, and how public officers plunder the state and set themselves above punitive laws. It includes how individual arrogates the power of the state to perform personal clandestine activities. The possibility of the "outlandish infraction of normality" becomes visible in the dialog between Chief Balogun and Ọ̀pálába (figure 2.)

Balógun: Hello sir, are you tired?

Ọ̀ páłábà: I'm not tired. I am only resting.

Balógun: Hope you've not forgotten about our previous discussion?

Ọ̀páłábà: Oh, about the

kingship? Balógun: Yes, sir.

Ọ̀ páłábà: But I've told you whoever is after meretricious wealth cannot be the king. For the king serves the people and not the other way round! And no Jogbo king could be as wealthy as the modern kings

Balógun: Why? Is that a curse?

Ọ̀ páłábà: That is mysterious. You may be a chief, but there are certain secrets that you cannot know, I know them because of my age and relationship with elders. That is the foundational code of Jogbo

Balógun: we have to change the law. The king-elect is my friend, and I want him to be rich.

Ọ̀páłábà: Tell him not to swear to oan ath or make

incisions. Balógun: Why?

Ọ̀ páłábà: You cannot understand. But warn him. [Singing] You cannot understand, they don't understand. They will comprehend it tomorrow.

Unlike the old king, the Onijogbo that forges the ade-ide, ado-ide, and saworo-ide—the mythical elements that fuse together to sanction government officials in Jogbo—the new king appears to be lacking in self-discipline, and political prudence needed to effect a prosperous government. The first impression the audiences have of the new king is that of fraud: he describes his queen pejoratively and sends a love letter to Tinuola, his concubine. Lapite's visage indicated

someone with western education but crooked in characters and moral. What could be gleaned from the dialog between Lapite and Balogun is that the king-elect, Lapite, is a modern king whose formal training has beclouded his regard for traditional values, and also that he approaches the kingship/leadership position as a means to an end and not an end in itself. When Amawomaro, the chief priest of Jogbo, beckons on Lapite to swear under oath as prescribed by the tradition, Lapite vehemently refuses to take part in the process on the pretext that tradition is too archaic for his elitism, and that the whole process is a "backward tradition" (*Saworo-Ide*).

Lapite's refusal to be incised underscores W.E.B Dubois's notion of double consciousness that he posits in his 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folk.* The double consciousness is a "'strange experience' [and] peculiar sensation of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, in which two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; and two warring ideals are located in one dark body (xiv). Lapite, who fits well into the double consciousness paradigm, exhibits a sense of hybridity and confusion: a part of him orientates towards African cultural practices, and the other towards crass elitism that is outside the limit his kingship permits. The avoidance of the ritual rites is an attempt by Lapite to dissociate himself from the cosmic cycle that binds the king, the deities, and the masses together in Jogbo. The dissociation signifies a violent reclamation of the agency from the spiritual domain to satisfy selfish agenda, which ultimately threatens the "common good" of the Jogbo nation.

The threat to the common good of the Jogbo nation is made visible in the outrageous manner Lapite harangued the kingmakers, to the point that he draws out his pistol to make them succumb to his will saying "that is the way I want it, rituals are now concluded" (*figure 2.7*). Here, Lapite's use of a gun is symbolic in the sense that it functions metaphorically to represents the various oppressive apparatuses of the modern state and its agents on the one hand, and on the other

reiterates Fanon's assumption that "the national bourgeoisie discovers his historic mission as an intermediary… its vocation is not to transform the nation but prosaically serve as a conveyor belt for capitalism" (100).

As claimed by Olaniyan (1995), it is not the case of cultural superiority that gave the Europeans the right to "pass judgment on the culture of other… their political and military power over disparate spaces gave the Europeans that right, not supposed claims of cultural superiority" (59). In a similar vein, it is not the royal status of Lapite that empower him to silence Amawomaro and Ayangalu and made them do his bidding; it is his gun, a symbol of military might and modernity that resembles that of the Europeans Olaniyan discusses. Unlike the old king, who listened to his subjects and forged for them the mythical ade-ide, ado-ide, and saworo-ide, Lapite fails to uphold the tradition that legitimizes his kingship; instead, he is gullible, puerile, and very loquacious. These differences in leadership traits and character are Kelani's way of exposing the weak strategies of contemporary governments in Africa and Nigeria adopt to govern their subjects. While it appears that Kelani is aiming for the inclusion of traditional values in modern democratic practices, he seems, also, to be interested in the element of governance that Foucault highlights in governmentality, which includes a system of control in which the citizen and the leaders perform their functions as expected of them. But, in his allegorical representation of the Nigerian state and its contemporary leaders, not only that Lapite fails to exert self-control and sees to it that the masses perform their duties as expected, he unleashes terror on his subjects, especially from the moment Opalaba reveals the danger inherent in his refusal to be incised.

Acting correct to the assumption that African bourgeoisie and elites are people with zero "economic clout" (Fanon 98), Lapite flagrantly condemns the economic structure of Jogbo and include himself in the national income derivation formulae. In opposition to Opalaba's claim that

"the Jogbo King serves the people and not the other way round," Lapite rejects the previous arrangement and claim that he is a "modern king."And that he is entitled to a portion of the national revenue, "I want to know your gross income and my share of it" (*figure 2.9*). And when the loggers respond that they will allocate ten percent of the revenue to him, he retorts "10% is small for me…and I want the money paid into my overseas account; I don't want evil eyes on it. (*Saworo-Ide*). Lapite's desire for material gains resonates with Chabal's assumption that "in Africa, power and wealth go together" and it is "precisely because power and wealth are so intimately connected that the personal 'integrity' of those political leaders is revealed as different, exceptional, odd-even" (214).

Furthermore, the Chiefs, who are supposed to be the "mouthpiece" of the people also share the inordinate lust for material accumulation. To be included in the arrangement, Balogun, on behalves of two other Chiefs—Seriki, and Bada—runs after the loggers as the exit the palace shouting "Hey, just a minute, you didn't even bother to see me again?" (Figure 2.10). However, in the words of Foucault "government has as its purpose not the act of government itself, but the welfare of the population and the improvement of its condition" (100). Instead of seeking the welfare of his subjects, Lapite advances his government in the opposite direction. He sabotages the economy and allocates for his personal use, state funds that he could have dispensed to provide welfare packages for the masses. His action is not only an anathema to state growth and social cohesion, but Lapite's act also brews dissension and engenders gargantuan corruption.

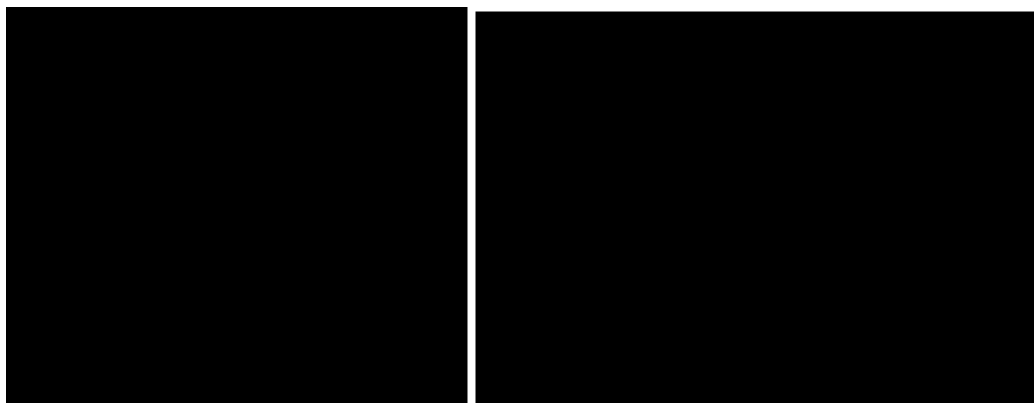

Figure 2. 9 & 2.10 (Lapite and his Chiefs bargaining with the loggers).

While still claiming to be representatives of the masses, the Chiefs transformed their social positions to that of modern agents with accumulated capital wealth that sustain ostentatious display of luxurious automobiles. This representation of the automobiles as a symbol of crass accumulation is in tandem with Patrick Chabal's idea of power in Africa, who said that "if we are interested in understanding what is happening in postcolonial Africa, it is important to recognize that…the legitimacy of power derives in some significant part of the acquisition, possession, and display of wealth (213). Perhaps, one could theorize that the images of the automobile are synonymous with corruption and oppressive powers in the Nigerian socio-economic contexts, where masses struggle to get basic physiological needs, and where powerbrokers stifle public opinions and unleash the terror of the state security to terrorize seekers of truth.[20]

In this context, Kelani's transformational agenda, it seems, to me, is directed at the need for non-partisan media as a general watchdog in exposing corruption and other vices in

[20] Of example is the killing of the prolific novelist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and eight other Ogoni leaders by the late General Abacha. Abacha, in a military junta, falsely accused Saro-Wiwa and eight other leaders for the dead of four infamous Ogoni leaders who supported Abach and the foreign oil companies in the ecological degradation of the oil-rich Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

contemporary political space. And in this regard, Opalaba and his songs serve as cultural elements that provide moral perspectives to the direction Lapite and his chiefs could follow (the exhortatory perspective of Adesokan, 2011). From a low-angle shot, Kelani frames Opalaba as he props himself against the railings of the palace, watching the chiefs and their treatments of the journalists, and he begins to sing his highly proverbial songs that condemn the high-handedness of the ruling class. The "ajantiele Song is a folklore tale about a brother who kills his younger brother in a sardonic attempt to inherit his wealth. It is similar to the Biblical story of Cain and Abel in material composition, where Cain kills Abel because the Lords accepts his sacrificial offerings. Here, Kelani uses the song pedagogically to speak to the conscience of the leaders and also to inform the masses of the wickedness of the chiefs, who arrogate collective state resources to cater for themselves.

The political reality that Kelani represents in *Saworo-ide* underscores privileges the elite class enjoys in Nigeria, and the roles centralized production plays in the cultivation of systemic corruption in the nation. To buttress the notion that centralized treasury is, at least, a factor responsible for the frenzied jostling for political offices in Nigeria, Kelani introduces Lagata and his inordinate ambition to rule Jogbo. The paradox, here, is that Lagata, who makes a grandiose speech about Lapite and his chiefs is, himself, a dupe, who wantonly dispense state's funds for personal needs. Representing this assumption, Kelani, from Lagata's point of view, brings to perspective how military rulers shunt democracy in Nigeria on the pretense that democratic leaders are corrupt. Whereas, in the end, they [military rulers] are worse off than their democratic counterparts in the way they steal from the national treasury and trample on human rights.

Figure 2.11 and 2.12. (Lagata is framed consuming wine)

The tableau that Kelani presents to the audience in *Saworo-Ide* reiterates the conflict between tradition and modernity on the one hand and the possibility that cultural processes could engender a flourishing political economy that is built on egalitarianism and equity, on the other. Kelani recasts culture and tradition in *Saworo-Ide* to explain the state of Nigerian politics to the masses who are not included in the formal arrangement that the state runs.

Besides the projection of the utilitarian values of cultures in contemporary African politics, Kelani opines that discipline and punishment will introduce some sanity into the Nigerian political space if sanctioned through shared cultural beliefs. Discipline, as Foucault notes, has to do with the task of establishing continuity "in both an upwards and a downwards direction" (91). The upwards direction, Foucault claims, describes the extent to which a leader disciplines himself/herself and how well he/she has learned to govern himself (extraction of self-seeking attitudes and greedy appetite). The downwards direction, one the other hand, is a step lower in the hierarchy: it describes how sub-leaders, like the heads of families, have learned to govern their families. In other words, downwards continuity describes, in a sense, that "when a state is well run, the head of the family will know how to look after his family, his goods and his patrimony, which means that individuals will, in turn, behave as they should" (92). What Foucault seems to

be driving at, in the up/down paradigm, is that responsible leaders exemplify good governance through their conducts, which in turn, subcategories of leaders and, eventually, the general population emulates. The whole import of the upwards and downwards continuity model is to teach discipline among leaders and their followers. It is, therefore, in this ideological paradigm that Kelani frames Bosipo in *Agogo Eewo*.

Bosipo leads by example and sets his household as a prototype of a just and disciplined family—he denies Lape, his wife, the flamboyant and extra luxurious lifestyle Lapite's household enjoyed. When Lape comments that "I want a convoy of three posh cars. Police escort siren in the front and another with a flashlight at the back," Bosipo exclaims "for what reason?" Lape mentions her status as the queen, a status that must be respected and displayed in public. Bosipo denies the request, saying, "no way. A car will convey you, and you will have a police escort. About the siren and flashlight, just forget it" (*Agogo Eewo*). Also, when Lape and Iyalaje discuss their pet project ideas with him (Bosipo), he frowns at using the state fund to kick-start the pet project. To Bosipo, Lape's project is personal and, as such, she cannot use the state's fund "that is your private project. We cannot vote state funds for that," he intoned.

Having separated himself from the fraudulent scheming of the chiefs and the whimpering satiation of his wife, Lape, for crass wealth, Bosipo begins the process of national rebirth. To bring Jogbo political community back to its old glory, Bosipo forms alliances with the cultural agents of Jogbo: Amawomaro and Ayangalu. With the help of these cultural agents, Bosipo is able to recast agogo-eewo as a cleansing symbol. The moment Bosipo formulates agogo-eewo, he moves to aggregate local supports for his reformative project by organizing town hall meetings, where he discuss the program of his administration with the masses. In the process of fostering unity through political accountability, Bosipo invokes the public space as a site of confession, where corrupt

chiefs are ridiculed. The public space provides the masses the much-needed freedom to voice their opinions, correct the abnormities in representations, and taunt their oppressors. The notion of the public space as the center for dishonoring the "honored' neocolonialist serves the purpose of reclaiming agency for the weak, the oppressed and marginalized members of the society.[21]

The invocation of this public space in *Agogo Eewo* is symbolic because it returns power to the subalterns, that is, the marginalized population, who, for the first time in the film, have space and freedom to jeer at the corrupt chiefs as they confess their atrocities publicly. What agogo-eewo, as a mythical object, does is to put in pragmatic perspective, the notion of discipline and punishment. In any political/ traditional contexts of governance, there is the notion of "Political reciprocity" (Chabal 1994), which speculates that leaders ought to be disciplined enough to reciprocate their duties to the masses that they represent. But in Nigeria and most African states, the idea of political reciprocity has not been effective because of the way politician tower above the people they represent.

To Kelani, there is a need for a system that will bring politicians and public workers to justice, in case they err in their duties to the nation. Here, Kelani, for the most part, is suggesting in *Agogo-Eewo* that the political landscape in Nigeria will benefit from legislation that stripes political representative of the "immunity clause" that has, over the years, shielded the powerful

[21] In *Xala, Sembene (1975)* appropriated the public space as the center of the ritual healing for El Hadji Aboucader Beye, a prominent citizen and a member of the chamber of commerce. Also in *Bamako* (2006), the open courtyard, becomes the trail court, the public space on which African spokesmen took call attention to the atrocities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

and political cabals from serving punishment. By recasting agogo eewo as a cultural element that helps civil justices, Kelani hints at the possibility of grafting sacred ideas with secular political views that can impact the nascent Nigerian political arrangement positively. Kelani infers that the possible solution to institutionalized corruption in Nigeria is not likely to come from secular democratic theories, principles, laws, and edicts but through sacred and sacrificial rites just because the Bible and the Quran that have served the process of swearing-in political officers and civil servants are foreign religious ideas to Africans. For example, it has been widely speculated that most indicted political office holders in Nigeria swear falsely with a Bible or a Quran because the oath object is far removed from their cosmic and cultural philosophy. For instance, any Yoruba man is aware of the wrath of Sango and/or other deities and gods and would not swear falsely using their names as the repercussion is severe (as exemplified in the death of both Balogun and Seriki, two high-ranking chiefs in Jogbo, who died shamefully because they failed to confess publicly and seek social forgiveness).

To this end, Kelani plays the sacred mimesis and the secular mimesis as intertwined approaches that are capable of solving corruption and other social vices in contemporary African societies through discipline and punishment. The film links discipline and punishment as two ends of a spectrum with "upwards continuity" as the most necessary leadership trait in Nigeria. *Agogo-Eewo* "has successfully problematized the tripartite distinction structuring the intermediate class" (Adesokan 107), it facilitates a communal space for the masses to publicly ridicule political bad-eggs and their local collaborators—a much-needed space in Nigerian to enforce political accountability.

Conclusion

"Nollywood has managed to subvert local expectations" (Tsika 10). Kelani, no doubt, has explored the potentials of video technology to produce world-class films that shift the paradigmatic scopes and "shaken out" [critics] historical need to read African cinema in narrow political terms" (Harrow 1). Kelani has demonstrated the vibrancy of using video technology cinematically to represent African concerns and universal themes, both nationally and transnationally beyond "intellectual genealogy based on a territorialized identity and a racialized geography" (Mbembe 257). In his construction of African identity and modernity beyond the racialized geography and territory, Kelani reformulates African tradition and culture as indispensable tools for building saner and sustainable socio-political institutions in Africa. In respect to this landmark efforts, notwithstanding his political bias and abstruse cultural formulations, Kelani deserves more canonical referencing than any other Nigerian filmmaker because he has provided a structure for viewing and reading Nigerian films without over-moralizing/sermonizing the themes. And it is in this instance of a role model that Kelani functions as a Nollywood icon and African auteur.

Chapter Three: Postcolonial Existence: "Origin" and "Identity" in Films of Kunle Afolayan

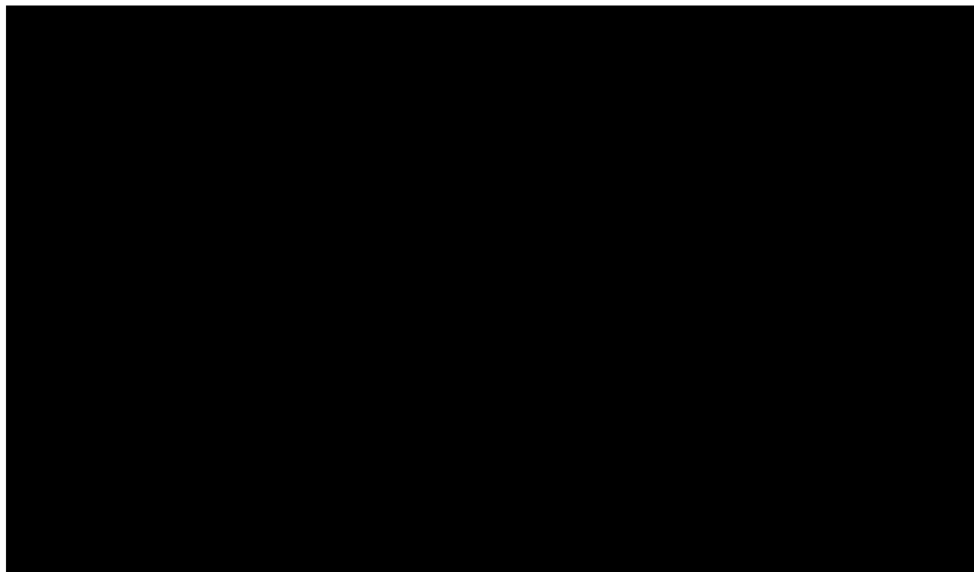

Figure 1. Kunle Afolayan on a film set. Photo courtesy the Golden Effect gallery.

Introduction: Kunle Afolayan in Nollywood.

In the spring of 2015, the Department of African Cultural Studies, University of Wisconsin-Madison, invited the famous Cameroonian filmmaker, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, as the guest speaker at one of the series of the "Africa at Noon" event hosted by the African Studies Program. After delivering his lecture and during the question and answer section, I asked Bekolo about his perception of Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. Bekolo, in the charismatic manner of an accomplished francophone African filmmaker, praised Nollywood for helping to recapture the African audiences that have been lost to Hollywood, Bollywood, and other film traditions. However, he quickly quipped that Nollywood is shortsighted because it cannot predict the rise of armed insurgency in Nigeria "Nollywood is popular, but what do you call a film industry that failed to predict the advent of Boko Haram in Nigeria?" (Bekolo, seminar). To Bekolo, if

Nollywood were a serious film tradition, it would have been able to predict the emergence of Boko Haram and other militia groups in Nigeria and Africa. But that is not true about Nollywood: it responds to political events in the nation as well as comments on socio-political anomalies on the continent. First, it is not the place of artistic works to predict the future. Art makes suggestive remarks on the present reality, and the audience can extrapolate into the future from that. Second, the pervasive pentecostalist self-flagellation that many Nollywood movies display does point to a fractured social domain that is fertile to the kind of Boro Haram fanaticism.

So, while Bekolo expects Nollywood films to deal with political matter and other issues that bother on governance in Nigeria and Africa, Nollywood, instead, focuses its camera lenses on the quotidian experiences of marginal people in the nation and the African continent: people who "tend to be invisible and inaudible" (Barber 3). This is political too. Political because Nollywood films, as a good example of African popular culture, "characteristically condense experience and are expressive on different levels" (Karin Barber 4). To say that Nollywood is not a serious cinema because it cannot predict national events and global circumstances is, in my opinion, a bias that reflects artistic sentiments, social, and ideological leaning that discounts Nollywood's contributions to the development of African cinema in general. And it reiterates the consistent arms-length relationship between film critics and Nollywood.

While I am aware of the inadequacies in the narratives of most Nollywood films, especially the mainstream ones, I am also mindful of the aesthetic sophistication that is present in some of these films, including the films of Kunle Afolayan. For instance, it is no longer the case that Nollywood films are "something between television and cinema," Nollywood films are increasingly becoming cinematic (Haynes 1). Or how would one describe Afolayan's films (*The Figurine, October 1* and *The CEO)*? Afolayan's films, no doubt, set new standards for Nollywood

production, which is suggestive of the growth mainstream Nollywood desires. In other words, and despite the technical shortcomings of the Nigerian video films, Nollywood films should not be dismissed on the premise that they lack artistic worth because they do not pander to elite political ideologies, or because they are not committed to an overarching theme of postcolonialism or pan-Africanism. In my view, they are to be read as contextually authentic narratives that have the potentials for reshaping African notions of popular culture by focusing on the scattered experiences of the "ordinary people." And it is from this contextual viewpoint that I am proposing that film critics and cultural studies scholars should interpret his filmmaking style as a "reconciliatory" art. That is a production style that combines the artistic traits of classic African cinema with the narrative potentials of Nollywood films.

So, my objective in this chapter is an academic effort to bring to the fore the artistic compositions of the films of Afolayan that are above and beyond Nollywood's conceptual and aesthetics bars. Here, I approach his works as the independent, imaginative creation of an auteur and, as such, I make efforts to interpret the audio-visual images that he employs in his films and the meanings they suggest. In my interpretation, I will briefly discuss all of his films—*Irapada (2006); The Figurine (2009); PhoneSwap (2012)* and *October 1 (2014)* — excluding *The CEO* (2016) which is yet to be released to the Nigerian market. Also, I will comment on the recurring elements in his films as well as his most essential filmmaking techniques. I will later subject *Irapada* to closer theoretical analysis and scrutiny.

"The Muse of Aresejabata": Kunle Afolayan, or, the Rise of a Nollywood Icon.

Afolayan is a renowned Nigerian filmmaker with a global connection: his films are premiered at major International film festivals and himself a constant guest at many American and European academic institutions. He was born on September 13, 1975, in Ebute-Meta, Lagos State, Nigeria. He is the son of a famous Nigerian filmmaker—Adeyemi Afolayan, popularly known as Ade-Love. Ade-Love was an accomplished Nigerian film actor, producer, director and in the golden age of the Nigerian celluloid cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. Before his death in 1996, Ade-Love, Afolayan's father, had acted in and produced films such *as Ajani Ogun* (1976), *Ija Ominira (1978)*, *Kadara* (1980), and *Taxi Driver* (1983). From a tender age, young Afolayan was introduced to the art of filmmaking and the business of promoting films to maximize profits by his father. He may be known as the most exceptional example of a Nollywood filmmaker in modern times, nonetheless, he experienced choppy formative years—to make ends meet, Afolayan, back in his secondary school days, would skip classes to screen his father's films to theater audiences in major Nigerian cities such as Ibadan, Ogbomosho, Osogbo, Ilorin, and Ondo (author interview). These errands, no doubt, negatively affected his school performances to the extent that he almost missed one of his West African Examination Council (WAEC) papers (author interview). Despite all the financial challenges and social odds, Afolayan went on to study Accountancy at the Lagos State Polytechnic and Digital Filmmaking at the prestigious New York Film Academy and subsequently went on to become a well-known and influential Nigerian film actor, producer, and director. In 2006, Afolayan established his production company—Golden Effect Production.

However, before that time, he had starred in Tunde Kelani's *Saworo-ide* (1999) and *Agogo Eewo* (2002). The film, *Saworo-ide,* is a political allegory of the Nigerian state and the ruinous

activities of its political jobbers and corrupt lobbyists, who use their power positions and privileges to loot the state's treasury, thus causing inflation and political instability. In both films, Afolayan acted the naïve prince Adebola, later known as Aresejabata alongside Kabirat Kafidipe, who played the character of Araparegangan. Following his brilliant acting in *Saworo-ide,* Afolayan became a famous actor in the Nigerian film industry, but he could not maximize the gain of the unfurling fame due to his busy banking job. Nonetheless, he appeared in a few films such as *Ti Ala Ba Ku* (2005), *Ejiworo* (2006), *Onitemi* (2007), and *Farayola* (2009). He finally launched into cinematic limelight in 2006 when he produced and co-directed *Irapada*—his first feature-length film.

From 2005 to date, Afolayan has produced and directed five feature-length films: *Irapada* (2006) The *Figurine* (2009) *Phone Swap* (2012), *October 1* (2014), and *The CEO* (2016). His films engage different aspects of the Nigerian social practices, cultures, traditions, and epistemology. For instance, *Irapada,* his first directorial attempt, is a simulacrum of the conflict between African tradition and the twenty-first-century global modernity. It details the herculean tasks Dewunmi, the protagonist of the film, who is caught up in the web of tradition and modernity, goes through to re-establish his cultural identity in the aftermath of his refusal to yield to the traditional atonement ritual the herbalist prescribed. *Irapada*, no doubt, is Afolayan's creative effort to draw the attention of Africans to the existing epistemologies on the African continent, and a clarion call to African elites to cast off their toga of arrogance towards traditional beliefs and cultural practices, while they embrace European values and culture. The film's narrative contextualizes Yoruba culture, philosophy, and spiritual framework that foregrounds the significance of ancestral origin in the overarching discussion of identity and its multiple processes. By going back into the past,

Afolayan, in *Irapada,* extols the cultural and religious values that were current and dear to the Yoruba people before the advent of colonial modernity beginning from the late nineteenth century.

Afolayan's second film, *The Figurine: Araromire,* in my opinion, is the sequel to *Irapada.* The film is an extension of the theme of divine versus the secular that *Irapada* expresses. But more than *Irapada*, *The Figurine* projects mythology, religion, and belief systems as concepts that shape identity and human essences in the universe. Representing this cosmic interaction between gods and human beings, Afolayan, on the one hand, projects that the gods exist and derive their powers from being worshipped by human beings and because people ascribe orchestrated events and strange phenomena to supernatural forces. On the other hand, Afolayan also suggests that the disjuncture and chaos in humans' lives could be the handiwork of the gods, who hide their transcendental manifestations in the "orchestrated" maneuvering of disgruntled neighbors, friends, and lovers (Sola Afolayan 6).

Attempting to underscore both assumptions, Afolayan, in *The Figurine*, figures the deity of Araromire as both a myth and a possible reality, which is made manifest through the phallocentric excesses of Femi and Sola. First, to show that mythical figures such as gods and deities are products of human creativity and imagination, Afolayan presents the appearances and the disappearances of the figurine as the handiwork of Femi and his sister, Lara, who happens to be Sola's paramour. By making the figurine to disappear and reappear each time Mona and Sola throw it away, Afolayan makes a rhetorical move that suggests that the supposed magical power of the deity of Araromire is not real, but that its existence is sustained through events that human beings orchestrate. This demystification process could also be read as a pragmatic way of making Africans question cultural beliefs and assumptions that lack empirical validation. Second, in the process of attempting to demystify the myth of Araromire, Femi ends up validating it when he

clubs Sola, his bosom friend, to death at the abandoned shrine of the goddesses. *The Figurine* is paradoxical: it tests two contesting assumptions without privileging neither of them.

Also, by representing the complexities in religious beliefs, Afolayan seeks to weigh in on the matters of religion in Nigeria and possibly prod the audiences' reaction to such complications, given that "loyalty to religion is often more important than loyalty to the state among Nigerians" (Falola 50). However, he formulates *The Figurine* as a narrative that animates human agency as a shape-shifter, whose actions and desires have consequences that could be interpreted literally, or metaphorically be fitted into the spiritual paradigm of the divine. In other words, whatever happens to human beings in life, Afolayan seems to be saying, are amenable to religious and secular interpretations. More importantly, he also seems to be saying that no matter how modern cultural agents desecrate African religious beliefs and cultural mores, in the end, the beliefs will outlast dissing contemporary ideas that seek to vitiate it.

Phone Swap (2012) is Afolayan's third film. *Phone Swap* may appear like a comedic representation of the Nigerian state and its cosmopolites; it is, in my opinion, an extension of the themes that Afolayan explore in *Irapada* and the *Figurine*—interethnic relationship, ancestral origin, fate, and destiny. To demonstrate how fate, destiny, interethnic involvement, and cultural origin contribute to the process of individual transformation and success, Afolayan, in *Phone Swap*, sends two different individuals from opposite cultural backgrounds and social classes on a life-changing journey. In that regard, Afolayan brings Akin, an educated Yoruba man from a wealthy background, friendless and often regarded as a usurper among his coworkers, and Mary, a beautiful dress-maker of Igbo extract who is struggling to fulfill her life's dream together to embark on a journey that will change their lives forever. They both run into one another at the waiting lounge of the Lagos airport and unknowingly swapped their identical Blackberry phones

in the process. This sudden development leads them to board planes to one another's destinations. Akin travels to Owerri to help Mary arbitrate in the feud between Mary's sister, Cynthia, and her in-laws. At Owerri, Akin is forced to adapt to the marginal and subsistence life Mary's extended family members live. He is not only appalled by the degree of material poverty and the marginal existence of the family; he attempts to show-off his elitism by refusing to eat with his fingers or sleep in a crowded room. However, in the end, he takes part in the intense farm work and eventually adapts to the communal and straightforward existence of marginal people, which is quite the opposite of the affluent but individualistic lifestyle that he lived in Lagos.

For Mary, who ends up in Abuja to run errands for Akin, the city lifestyle is drowning and overwhelming. The city imposes a strange grandeur on her, especially in the way Akin expects her to blend in with the formalities of handling the job of a highflying Personal Assistant. Thus, she finds herself choking in the atmosphere of glamor and glitz that surrounds her. In the end, she becomes acquainted with Akin's mother and her retinue of socialite friends, who offer to patronize her whenever she is ready to fly her dressmaking company, "Maryholds." As Akin discusses his past love encounters with Mary, he relaxes his stiffness, and when they both return to Lagos, they can only smile at each other and hold hands to signal the love budding between them.

Phone Swap is premised on "fate/destiny." it is a projection of how destiny works in a complex society and how interethnic relationship is forged through accident, deliberateness, perseverance, and open-mindedness. It details the second part of the idea that Afolayan has worked into his films, which has it that fate, mythology, and destiny, cannot operate on their own without human agency and that a return to one's cultural origin serves useful purposes.

After *Phone Swap*, Afolayan made *October 1* in 2014. *October 1* is a psychological/political thriller; it is a film that projects the atrocities of the colonial government

and the traumatizing effects of colonialism in Africa. Also, the film exposes the psychological and bodily abuse that Africans endured during the long century of colonialism, and how that abuse predisposed them to violence. *October 1* may be different from *Irapada*, *The Figurine,* and *Phone Swap,* yet, it still about agency—that is the ability of individuals to act and take control of situations that affect their lives and group harmony. *October 1,* as an allegorical representation of the Nigerian state in the wake of her independence from the British government, tells the stories of Prince Ropo and Agbekoya as students under the tutelage of the Reverend Father Dowling, a Missioner who sexually abused school children put under his tutelage. While Agbekoya returned to Akote his hometown, when he fled from the missionary school, to establish himself as a prosperous cocoa farmer who never allowed his children to attend the village schools, Prince Rope endured the sexual abuse and went on to graduate from the University College, Ibadan. Despite his university education, Prince Ropo is a psychopath. He, too, returned to Akote, but with a secret mission to kill ten maidens as a compensation for the ten years of the brutal sexual assault he endured with Reverend Father Dowling. Because of the incessant killing of the village maidens, the British administrator sent Inspector Danladi Waziri to Akote to resolve the murder case. In the end, the bubble burst on Prince Ropo, and he is killed in a gun duel with Inspector Danladi Waziri

October 1 reimagines the history of colonialism in Nigeria, and it humanizes African political and cultural past. The film imagines the multiple ways colonialists assaulted Africans, and it portrays the lasting effects of colonialism in Africa. Himself a postcolonial subject, Afolayan reminds the audiences, through the film, why it is pertinent for Nigerians and African people to come together in unity to form strong multicultural frontiers capable of dismantling the various hegemonies and inequalities that colonialism instituted. More than anything else, the film visually details the unfulfilled dreams of the Nigerian intelligentsia, especially Ropo, Agbekoya, and

Corporal Omolodun, who have their lives planned out but ended tragically. The representation of the unfulfilled lives of the past victims of colonial rules and neocolonial exploitations that Afolayan expressed in gripping audio-visual images, not only serve the purpose of retelling history, it as well serves as a guidepost for contemporary Nigerians to fight against exploitation and oppression of any kind. For according to Paul Riccour (1998), "by awakening and bringing back to life the unkept promises of the past, we strengthen our future with buried future of those who came before us" (27). Meaning that Afolayan is not merely interested in retelling the history of the Nigerian nation, but also that he hopes that the lessons learned from the colonial regime would inspire Nigerians to work together to build functional and economically productive government; a country that celebrates ethnic diversity and despises cultural bigotry and religious parochialisms.

Two years after he released *October 1*, Afolayan, in 2016 made *The CEO*. The film is a "multinational" production that has its settings in two continents—Africa and Europe—and five countries—Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Ivory Coast, and France. For the record, The CEO is the first Nollywood film to be premiered above sea-level. On June 1, 2016, it was shown to selected audience onboard Air-France flight AF149 from Lagos to Paris[22]. The CEO, with its two million dollars' budget, appears in recent times as the most expensive Nollywood film ever made by an indigenous filmmaker. While the film has been shown to audiences around the world and selected national cinema houses, it is yet to be released to the general audience via DVD and online streaming platforms.

[22] http://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2016/06/11/nigerian-film-the-*CEO*-premieres-onboard-air-france/

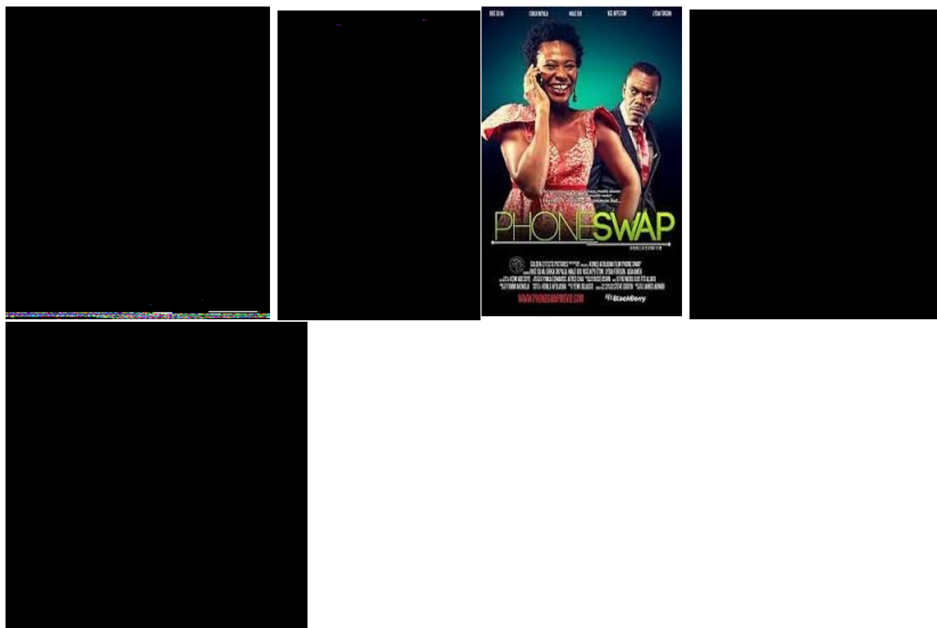

Figure 2. DVD Jackets of the Films of Afolayan. Photo courtesy The Golden Effect Gallery

Afolayan and the "New Nollywood"

It is no longer news that Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, emerged from a rustic video-film experiment to become the second largest film industry in the world (see Jonathan Haynes, 2010; Manthias Diawara, 2009; and Kenneth Harrow, 2016). The early films were met with huge criticisms especially in the areas of thematic preoccupations and technicalities: flickering visuals and garbled audio outputs. Recent Nollywood releases, however, bear marks of improvement, both regarding narrative and technicality. These technical improvements are not by accident; they are made possible by the foresightedness of a few professional filmmakers who strive to distinguish their arts from the sloppy narratives that have become the hallmark of Nollywood industry. As a dialectical opposition to the mainstream Nollywood filmmakers, who

privilege economic gains over artistic excellence, a new movement was born and christened "New Nollywood." The New Nollywood is "premised on a new economic buoyancy" of the Nigerian nation, and it responds to "deep, unsettling shifts in the audiovisual environment provoked by technological and other forces" (Kenneth Harrow 289).

Thematically, the New Nollywood films are mostly concerned with contemporary issues such as globalization, neoliberal capitalism, transnational migration, and political instabilities in different African States and the global world. As with any growing tradition, and much like the differences in the ideologies of Pan-Africanism[23] and Afropolitanism[24]—two concepts that describe African experiences—the trending issues in the Nollywood films of the 1990s are not the same as those of the new Millennium. Just as Pan-Africanism, which was conceived as unifying

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[23] Pan-Africanism as a movement was first conceived in 1900 by a West Indian lawyer named H. Sylvester Williams, but became popularized by WEB Dubois. "Pan-Africanism actually reflects a range of political views. At a basic level, it is a belief that African peoples, both on the African continent and in the Diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny. This sense of interconnected pasts and futures has taken many forms, especially in the creation of political institutions"

[24] The Nigerian/Ghanaian writer, Taye Selasi, coined the term in 2005 when he describes a new breed of Africans with multiple local and global identities. It is a term that has generated controversy in the academic circle, especially with the notion that it is a flamboyant term that is elitist in perspective (see Amatoritsero Ede (2016), *The politics of Afropolitanism*).

term for all black people globally, and Afropolitanism, a new buzzword and a blanket term for categorizing multiple black diasporic identities, are concepts that describe and situate issues of African identities in different contexts, the ideological orientations of the new Nollywood filmmakers have shifted considerably from that of their predecessors.[25] Even though the New Nollywood films appears to be different from the general stock of Nollywood production, they are not far removed from the objectives of African cinema regarding content and style.

The New Nollywood films, "because of their international dimensions… tend to be aware of representing Nigeria to the world and may be actively trying to market some notion of African culture as part of their appeal to both foreigners and diasporic Nigerians" (Haynes 290). While crass commercial gains motivate some mainstream Nollywood filmmakers, winning international awards at film festivals is the major motivation for the New Nollywood filmmakers, including Afolayan. In other words, the New Nollywood filmmakers make films that target international audiences (which in some ways alienates the local audiences who do not have the training to engage films that have critical orientations). As a result, the "New Nollywood audience is precariously narrow" (291). And, to maximize profit without compromising artistic quality, the New Nollywood films must and should appeal to "the people who can afford the luxury of a ten-dollar ticket in a country where 70 percent of the population lives on less than two dollars a day"

[25] The old African filmmakers were part of a movement that produced FEPACI—Federation Panafricaine des Cineastes—in 1970, and the organization's 1975 charter, popularly known as the "Algier's Charter of African Films," stipulates that "African film should be a vehicle for education, information, and consciousness-raising, and not strictly a vehicle for entertainment" (Fofana 4).

(289). It, therefore, means that both the Nigerian upper class and the diasporic audience are essential to the New Nollywood production in other for it to survive.

The idea that the New Nollywood is not a new phenomenon is rampant among academic scholars and film critics, who often claim that Kelani provides the model for it, and that "he has been achieving their [New Nollywood filmmakers'] objectives all along, using different means" (Haynes 288). Yes, it is obvious to anyone who is conversant with the history of Nollywood that Kelani mixes the tactics of celluloid filmmaking with the conventions of digital video filmmaking in his works. That, notwithstanding, Afolayan is still very pivotal to the success of the New Nollywood movement. Especially because he focuses his filmmaking efforts on the production of festival films, and also because he partners with business corporations to secure large financial support that allows him to afford expensive equipment and professional casts needed for making cinema-like video films. Although Haynes (2016) had posited that it was the economic conditions of the Nigerian film industry that birthed the New Nollywood movement, I am of the opinion that the New Nollywood became an established movement because of the desires of young filmmakers like Afolayan to make quality films. It is true that "the New Nollywood was launched on a precarious basis" especially with the clandestine activities of film pirates, which often is a menace that any serious-minded Nollywood filmmaker must consider before venturing into production. It is still unlikely that Afolayan started film production because he wanted to make huge profits (287).

Perhaps, because of his training and exposure to the Nigerian celluloid cinema and the American filmmaking practices, Afolayan approached the New Nollywood as an alternative platform that resembles the defunct Nigerian celluloid film production and which shares the glitz and glamour of Hollywood and Bollywood films, "since Nollywood sought glamour, and there

have been concerted efforts to appeal to an elite audience since *Violated* in 1996" (290). It is not surprising, then, that he emerges as the first Nollywood filmmaker, in recent years, to have a complete edited book dedicated to one of his films (*The Figurine)*—an unprecedented feat in the history of the Nigerian film industry. Through the vibrant audio-visual images that he projects in his films and the big ideas he represents in his works, Afolayan continues to dominate the center of film discussion in Nigeria and the diaspora.

Afolayan's Artistic Style and filmmaking Techniques.

In Nollywood, and even beyond it, audiences admire Afolayan; that, I know, and it is beautiful. But the admiration did not come as a result of his acting skill but through qualitative filmmaking practice. What then is this 'qualitative film practice,' if one may ask? Afolayan's storytelling styles and filmmaking practices resolve around his prodigious use of three cinematic elements: camera/shooting angle, lighting, and soundtrack.

Camera/Shooting Technique

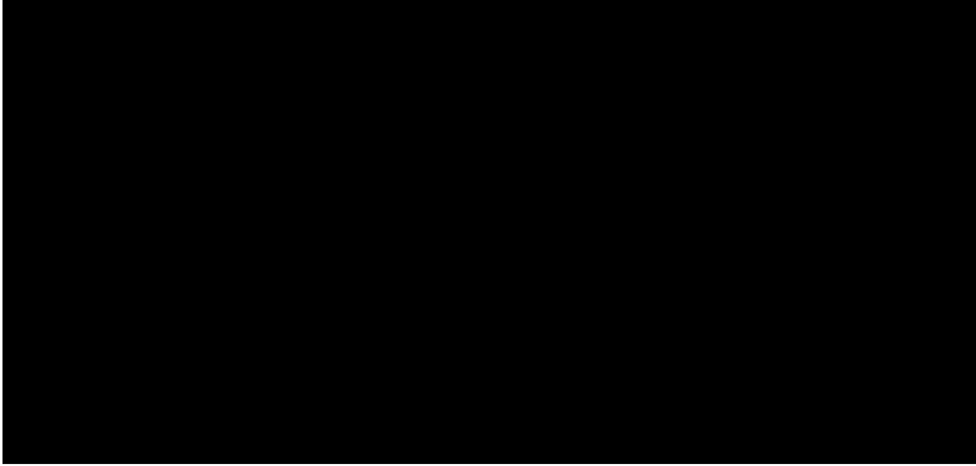
The camera is critical in any filmmaking culture; it has its languages, and its deployment distinguishes film directors across levels and traditions. This vital knowledge about the camera is not lost to Afolayan who always take advantage of the equipment to make artistically appealing films. Importantly, Afolayan is different from other Nollywood filmmakers in the way he frames his scenes and directs his shots. Framing film scenes and taking shots of actions is technically

referred to as cinematography in film studies. Cinematography has many purposes, "some of them far beyond the simple act of photographing the action" in a film (Blain Brown, 14). Cinematography helps great directors to tell excellent stories in their works: it helps them to add "visual subtexts" and "visual metaphor" to films (ibid). The visual subtext is the nucleus of a film plot—it is like the yoke of an egg that hides inside the shell. While most critics and audiences of Nollywood films can synopsize the plots of the films, only a few attempts to extrapolate the more profound meanings the films carry. Visual metaphor means the presence of images in a film to make a comparison through images. It provides the audience with more information beyond the spoken words of actors and actresses through juxtapositions of images, characters, or landmarks.

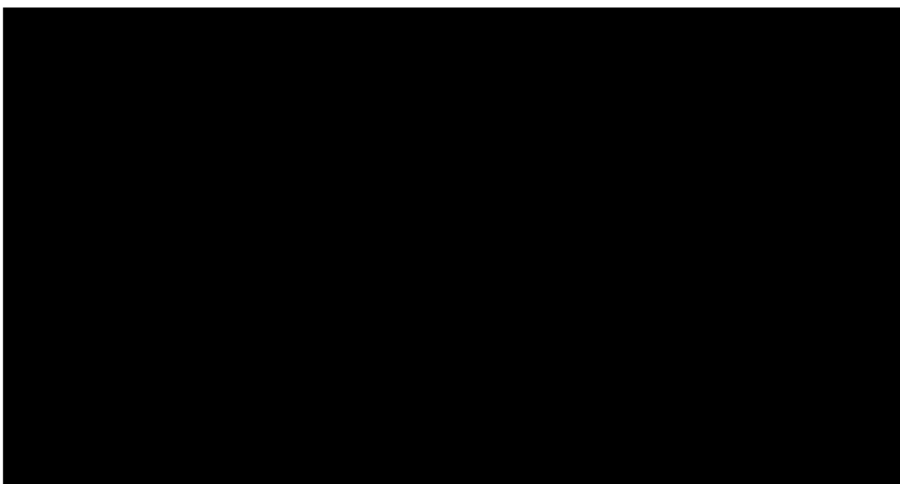
Technically speaking, Afolayan's films are rendered using excellent cinematography. Unlike the mainstream filmmakers, he plans his scenes and frames his shots in respect to the position of the camera, props, and light. Framing, which is the choice of where to place the camera, helps Afolayan to include many cultural information and images in his films, which the audiences can interpret together with the dialogs of the characters as they form multiple opinions similar or different from that of the film director. For instance, in *Irapda* (2006), Afolayan's choice of camera position and shooting angle helped him to create an arresting opening scene that is so cinematic. First, he positioned the camera facing Dewunmi and his mother, as they come into the frame, and he opened up the aperture to capture the action at a wide angle. The choice to place the came directly in front of both Dewunmi and his mother is deliberate: It allows Afolayan to take static shots of the characters as they enter and exit the frame. Instead of panning the camera or zooming in and out on the characters, Afolayan allows each of the two characters to walk into the frame and exist it. While Dewunmi walks in into the frame to board the waiting canoe, his mother is seeing running after him. In one long shot, Afolayan captures both Dewunmi and his panting mother.

Then, he quickly cuts away from Dewunmi's mother, who is almost at the center of the frame, to capture Dewunmi as he walks towards the waiting ferryman. Dewunmi boards the canoe, and the camera cuts away, again, to record his mother who, this time, is almost existing the static frame as she dashes after the ferryman and her son.

Apart from the crispness of the opening scene of *Irapada*, cross-stitching of shots is also profoundly employed, and it foregrounds both the visual subtext and the visual metaphor of the scene. On the surface, the opening scene could be interpreted to mean a son who is running away from his mother. Or a caring mother who is devastated that her son is leaving her. The plot resembles a common military motif where war-bound soldiers are driving off to battle while their mothers and wives and children wail. But, it is more than that. If one considers the visual subtext of the opening scene and the different visual metaphors, then one would read the whole scene differently at a deeper level. First, Afolayan's choice to make the camera static without panning or zooming could be construed as a storytelling technique that mirrors Yoruba philosophy about life and death. It is possible to interpret the static camera as the mundane world; our universe that has been in existence for million years and which will continue to exist for many more years. Dewunmi coming in from a distance and exiting the open aperture of the camera could also mean that Afolayan is saying that human beings come into the world and leave it at different times.



The pier, the river, the canoe and the ghostly ferryman are visual images that carry metaphorical interpretations. Does the dock represent the very end of human lives? Does the river suggest the afterlife or the passage to the underworld? What does the ghostly ferryman represent? And what is the relationship between the storm and the vanishing point that paints a picture of infinite space? These are likely questions one could ask, and it is by engaging the questions that one can judiciously make sense of the images Afolayan deliberately inserts in the films. The scene achieves its sophistication because Afolayan combines his knowledge of camera angle with the professional utilization of cinematic effects and superlative lighting technique, thus locating the scene in the realm of the spirits—an ominous dream.

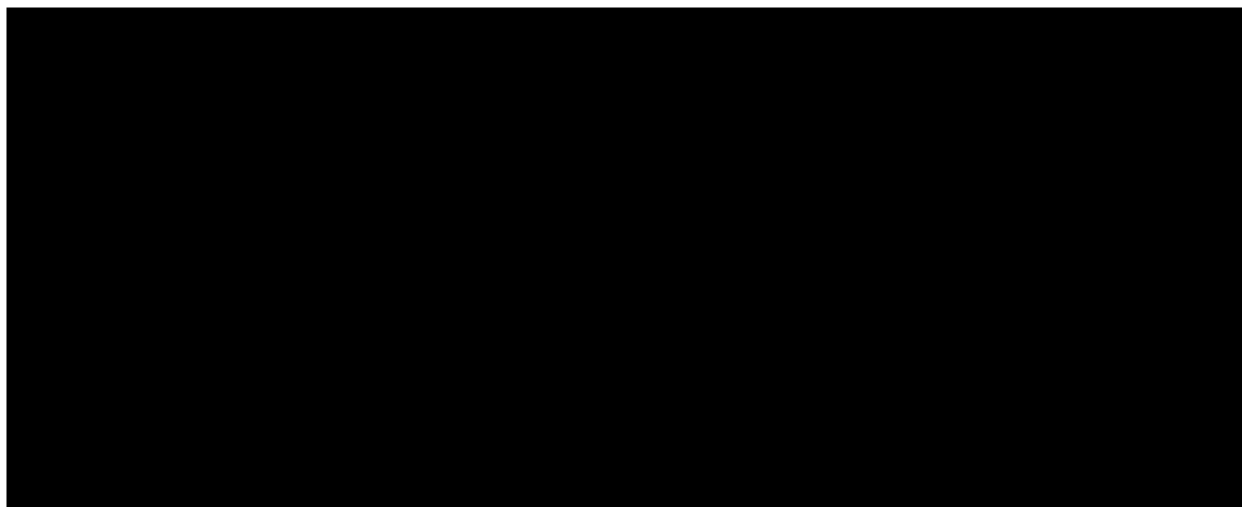


Lighting and Soundtrack

In filmmaking, there is no one particular way to light scenes. This is because "lighting has nearly infinite permutations and variations" (Brown, 104). Different filmmakers determine how they want to make use of lighting in their production. Depending on what a filmmaker purposes lighting to do for him/her in his/her production, which includes creating images that have "full range of tones and gradations of tone," lighting can significantly enhance the quality of any film if adequately utilized (Brown, 105). From *Irapada* to The CEO, Afolayan creatively employs lighting techniques to improve the qualities of his films. Also, apart from incorporating different types of light in his works, Afolayan use music to add layers of emotion and mood in his films. For example, in *The Figurine* (2009), Afolayan creates dense cinematic aesthetics through the combination of the soundscape, special effects, and lighting. Begining with the opening scene, Afolayan treats the audiences to a Hollywood standard of cinematic technicality, especially with the appearance of the drifting bloated body of the priest of Araromire on the river. Here, in the film, more than ever before, Nollywood witnessed a profound use of special effect and excellent camera work that brings the point of views of the characters into focus. The *Figurine* creatively combines non-diegetic/diegetic (diegetic music meaning songs that are composed of the thematic ideas expressed in the film) music to complement images and actions of the characters. It blends the tenor of the diegetic music with the lustrousness of the different shades of light and ambiance to create feelings of anxiety and panic in the audience. The song, chanted rather than merely sung, underscores the notion of injustices and cruelty that he attempts to foreground in the film.

The fact that the song combines modern percussion with an ensemble of traditional drums, especially the bata drum, the rapid rolls of which stands out in the background, suggests that Afolayan is deliberately contrasting or seeking to bring both traditional values and modernity into

a dialog. The soundscape in *The Figurine* functions more than just a soundtrack, it blends with the camera movements, especially with the panoramic shot of Femi and Sola on their way to return the haunting figurine of the goddess, which is captured using a circular track and grip, to provide a cinematic feeling. Afolayan's other films are replete with sophisticated artistic images regarding lighting and special effects.



Mona and her Professor discuss the figurine of Araromire (The Figurine, 2009)

Similarly, in *October 1,* Afolayan shows his exceptional understanding of lighting as a critical filmmaking tool. More than any of his films, he uses light to strongly compliment the scenes of violence that dot the plotline as well as enhance the feelings of empathy, disgust, and familial attachments. His lighting technique in the opening scene makes the raping and eventual murder of the unknown victim more surreal (figure 2.7). Also, Afolayan projects the tragic death of Corporal Omolodun in gripping emotional images by framing both Prince Ropo and the Corporal in a two-person dialog position using a backcross keys lighting technique, thus creating a fiendish look of the psychopath Prince (figure 2.8).

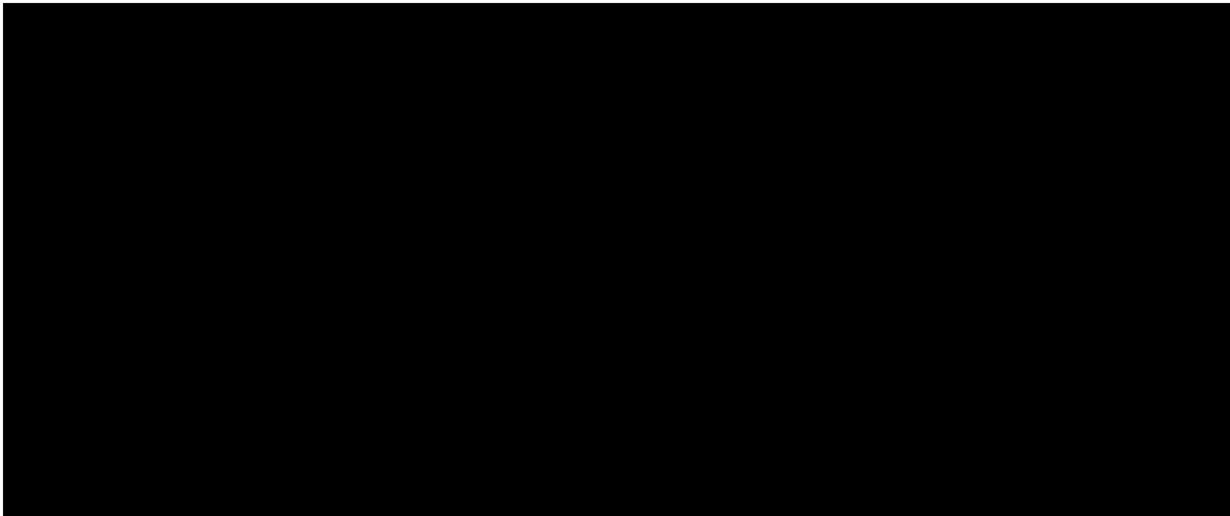


Figure 2.7. Prince Ropo chokes his first rape victim to death (*October 1*).

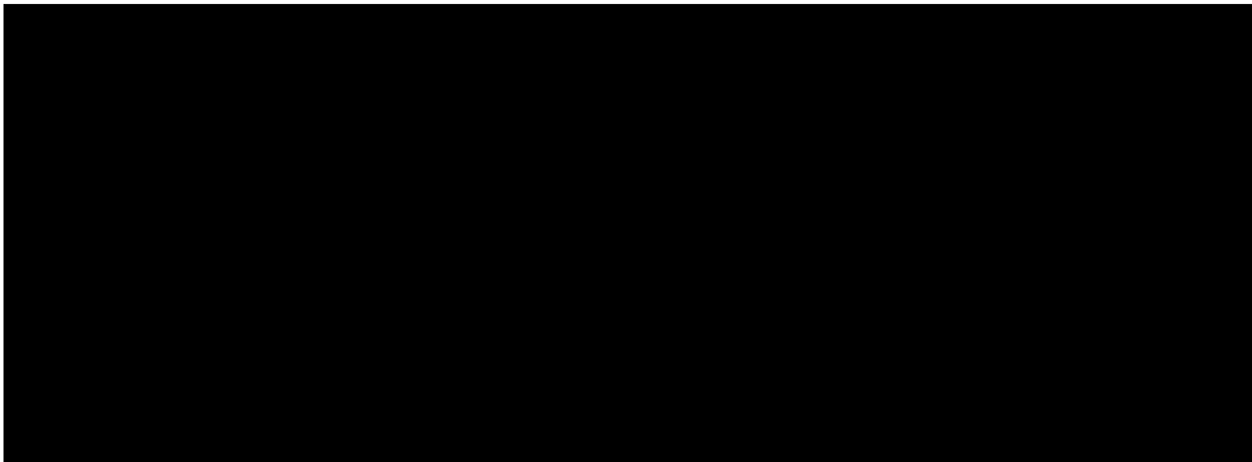


Figure 2.8. Prince Ropo kills Corporal Omolodun with a jackknife (A scene from *October 1)*

Afolayan, through his films, continues to push for cinematic innovation and filmmaking techniques that will further endear Nollywood films to not just the African audience, but the global audiences. And through his exceptional use of camera, lighting, and soundtrack, he presses on in his quest to make Nollywood a global product for many decades to come.

Recurring Elements/Themes in the Films of Afolayan.

One common issue with the mainstream Nollywood films is that of organization and harmonized discourse. Because most mainstream film directors work on multiple film projects funded by diverse producers with different artistic perspectives and cinematic views, there is often a lack of coherence in the thematic preoccupations of a particular mainstream filmmaker. However, in the case of Afolayan, there exists a profound difference in his art and that of the mainstream filmmakers described above: Afolayan's films have recurring themes/elements that have come to be distinguished as his trademark and artistic signature in the jaded Nollywood industry. From *Irapada* to *October 1,* there are projections of the past and the present and coexistence of traditional and modern conventions that are delivered through evocative acting.

This symbolic representation of tradition and modernity seldom happen in the mainstream films. Many Nollywood filmmakers view and represent modernity and tradition in an antithetical relationship. To the extent that Nollywood has designated a sub-production culture "village films" as a category for representing all films that include indigenous tradition, culture, and ancient praxis. When a Nollywood filmmaker combines traditional ideas and ideas from the current neo-liberal modernity in his/her work, such work is often labeled as "elitist" art; whereas, both traditional values and modernity are not organically stable to the point that they cannot borrow from one another. So, in that regard, Afolayan's films boldly reconcile the past, the present, the various traditional values, and modernity to re-contextualize Yoruba culture and practices. Through this contextualization, Afolayan expresses his thoughts concerning the postcolonial existences of Africans in our expanding global world, where matters of identity have become circumscribed by or intertwined with political economy and cosmopolitan alignments. Although Afolayan is yet to establish a long list of recurring elements in his films and have a long list of

actors that frequently feature in his films, like as Kelani does, nonetheless, he has engaged recurring themes in his films—matters of ethnic diversity and nationhood, cultural origin, fate, and identity.

Ethnic Diversity/Nationhood

Afolayan continually projects an ethnically and culturally diverse Nigeria in his works. It seems to me that he subscribes to Anne Mcclintock's (1997) idea of what nationism means.[26] To Mcclintock, nationalism is embodied in the aggregate of individual objects that are organized to form regular images of the nation and through the collective actions of citizens that become displayed as a national spectacle on behalf of the country and for the country. Similarly, Afolayan approaches the Nigerian nation through the efforts of individual members of the society and the aggregate of the collective orientations of the masses. To Afolayan, Nigeria is, first, conceived at the micro level that is made up of scattered individuals whose activities and perspectives significantly affect the collective outlook of the nation. Furthermore, he opines that the nation is a pyramid with a broad interconnected base and a loose narrow apex. The base is interconnected

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[26] Anne Mclintock posits that submission that "more often than not, nationalism takes shape through the visible, ritual organization of fetish objects: flags, uniforms, airplane logos, maps, anthems, national flowers, national cuisines and architectures, as well as through the organization of collective fetish spectacle - in team sports, military displays, mass rallies, the myriad forms of popular culture, and so on" (102).

because individuals relate with one another in different contexts, share similar delussionment, hopes, and aspirations, and can be identified. To Afolayan, the apex is loose because only a few privileged individuals form the mechanism for running the state and that their identities are blurred by the vastness of the Nigerian state that they represent.

When Benedict Anderson (1991) writes that the nation "is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship," he is, no doubt, referring to a seemingly fraternal yoke that binds scattered individuals together to the extent that they form alliances, despite not sharing the same ethnic or language affinity, but by the sheer fact of belonging to the same geographical space and through the news they read or the popular cultures that serve their societies (7). Similarly, to Afolayan, the Nigerian nation did not arrive at its current dismal state because of its ethnic diversity and the inability of different language groups to coexist and function as a nation, but due to inimical actions of an individual that are antithetical to national progression. To foreground the benefits of ethnic diversity on the one hand, and to illustrate how individual actions inform the larger national outlooks, on the other hand, Afolayan repeatedly mixes actors and actress from the three major ethnic languages in Nigeria: Hausa, Igbo, and, Yoruba. Through his casting choice, Afolayan can reflect how individual parochialism or open-mindedness contribute to the image of the Nigerian nation or otherwise. Through the pictures that he feeds his audiences, he deconstructs the negativity trailing ethnocentrism in Nigeria: that the Hausas are uneducated and violent; that the Igbos are aggressive and material conscious; and that the Yorubas are arrogant and vain. His films, while occasionally leaning towards the Yoruba culture and custom, are mostly national in outlook and orientation. And it is this widespread outlook that often informs his casting, locations, and language choice.

Afolayan's artful casting of actors and actresses across many Nigerian languages reflects his cinematic ambition and motive in the Nigerian film industry; that is, the exploration of how the past and the present interact to shape, not only, cultural identities in the twenty-first century Nigeria, but also national identity formation. In *Irapada*, he casts Jotham Ayuba (Sheu), a Hausa actor alongside Igbo and Yoruba actress: Angela Phillips (Amaka) and Deola Oloyede (Moji). While I am not saying this is the first time that any established Nollywood filmmaker would be casting actors and actresses from the major ethnic and language groups in Nigeria, at least, Kelani, in *Thunderbolt* casts Ngozi Nwosu and Uche Obi-Osotule, two Igbo actresses, alongside other famous Yoruba thespians, including Akinwunmi Isola and the late Bukola Ajayi. What I am pointing attention to, here, is that this type of casting is recurrent in the films of Afolayan more than in any other Nollywood films. Only in *Thunderbolt* do we see Kelani cast prominent Igbo and Yoruba actors and actresses as characters representing their cultures, in most of his films the casts are Yoruba actors and actresses.

However, in the case of Afolayan, mixed casting has been his iconic trait from the moment he made *Irapada*. Even, his latest film, The CEO*,* has actors drawn from Nigeria and other African countries. In *The Figurine*, Ramsey Nouah, (who was born in Edo to a Yoruba mother and an Israeli father) plays the role of Femi, the villain of the film, while Omoni Oboli, an Igbo actress plays Mona, Sola's wife, whom Femi covets so much. Also, in *Phone Swap*, Afolayan casts an Igbo actor—Chika Okpala—and an Akwa Ibom born actress—Nse Ikpe-Etim —as well as a Benue born actress—Ada Ameh—alongside actors and actresses of Yoruba extraction—Wale Ojo, Hafiz Oyetoro, and Joke Silva. In *October 1,* Afolayan parades actors and actresses from the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, and for a brief moment, he highlights the effects of individual actions on the collective outlook of the nation when Okafor (Kanayo O Kanayo) lays siege at the Akote police

station and kills the Hausa suspect whom he believes to have raped and murdered his daughter, on the pretext that Inspector Danladi Waziri (Sadiq Daba), a Hausa man, will side with his kinsman and exonerate him of the crime. Also, there is a bit of cultural tension in the film when Inspector Waziri commands Sergeant Sunday Afonja (Kayode Olaiya) to arrest Baba –Ifa (Ifayemi Elebuibon), and the latter's refusal to carry out the order because of the cultural implication of locking up an Ifa priest.

In most of his works, he is not just bringing actors and actresses from various cultural backgrounds together; he focuses on their immediate interaction with one another to express his views about the Nigerian nation and to make positive comments on linguistic and cultural diversity. For example, in *Irapada,* Afolayan presents to the audience a close-knit friendship between Dewunmi and Sheu. In the film, he projects, Sheu, a Muslim and a Northerner as the best friend of Dewunmi, who is a Yoruba man. Usually, the ethnocentric argument has always been that both ethnic groups—Hausa and Yoruba—are sworn enemies and that the Hausas are religious bigots who cannot tolerate any religion that is not Islam. Incidentally, Nigerian literary scholars have also represented this culture of stereotyping the "other" in their writings with the aim of discouraging it. (Examples include Labo Yari's Climate *of Corruption* (1978)).

While we do not know what religion Dewunmi practices in *Irapada*, one can glimpse Sheu's tolerance for other religions from the romance between him and Amaka, a Christian Igbo woman. Through these powerful images of interethnic relationship, Afolayan condemns ethnocentrism as a social construct that is mostly circulated to feed certain political and power imaginations and political agents who benefit from ethnic chaos in Nigeria. Here, instead, Afolayan uses the images of Dewunmi, Sheu, Moji, and Amaka to underscore the idea that a "nation" is an aggregate of individuals and their actions, which later coalesces into a pattern of

association that describes the overall outlook of that state. The striking image of the trio of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba characters in harmonious coexistence is pleasurable and significant: it points to the foundational ideology of the nationalists that fought for Nigeria's independence from the British Empire. As noted by Haynes, "*Irapada* has an Awolowist, Wazobian politics that is integral to its structure rather than something preached or joked about" (293).

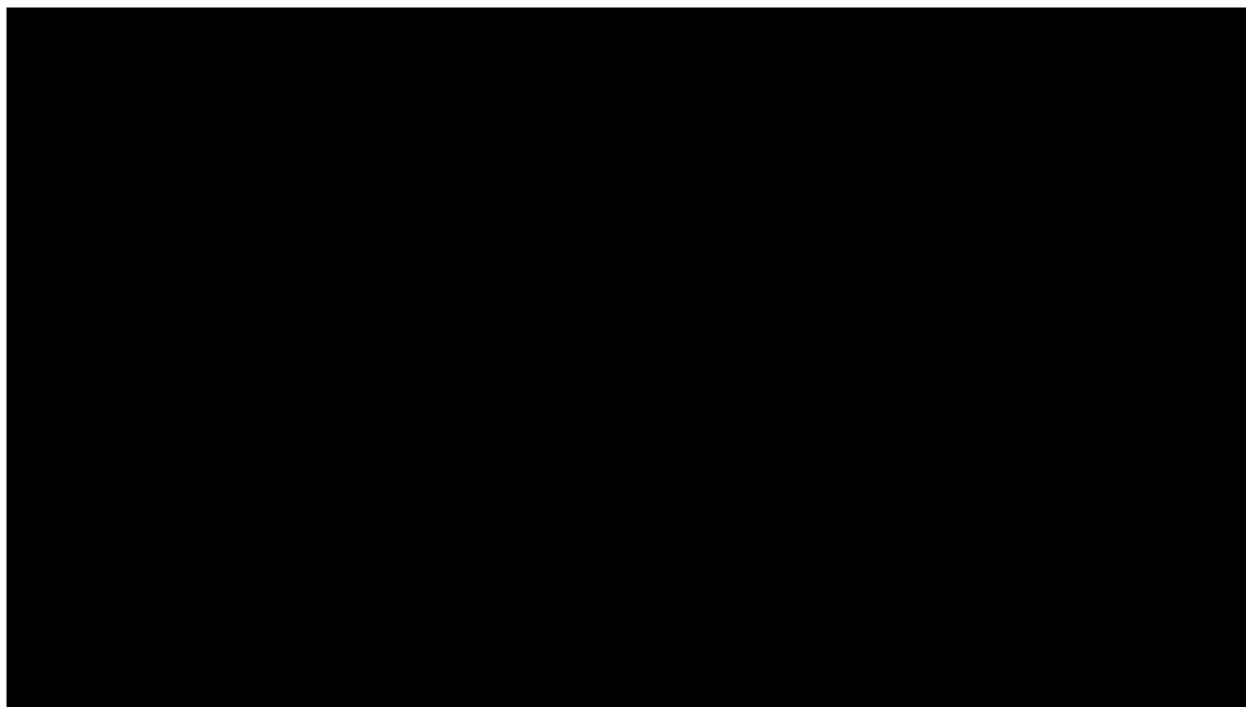
In his portrayal of friendship along ethnic lines, Afolayan presents the relationship among the friends, especially that which exists between Dewunmi and Sheu, as a bond between two comrades and which blurs ethnic borders. The move to remove ethnic borderlines is, no doubt, a nationalistic perspective of Nigeria as a sovereign state with diverse tongues, culture, and customs. This nationalistic view orientates towards a just an egalitarian society that is founded on equity and the rule of law, one that imagines that citizens are treated equally at all levels, irrespective of their ethnicity as human beings with rights and in opposition to the contrived political arrangements in the nation, which is etched on ethnic-sectionalism and haphazardly glued together by political parties. Therefore, it is no surprise that Sheu vigorously defends Dewunmi from the abysmal terror of the northern super-powers. Again, when Moji is in labor at the hospital, not only does Sheu prayed for her safe delivery, his fiancée, Amaka, also brings in her pastor to pray for Moji. It is in this beautiful canvass of artful representation where people, who ordinarily would have been separated by religion and ethnicity, come together in love and empathy to aid one another's course that Afolayan foregrounds the type of Nigerian nation that he imagines.

Perhaps, his representation of the Nigerian nation as one harmonious space for all citizens, regardless of color, language, ethnicity, and economic status, aims to "distinguish the [nation], not by its falsity/genuineness, but by the way in which it is imagined" *(Imagined Community* 6). Why do I make this assumption about Afolayan and his project of nationalism? Of course, the visual

images he presents to his audiences in his films carry enough information and meanings that attest to my opinion. If one invests a good amount of time on his films and distills the essential meanings from them, it is obvious that one can make a storyboard that illustrates this be-your-brother's-keeper idea. While we have seen how Sheu defends Dewunmi in *Irapada*, *Phone Swap* has scenes with a similar idea. The telling scenes in *Phone Swap* are where Akin fights with Tony, Mary's philandering boyfriend, to warn him never to think of dating Mary since he is married with kids. What is particularly interesting to me here, is how Akin (with his claim to elitism and sophistication) descends so low to engage Tony in a physical brawl. Even though the scene is comedic, it certainly touches on this theme of "defending the Other" that is intricately weaved into Afolayan's films.

In another instance, Akin, who is a Yoruba man, succeeds in convincing Cynthia, Mary's termagant police sister to apologize to her in-laws for the sake of peace. Before his arrival, Cynthia is unyielding and challenging to talk to; even her father has lost all hope of making her apologize to her in-laws for the abominable offense she committed against her husband. But thanks to Akin, Cynthia finally apologize to her in-laws and thus saved her marriage. Similarly, Mary, who is often maltreated by her boss, despite her excellent dressmaking skill, finally fulfills her dream when Akin's mother and her socialite friends agree to patronize her whenever she opens her dressmaking shop. These three scenes are filled with empathy and passion as different individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds rescue one another from danger and give hopes for better futures. Albeit subtle, Afolayan replays the same message of intercultural tolerance in *October 1*. Not minding that his superior is a Hausa man, Sergeant Afonja and his wife attends to the health need of Inspector Waziri when he is clubbed by Prince Ropo and left to die.

In all of these scenes, what is overwhelmingly represented are communities of people who, despite belonging to different ethnicities, education, and economic status, come together as one diverse happy nation.



Sergeant Afonja and his wife care for Inspector Waziri in *October 1*.

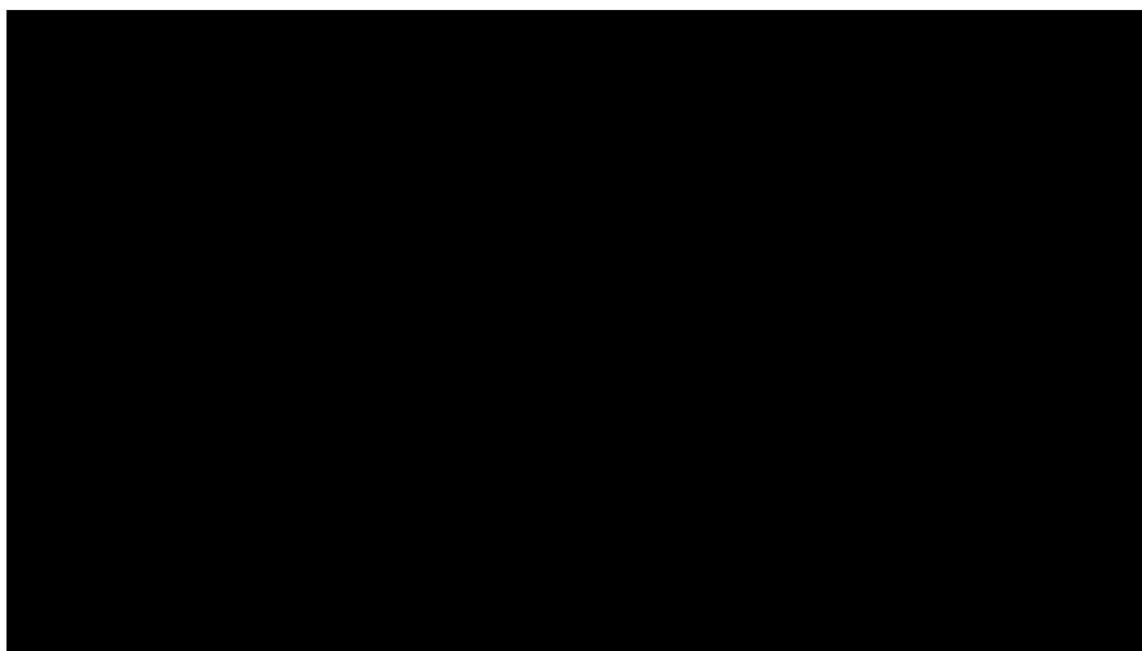


Figure 5. Akin and Tony fight over Mary in *Phone Swap*

Origin, Fate, Destiny, and Identity.

The other recurrent themes in the films of Afolayan are identity, origin, fate, and destiny. However, he constructs his notion of identity formation around the subject of migration. He does that by sending his protagonists on long-distance journeys of enlightenment, at the end of which their identities and personhood become revealed through a multi-layered transformative process. This storytelling technique follows the archetypal transformational patterns that structure African oral traditions. In many African oral stories, prominent characters usually embark on long journey voluntarily or mandatorily to fetch disease-curing elixir or to acquire immense knowledge. Daniel Fagunwa, a renowned Yoruba novelist, is known for sending his characters on long journeys, after which they return as celebrated heroes and heroines. In his hugely influential book the *Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1956), Joseph Campbell terms the transformative journey of the protagonist as a monomyth. The monomyth theory divides the passage of the protagonist into twelve stages, which could be summarized into three significant order: Separation →→Adventure→→ Return. Even though Afolayan's stories share similar traits of the monomyth, there are slight differences in their compositions. In most of the hero's tale, the hero/heroine leaves home when there is a crisis, and through the help of nature, he/she can overcome series of temptations and pass numerous logic-defying tests before he/she is granted victory. But in the films of Afolayan, the protagonists embark on their journeys to find solutions to problems of family members, return haunting effigies, or to heal themselves of induced afflictions and trauma. Therefore, Afolayan creates the home/abroad dichotomy as the repeated pattern of migration which his protagonist go through so that he [Afolayan] can foreground the implications of origin, fate, and ancestors for identification. I will discuss this at length in the next section.

“Origin” and “Identity” in the Films of Afolayan: A Study *of Irapada* and *The Figurine*.

From the time of early religious scholars and philosophers, the suppositions have been that “religion lies in, or at least depends on certain metaphysical beliefs.” Not just that the metaphysical underlies the heart of religions, the philosophers further argued that “God is conceived as the ultimate cause and sustainer of the order of the universe of which we and our doings are a part” (Burtt, 1939:240). The world, therefore, is complexly connected, where human-beings and God play different roles according to the order of establishment and hierarchy. In that order of establishment, that is, the primordial arrangement that figures out the earth as the domain of human existence and the heaven as the abode of God, there exists a middle level, a space that is occupied by deities and the ancestors, who guide and protect the earth. It is this postulation that informs Afolayan’s musing about the tangibility of deities and ancestors in the affairs of human beings. Unlike many of the mainstream Nollywood filmmakers, who have taken for granted that misfortunes and success are granted by God, especially the concept of destiny and fate, Afolayan, instead, interrogates the multiple realities that surround the relationship between human life forms and other transcendental beings in his films. He establishes the connection between individuals and their origins as markers of identification. Therefore, a study of the films of Afolayan is incomplete without a scrutiny of the relationship he establishes between “origin” and “identity.”

The question of belief that ends The *Figurine* (2009) is not to amuse the audience and neither it is for artistic stylization. Instead, it represents the overarching message that cuts across all the films of Afolayan. The question is a direct engagement with the audience to reflect on their belief systems. To summarize Afolayan’s film agenda in Nollywood, I would say it is about origin and identity. Unlike Kelani, whose cinematic efforts focus on language, culture, and politics, Afolayan is more interested in phenomena that shape our identity and bring culture into the

modernity of the postcolonial, especially how one's origin signifies his/her identity in the presence of multiple localities. The marked difference between Afolayan and any other Nollywood filmmaker, including Kelani, is his interrogation of culture and the roles he assigns to origin and locality in the complex discussion of identity. Differently, from Kelani, who defines culture as collective and sacrosanct, Afolayan tests the validity of Yoruba culture, especially traditional rites and religious beliefs, in multiple contexts. In such interrogations, instead of bifurcating the essences of origin, ancestors, and customary beliefs into tradition versus modernity, he painstakingly walks his audience through the nuanced ways cultural origin influences identity formation in Africa, especially in the elite circles, who aggressively make efforts to deny its existence.

This mode of representing postcolonial existences in Africa is different from the usual method in Nollywood, where there is a strong contention between the dialogism of tradition and the linearity of modernism. No wonder Chuma Okoye (2009) submits that "while it is obvious that Afolayan prefers the dialogism of the animist system over the linearity of modern worldview, he nonetheless demonstrates the relationality as well as the plurality of modes of understanding, explaining and experiencing phenomena (132). Afolayan's preference for the animist system over the linearity of modernity is a conscious move to either prove that modernism, with its high-end technology and sophisticated lifestyle, is inadequate to define postcolonial existences on the African continent or to reflect on the traditional concepts that define beingness beyond the materialist economy that characterizes the twenty-first century global world. But instead of the normative approach, where modernity is read as the opposite of animist perception and traditional values, Afolayan retraces African identity to the origin of individuals and their multiple localities. In other words, Afolayan's films mainly underscore the interaction between locality and origin

and their implication for identity formation. To begin with, I need to state what "origin" and "identity" mean and how I use both concepts here. As my theoretical tool for analyzing the films of Afolayan, I borrow the terms"origin" and "identity" from Patrick Chabal's *Africa: the Politics of Suffering and Smiling* (2009). To Chabal, to have a full grasp of African politics, individuals and the role they play must be studied. To study the individuals, Chabal postulates that his/her being ought to be examined in the contexts of origin, identity, and locality (24-25). While he warns that the three particular aspects of individual may appear to be self-evident as the founding blocks of any individual, he submits that they mean different things in separate settings and that "they carry different political meanings" (25).

As Chabal speculates, "the point of looking at these three dimensions of the individual is not so much to provide a single definition of what they might mean but to discuss the relevance that they have both to the understanding of politics [and culture in Africa]" (26). Therefore, I am not also interested in the meanings that the two terms—origin and identity—possess etymologically but to discuss their importance in the films of Afolayan. Etymologically, "origin" connotes a source of action/activities, or where something begins. Culturally, it is connected to "location" and the importance of the "geographical site." In the words of Chabal, origin comes in two distinct but interrelated dimensions— "as a place of birth and as a link to the actual geographical site" (27). This clarification of what origin connotes is beneficial in the analysis of the films of Afolayan since it helps one to understand his appropriation of the term, especially the term's relationship with the land, ancestor, and belief systems, which he amply represents in his works. What makes the concept of origin fascinating in the study of the films of Afolayan is that he assumes an elitist demeanor. And because of the elitist outlook, Afolayan seems like a

filmmaker who is not concerned about tradition and its manifestations in spiritual contexts, whereas he does.

Irapada, as a postcolonial narrative, illustrates how origin affects an individual's identity and belief system. Although it is not mentioned in the film, the audience is aware of the fact that Dewunmi's place of birth is not Kaduna; that he only ekes out his living as a stranger there. The site of birth, which is the foundational origin of Dewunmi is his village, while the cosmopolitan city of Kaduna forges his elitist identity as a building engineer. There exists a connection between Dewunmi's village and Kaduna. As Chabal argues, one's place of birth and the links with the actual geographical site shapes one's identity. What Afolayan seems to be suggesting in *Irapada* is the importance of one's origin and how one's place of birth is spiritually connected to one's destiny and fate. Before her mother's arrival, Dewunmi and his wife and retinue of friends live in harmony; he is prosperous despite being a stranger. However, the mother arrives to fetch him back to the village to perform a cleansing ritual. Without the cleansing ceremony, calamity and loss would come upon Dewunmi, the herbalist warns. Dewunmi, who sees himself as a cosmopolite than a traditionalist, dismisses such warning on the pretext that he does not believe in such propositions. Here, what is apparent is a disconnection between Dewunmi's understating of origin and the importance of the link to the actual geographical site.

Origin, as Chabal puts it, is intricately defined by place of birth and the importance one attaches to that actual geographical site. That explains nationalism and the whole import of sovereignty and land protections. One thing is sure, Dewunmi accepts his village as his place of birth and not as an essential geographical site required for his identification. It is here that Afolayan begins to unfold his thoughts about the origin and the roles it plays in one's life. To foreground the importance of the place of birth in the whole scheme of identity, Dewunmi's mother inquiries

from the herbalist if the ritual could be performed elsewhere without Dewunmi having to return home, but the herbalist declines that it is not possible. The fact that it is not possible to substitute the location of the ritual speaks more about the importance that Afolayan places on the place of birth. On the part of Dewunmi, his village is just a location; it carries no particular significance beyond being recognized as the geographical region where he is given birth. Whereas, on the side of tradition, Dewunmi is spiritually connected to his village and its belief. The fact that he must return to his ancestral community to perform the healing sacrifice suggests that the village land is unlike any other place in the world. Perhaps, the village land is unique because it is the resting place of the ancestors. As Chabal posits, "in Africa, the places of birth and burial—the two being linked—matter greatly" (27).

The idea that the places of birth and burial matter much for identification has been a recurring theme in many African films, including Nweze Ngangura's *Pieces d'identities* (1998) and Kelani's *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (1993). In the two films, identity and the process of identification are substantially linked to the place of origin, especially the land. In the case of Kelani's *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile*, the land signifies communal identity for the Oke-Ajeigbe people: it is a shared heritage and a symbol of their existence as a group of people. The land, which is a symbol of origin, therefore, becomes a link between the living and the dead, and that explains why the ancestors, who occupy the sacred land, punish all the land speculators. In the other film *Pieces d'identities*, the king of Manikongo travels to Belgium to search for his estranged daughter, only to discover that whatever power he has and the respect he commands in his domain is limited to his kingdom. In Belgium, he is treated not as royalty but as a visitor, who commands no particular respect. His crown, which is the symbol of his power and identity is almost confiscated at the immigration desk in Belgium. To the officer, the crown is an artwork to be taxed and not a significant royal symbol. I guess that

my point here is that there exists a connection between one's place of birth and the identity one carries. Often, individuals take the relationship between their native land and identity for granted, and not until they leave the domain of the familiar birthplace that the importance of those pieces of identity manifest, since "land is just not a physical attribute but is constitutive of what 'being' means" (28).

In other words, the connection between land and the ancestors is immutable; for the land is the real location of the ancestors, and it is by the history of the ancestors that lineages take shape. Since "the bond between the land and ancestor is stable and may not be altered" (28), it becomes evident that Dewunmi either succumbs to the will of tradition or perish with the arrogance of modernity, in case he chooses not to perform the ritual. However, no matter how important these dimensions of origin—land, ancestors, and belief—are to the local folks, they do not matter to Dewunmi, whose urban and cosmopolitan identity is shaped by empirical knowledge and not mythical allusions and beliefs. But as unconvincing as the concept of origin and its dimensions may seem to African elites, Chabal warns that land, ancestors and belief "form the core of the constraints of origin…and they are so central to the sense of identity as to be taken entirely for granted" (27). In a similar vein, what Afolayan seems to be suggesting with the story of Dewunmi and the cleansing ritual is the need for a rethink of attitude towards traditional values in Africa. Although not the first African filmmaker to suggest that Africans need to reevaluate their dispositions towards indigenous beliefs and cultural practices, what is most prodigious about his perspective to the discourse is the subtlety of approach.

The primacy of focus here is not that Dewunmi shuns the ritual process initially, but the fact that he later returned to perform the cleansing rite after he has suffered losses. Here, it is interesting to see Dewunmi succumb to the will of the herbalist as he completes the ritual and set

on a double-fold quest to find his estranged father, who must pray for him to be thoroughly cleansed. The lost father, who must pray for Dewunmi, in my understanding of the Yoruba context from which Afolayan writes, represents the ancestors. In the Yoruba family and belief systems, which Afolayan represents in *Irapada*, the father is both the temporal and spiritual head of a household. He is entrusted with the tasks of providing all the physical needs of the family as well as their spiritual protection. Whenever the ancestors are ready to bless individual family members, they are reborn as "Egungun," or they speak through the mouth of the father, who is the direct link to the ancestors by blood. It is through this representation that Afolayan signifies the connection between one's place of birth, the ancestors, and the belief system. Here, we are faced with the image of a prodigal son, who returns to his base empty and broken after squandering his privileges. This image of a culturally alienated African is familiar in African cinema, especially in the films of Ousmane Sembene.[27] The alienated individual is caught up in the web of modernity, which his/her formal education training and the metropolis spin around him. At the same time, he/she is trapped in the complexities of tradition and its nuances, while failing to succumb entirely to either of the two. Summarizing this identity alienation, Achille Mbembe (2002) writes:

> Fundamental to both currents of thought are three historical events, broadly construed: slavery, colonization, and apartheid. A particular set of canonical meanings has been attributed to these three events. First, on the level of individual subjectivities, there is the idea that through the processes of slavery, colonization, and apartheid, the African self-has become alienated from itself (cell division). This separation is supposed to result in a loss of familiarity with the self, to the point that the subject, having become estranged from him- or herself, has been relegated to a lifeless form of identity (objecthood). Not only is the self no longer recognized by the Other; the self no longer recognizes itself. (241).

[27] Aljadi beye is a character in *Xala*.

Mbembe's description of the diagnosis of the alienated African aptly describes Dewunmi in *Irapada*. Not only is he relegated to a lifeless form of identity in the film, but he is also as well estranged from himself and wife, Moji.

It is not just that Dewunmi is alienated from himself in respect to the tradition and culture of his people, he shows a shoddy disdain for the tradition and its agents. When he talks to the herbalist, he distanced himself from the ritual affairs, "I don't have anything to do with the ritual, and don't ever talk about it to me again." In retrospect, Afolayan represents the alienating effects of modernism on Africans. Though not explicitly stated, the notion that Dewunmi may be practicing any of the two foreign religions—Christianity and Islam—is strongly hinted at. As the film progresses, Dewunmi's "lifeless form of identity" becomes real: he has lost the entourage of friends and affluent lifestyle that emboldens his identity as a cosmopolitan Nigerian in the North, and he struggles to fathom the reality of his ancestral origin.

Dewunmi, in my reading, is a metaphor for the Nigerian nation and the multiple identities of its citizenry. In particular, the film points to the dire need for the Nigerian nation to retrace its steps towards traditional values and work them into useful national episteme, instead of ascribing its economic woes and social maladies to the influences of external factors. This narrative conjecture is Afolayan's way of suggesting that traditional values and ethos are a panacea for the disarrayed socio-political landscape in the nation and the Nigerian economy that is already in comatose. The imposing grandeur of the North and the joyful life Dewunmi cherish, are symbols that put the film in postcolonial discourse. Kaduna and the position it occupies in the film are strategic: it is in a dialectal opposition to the "home" or the "origin," which Dewunmi must return to. Kaduna is the center of modernity, a bubbling space where people of different tongue and background meet and bond in friendship and filial relationship. It is a cosmopolitan city with all

social amenities. The village that Dewunmi must return to is unknown and unsophisticated, but it is the foundation of his existence.

The abroad/origin dichotomy has significantly shaped African literature since Sembene's *Black Girl* was published and made into a film. Leaving home, Dounna and other protagonists of African novel forge new identities for themselves while abroad. In most of these representations, the North, as prosperous as it appears, is often alienating to the Africans who often return from it empty-handed. The North is a turning point, the center that redirects protagonists to their roots; it is not just a fixed space, it is expressive and monstrously intimidating for African characters, who must learn how to navigate it or perish in the process. This representation of the North and the South vis, a vis home/abroad paradigm, echoes Tayeb Salih's portrayal in his novel, *Season of Migration to the North* (1968). Just like Salih, Afolayan seems to be proposing that importance of culture and tradition in navigating the North successfully. There exists a common ground in both genres to support this claim: the failure of Mustafa Sa'eed to conquer the north despite his brilliance, and the inability of Dewunmi to actualize his dream as a young building contractor in Kaduna due to financial setbacks. In the end, both characters leave the north for their places of birth to seek solutions to their problems.

Kaduna, therefore, functions beyond a setting in the film: it is a metaphor for the global Europe and America, which possess the cadence and allure of modernity but perilous to traditional African values. In the view of Afolayan, the global North, which Kaduna represents, carries no stigmatization of identity. With its many oddities, it still accommodates people of different colors and tongues, as exemplified in the friendship that exists between Sheu and Dewunmi. So, to Afolayan, the global North is unavoidable if Africans are to make tangible progress in the world. This is because the global North is enhancing. It has the resources to help people realize their

potentials and become global citizens significantly. However, the global north is intimidating to the margins, the disparate locations that are scattered around the world. The intimidation does not come directly from the global North but in how it shapes the mental attitudes of the Africans who are often drawn to it. The alienated Africans, like Dewunmi, have come to reject the African ways of life, shunning its epistemology and given up its contributions to the global advancement. It is this mental attitude to Africa and its contents that Afolayan points at in *Irapada* as corrosive and unproductive to the wholesale development of the African continent.

In another perspective, *Irapada* has a diasporic outlook: it strives to connect Africans in the diaspora to their roots since "the link to ancestors [land] is an integral part of the meaning of origin, and of the texture of identity, which cannot be disregarded" (Chabal 29). Nonetheless, a new generation of Africans, especially those in the diaspora, ubiquitously disparage their African roots and seek to sever the connection between them and their origins. These delinking attempts are manifested in linguistic preferences, names, and taste. There exists, now, a new generation of Africans whose first language is not Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Lingala, Swahili, or Shona but English, French, and Portuguese. This new breed of Africans acquire the syntax of foreign languages and speak in European and American accents, they have mastered the social and cultural nuances of their host nation to the point that they could easily pass for natives of the lands. Much like Dewunmi, they relish the good life and the dynamism associated with city lives, especially with those strange social formations that are devoid of cultural sanctions and censorship, which are common in Africa. The cinematic objective of Afolayan regarding diasporic Africans, it seems, is to connect them back to their roots to make them share in the identity conferred by such connection. Even though "today that chain may often be broken, in that individuals (youths, for instance) are now detached from their place of origin," Afolayan, like Chabal, is of the opinion the detachment

"has an impact on their [alienated individuals'] sense of identity and on their conception of other places in the world" (29).

Conclusion

Presently, the story of Nollywood is incomplete without a mention of Afolayan and his cinematic art. Perhaps, the ostensible reason for this assertion is the landmark achievement of Afolayan in Nollywood. His artistic results are unprecedented in the history of the Nigerian film industry since it turned its attention to video-film production. In the discussion of Nollywood and its global presence, one can mention the laudable contributions of notable filmmakers such as Hubert Ogunde, Moses Adejumo (Baba Sala), Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugbonna, and Adeyemi Afolayan (Ade-Love) and the creative efforts of Kelani, Amaka Igwe, and Tade Ogidan. However, among the newcomer filmmakers, Afolayan's filmmaking style is unprecedented in the manner he approached storytelling and artistic aesthetic creation. The sweeping fame of *The Figurine, Phone Swap* and *October 1* announced to the world that Afolayan is a filmmaker with an objective. And because he strives towards meeting international film standards, Afolayan privileges cinematic sophistication over shoddy productions that are hurriedly put together to recoup the minuscule financial gains. Afolayan, no doubt, is an elitist postcolonial filmmaker, but that does mean that he, at any point, is ready to jettison his African culture, history, and beliefs for other western conventions in his films.

Even though his films appear to be loaded with contemporary ideas and are filled with thematic preoccupations that fit contemporary modernity, where the images ofsleek automobiles,

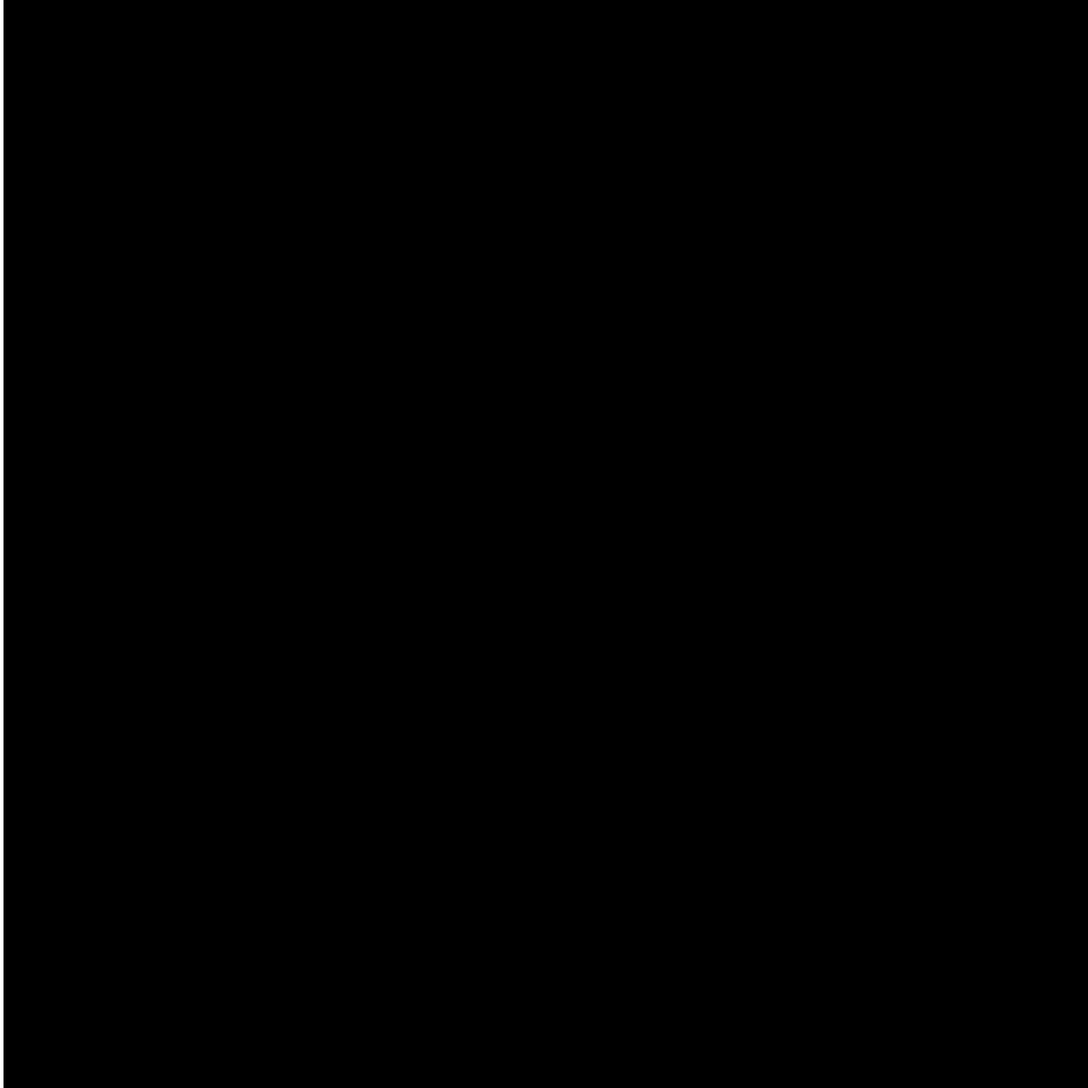
highflying career jobs, and the imposing grandeur of city architecture are projected continuously, yet, with subtlety, Afolayan represents matters bothering on African epistemology and cultural assumptions. Most often, the soft-spoken and lanky Afolayan presents the manifestation of fate and destiny in his works—two major African cultural ideas—in such a way that the concepts blend in with the idiocies of a modern world. The journey motif in the films of Afolayan, while borrowing from the archetypal *monomyth* style of African oral tradition, not only seek to explain the immutability of African thought process in a complex neoliberal capitalistic African contexts, but also to replay the childhood experience of the filmmaker, especially his rising from a humble background to a global film icon.

The cinematic audacity to represent life in cyclic motion foregrounds his belief in the cosmic forces that shape life: whether one agrees to their presence or not. For a filmmaker, who communes with his father in dreams, there can never be a single reality as presented in religion through the lenses of Christianity and Islam or say, the western culture, which Euro-American literature circulates (author interview). To Afolayan, there are other scattered realities that are foregrounded through the images of the ancestors, origins and the communal lands that explain the world we live in differently from the empiricism of our rational world. These "other" realities are not verifiable by scientific permutations and rational logic, but by belief systems. So, it is these scattered realities and their manifestations in contemporary corporeality that Afolayan seeks to represent and interrogate in his works. Afolayan artistic gaze is beyond the present: he is already projecting into the future of the Nigerian film industry, where the norm would be big-budget productions that will feature foreign actors and actresses. And there is no doubt that he is going to express that future in his next film titled "Dead Alive," whenever he produces it.

In reality, the New Nollywood is, to me, the future of the Nigerian film industry. But my primary criticism of it is that it tends to be elitists' affair. That is to say, the "New Nollywood" and the gimmicks it employs to recoup its investments while proving to be successful with the numerous awards and the red-carpet premiers, alienates local audiences with little or no formal education. Perhaps, this view of alienation means nothing if no one expects responses and reactions from the semi-literate and non-literate spectators, whose stories are being told in the films. However, if it is in the interest of the filmmaker (s) that the audience should consume and react/respond to the texts of the films, then the issue of alienation may be considered for quick attention. And I think that Afolayan, more than any of his colleagues, wishes that the national ideas he projects in his films resonate with the audience to the point that they can reflect on their existences about the working mechanisms of their communities and the Nigerian nation. It is, perhaps, this notion of reflexivity that pushes Afolayan to produce films that are filled with metaphor and metonymy, signs and symbols and audio-visual images that are both commercial and artistic and which have originality. No wonder he ends *The Figurine* with a question, "What do you believe" instead of banging the gavel of morality to proclaim retributive justice from his self-assumed position of a pious moral judge, which has been the hallmark of the Nollywood industry.

Chapter 4. Amaka Igwe: Toward a Feminist Nollywood Filmmaking Practice

Amaka Igwe: From Television to Nollywood



In the history of African filmmaking, "few women have gained access to film production in the past thirty years, and even fewer still have managed to complete a feature film" (Sheila Petty, 72). For the past half of a century, men directors dominated African filmmaking, and they call the shots. Similarly, in Nollywood, only a few women gained access to film production. Initially, the Nigerian film industry was, undoubtedly, a cult of male directors until Amaka Igwe

made an audacious entry into the industry. Amaka Igwe is to Nollywood, what Safi Faye is to Francophone African cinema.[28] She is the pioneer female video-filmmaker in Nigeria, and until her death in 2014, she was committed to the representations of marginalized members of the Nigerian society—children, women, and the have-nots. The Nigerian media community and the diaspora recognize Igwe as a postcolonial filmmaker who ingeniously uses her films and soap operas to scrutinize Nigerian familial, social, and political terrains. Through her works, she promotes the positive representations of African women in Nollywood film, and she foregrounds issues about women that many other Nollywood filmmakers do not engage in their works.

She was born in Obinagu –Udi, Enugu State, Nigeria, on January 2, 1954, and she attended All Saint School (now Trans Ekulu Primary School) and Girls High School Awkunanaw both in Enugu State. She later proceeded to Idia College in Benin City where she had her A levels. For her university education, she attended the University of Ife, now known as Obafemi Awolowo University. Upon the completion of her first degree, she proceeded to the University of Ibadan where she obtained a master's degree in Library, Archival and Information Services. She later returned to the studios of the Enugu State Broadcasting Service where Lola Fani-Kayode, a well-regarded broadcasting icon in the Nigerian television industry, helped shaped her creative brilliance.

[28] Safi Faye is the first African female director to rise to international recognition in 1972 when she produced her first film *La Passante*. In 1975, she produced her award-winning feature length film by the title *Kaddu Beykat (see* http://www.africanwomenincinema.org/AFWC/Faye_Pfaff.html)

In 1992, she transitioned from television production to filmmaking. And to freely express her opinions on national matters and issues relating to women, she established her television and film Production Company known as the "Best of the Best African Film and Television Programs" in 1993. Later, in 1994, she established Amaka Igwe Studios— an outfit that is known for quality television shows and video films. Before her death on April 28, 2014, Igwe had founded a radio station—Top Radio 90.9 FM—and a satellite television station—Q entertainment networks. Her films include *RattleSnake* 1&2 (1994), *Violated* (1996), *Forever* (1997), *To Live Again* (1998), *Rattle Snake* 3 (1999) and *Barber's Wisdom* (2001). Besides the films that she directed, she was also responsible for the creation of two sitcom shows—*Checkmate* and *Fuji House of Commotion*. Her other works include *Bless this House*, *Infinity Hospital, Now We are Married*, and *Solitaire*.

As a filmmaker, Igwe contributed enormously to Nollywood by providing alternative perspectives to gender representations in the industry that appears for a long time to be a cult of male directors who impose their agency on the general outlook of the Nigerian film industry. From 1992 (the year that is often quoted as the birth of commercial home-videos in Nigeria) to the present moment, there are about ten male directors to one female director. Although female voices such as that of Anike Williams and Lola Fani-Kayode dominated Television and Radio programs in the 1980s to the 1990s in Nigeria, no woman sat behind the camera as a film director until Igwe came into the industry. Nollywood, like Hollywood and other dominant film traditions, initially was seen as "men's only" field. The misrepresentation of women in Nollywood and the absence of female directors in the early 1980s and the late 1990s were not a mere coincidence; they came to be as a result of the patriarchal configuration of gender roles in African societies. This configuration of gender, as we know too well, favors the male sex regarding representation and allocation of rights. It is a patriarchal assumption that is undergirded by traditionalism.

Traditionally, most African cultures regard the male child as the head and the heir apparent to the throne, inheritance, and privileges. He is the demigod that allocates resources to the presumed "weaker sex"—female. However, some scholars have argued gender privileging happened only from colonial rule in Yorubaland and other African city-states. (See Oyeronke Oyewumi, *The Invention of Women; Nwachukwu Ukadike, Reclaiming Images of Women in Films from Africa and the Black Diaspora).*

This patriarchal assumption is not inherently an African concept; it is also a significant fundamental theological basis for both Judeo-Christianity and Islam (see 1 Peter 3: 7-9 and Surah 29). To this point that patriarchal configurations in Africa undermine the agency of women, Kenneth Harrow (1999) further argues that :

> the reactive, defiant, angry posture assumed by the African male avant-garde were translated into Negritudinist elaborations on the beauty of Mother Africa or the African dancer whose roles was to inspire the Black (male) poet—there being no female poets or filmmakers to respond to the inspiration (xv).

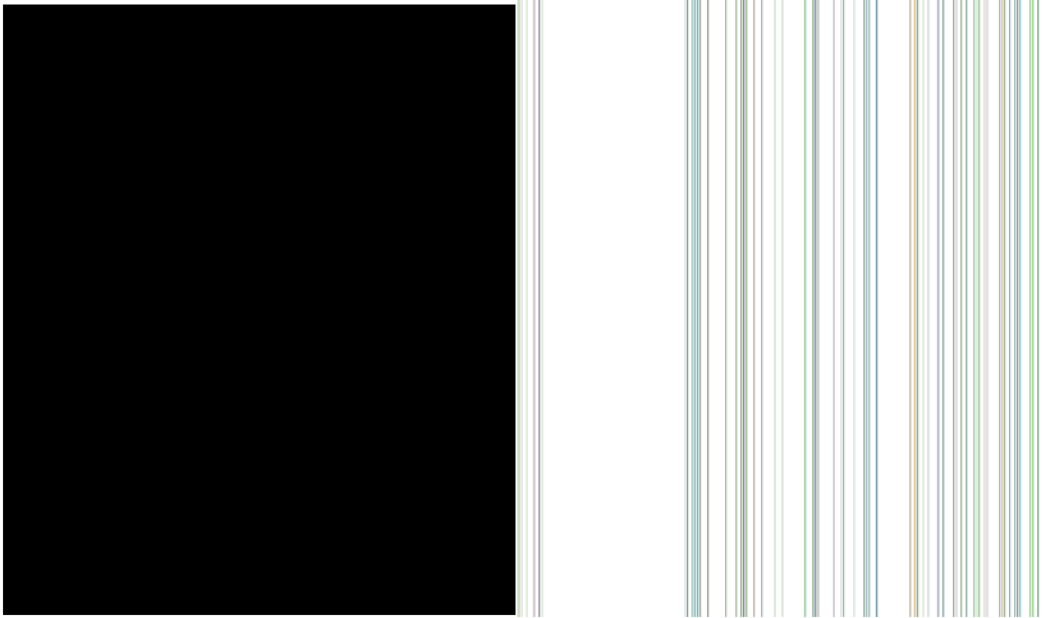
Therefore, the absence of women directors in Nollywood, for a long time, was occasioned by the traditional or supposedly traditional roles the Nigerian society assigned to gender, which denied women the much-needed media space to articulate their views. While women were present in Nollywood narratives, they are absent from its production. Perhaps, this is because as "long as men were there to defend the interest of women, to advance their cause, to speak for them" there is no further need to grant women the agency to articulate alternative views that describe their essences and physical conditions (Harrow, xv). There is also the issue of access to opportunities—men have more well-positioned male mentors for assistance than women at comparable points in their careers.

So, in 1995, when Igwe released *Rattle Snake* (Part 1) to the Nigerian market, she became the first woman to enter Nollywood as a film director. Even though Ngozi Onwurah, a UK based Nigerian filmmaker, had in 1988 directed *Coffee Colored Children,* her work could not be regarded as a Nollywood production because she identifies more with the UK production houses than she does with the Nollywood industry. Therefore, Igwe is the first Nollywood female director to enter the Nigerian film industry. Unlike the stereotypical representations of the female bodies by male filmmakers, Igwe espouses both the mental energy and the physical stamina that women possess. She contests the patriarchal gender configuration in her works by leaning towards African feminine ideologies that privilege women's social, cultural, and economic independence.

In addition to her commitment to positive representations of women in her films, Igwe introduced a new approach to scriptwriting and storytelling in the jaded Nollywood industry when she started producing action films and thrillers. Before her efforts, most Nollywood filmmakers churned out movies that are replete with the themes of "occult economy" (see Comaroff and Comaroff), extra-terrestrial manifestations, and prostitution (*Living in Bondage* (1992); *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1992); and the *Glamour Girls (1994)*. To invent new narrative scope for Nollywood films, Igwe shunned "epic" stories that valorize dark-gurgling aesthetics and those that overdramatized ritual killings and avaricious desires for blood-money in their quests to recreate past cultural glories and fantasies (e.g., the *Missing Mask* (1994), and *Battle of Musanga* (1996). Instead, she focused on realistic representations of the socio-political and cultural conditions of Africans, especially Nigerians, and how they make attempts to find hospitable spaces in the disorderly nation-state. More than any Nollywood filmmaker (be it male or female), Igwe made films around the themes of love, women empowerment and the disintegration of the family structure. Today, her pioneering efforts and industrial bravery have yielded a huge dividend to the

Nollywood industry as there are more than ten professional female directors in the industry. Not only that these directors are young women, but they are also trained in the best film schools in Europe and America. And like Igwe, they, too are committed to issues of women and the plight of the girl child in their films. Furthermore, they also use their camera lenses to spotlight the Nigerian government and set it up for scrutiny. Prominent among these female directors are Mildred Okwo (*The Meeting*), Chineze Ayaene *(Ije*); Kemi Adetiba (*The Wedding Party*), and Emem Isong (*Knocking on Heaven's Door*).

However, despite Igwe's laudable contributions to Nollywood and African cinema, she has not been discussed as an auteur in the Nigerian film industry. As late as 2010, when Manthia Diawara published his prose-style book *African Films: New Forms of Aesthetics and Politics,* "only four of the thirty-one films selected for the book and DVD projects were by female directors" (Dipio 16). Even, among the four selected female filmmakers, Igwe is absent from the list. Of course, the omission is not in any way an error, but a conspicuous affirmation of how critics of Nollywood have often excluded video films from critical analyses of African cinema. As usual, critics discuss her works within the broad specifics of the Nollywood industry, whereas her films deserved special mentions and independent reading. As part of my academic effort to expand the scope of scholarship on Nollywood filmmakers, especially the female directors, this chapter focuses on the films of Amaka Igwe. My purpose here is to underscore how Igwe represents women differently from her male counterparts in Nollywood, and how she responds to the perception of gender roles and femininity in a highly patriarchal society like Nigeria and a Nollywood industry that is dominated by men. Analyzing the *Violated*, I conclude that Igwe condemns the domination and exploitation of women in literary and popular culture and that she engendered discursive perspectives of "difference and desire" among women.



The Films of Amaka Igwe

Igwe's first film is *Rattle Snake* (1994), and it is about the danger in broken family cohesion; it projects how family disintegrates under strain. The film frames the family as the center of the social system, and that when the family system fails, the society is also affected; since broken homes breed miscreants and criminals. The film opens with Louis, the father of the protagonist of the story, Ahanna, and his wife, Nancy. Louis is getting ready to leave for work, while Nancy prepares the children for school. After he has eaten his breakfast, and as he leaves home, he gives Nancy money to cook dinner. Nancy complains that the money is not much, but Louis promises to add more when he gets his promotion letter later and salary arrears that day. True to his words, Louis is promoted, and he calls his family to celebrate with him. However, as the family celebrates the long-awaited promotion, Odinaka, Louis' younger brother, poisons him and plans to inherit his wealth and wife. In the end, Odinaka married Nancy and began a new family with her. Without

any parental care and guide, Ahanna and his friend Peter, the spoilt brat of a local politician, took to petty stealing and before long, they became armed robbers.

Rattle Snake is a story of love, betrayal, and brotherhood. It sets out to teach the importance of the family and how the family can disintegrate under strain. Besides showing the importance of love and parental care in the lives of children, the film reflects the usefulness of home-training to any society. Furthermore, it suggests that the primary cause of crime in the Nigerian society is broken homes. Perhaps, Igwe is not the only Nollywood filmmaker who shared the opinion; Tade Ogidan in his blockbuster movie, *Owo Blow,* expresses similar views. In the words of Jonathan Haynes (2016) "generically, the two films' (*Rattle Snake* and *Owo Blow*) strategies are the same. They begin as family films and then turn into crime films—specifically, criminal biopics tracing a gangster's life story" (101).

Igwe's second video film is *Violated* (1996). *Violated* is a two-part film that details the life of Peggy and her strive for success. As Haynes observes, "the *Violated* was not aimed at market women—or at least it did not want to be seen as aimed at them" (81). The film focuses on women, their bodies, and their stories. Unlike *Rattle Snake* that traces the biopics of criminal activities in Nigeria, *Violated* projects female bodies as a "troubled" body that lacks agency. This idea that women's bodies are "troubled/traumatized body" could be gleaned from the opening scene. In the dark, in the rain, a troubled and hapless woman abandons her twins in the bush; while another one sits at the back of a car, gripped with labor pain. The car comes to a stop at an undisclosed clinic and two nurses, one holding an umbrella, assist the pregnant woman to alight from the vehicle. The pregnant woman lies on a bed, and one of the nurses gives a list of medications needed to the distraught driver that brought the woman. As the nurse goes back to the ward to meet with the doctor, the camera cuts away into the night and reveals a woman trailing the cry of the abandoned

babies. Moved with compassion and alarmed at such wickedness, the indistinct woman picks up the twins and heads towards the clinic. At the hospital, the woman, known as Mama Soldier asks the nurses to take custody of the babies, but they declined initially. Unfortunately, the pregnant woman gave birth to a preterm baby that died a few minutes later. To calm her and to prevent her from a nervous breakdown, a nurse gave her one of the abandoned twins in replacement of her lost child. A few seconds later, the camera opens on Junior who is seen celebrating his birthday. It happens that Junior is the abandoned boy that the nurse gave to Mrs. Olu Peters some ten years ago. A moment later, Peggy (Ego Boyo) is seen moving around a departmental store where she works as a clerk. Her boyfriend, Tega (Richard Mofe-Damijo), strolls into the store to break the good news to her [Peggy]—she has passed her banking exam and has been offered a job at Tega's mother's bank. Peggy is happy. However, before she leaves with Tega, she puts in her resignation letter and returns the verbal abuses that the store manager hauls at her. Tega and Peggy are in love—they go for boat rides and spend time together in warm embraces.

However, Peggy 's romance with Tega hits rock bottom when Tega's mother forbids her from marrying him—because she is not from a wealthy family. Undaunted by Mama Tega's intimidation and scheming, she bears a son for Tega; but she is forever troubled by her rape experience. In the end, Peggy decides to search for the twins she abandoned ten years back, especially her son, having found Courage, her twin girl. Through her steadfastness, she learned that Mrs. Olu Peters has her son, that is, Junior. In the end, Peggy allows Mrs. Olu Peters to keep Junior, while she focuses her attention and love on her new marriage and family, but not before she had figured out, by intuition, that Mr. Amadi (Kunle Bamitefa), her previous boss, whom she worked for as a housemaid and who had sent her away when she was pregnant with the twins, is the rapist that fathered both Courage and Junior.

Unlike *Rattle Snake*, *Violated* projects how contemporary Nigerian society frames women still, in subjective positions. The film figures the social burden women have to endure, especially those that have children out of wedlock. For one thing, *Violated* is "about maternal feelings" (Haynes 86). How else could it not be about maternal feelings when Peggy knows that her lost child—Junior—is the cherished son of Joe and Sumbo? As much as the film is about maternal feelings, it is also about finding psychological closure. The film details the psychological trauma that women and spouses endure when the other partner keeps secret. Because of that, *Violated* is more about the marital relationship than it is about maternal feelings—it underscores the consequences of keeping secrets in a relationship. There is no doubt here, that what Igwe attempts to underscore is how keeping secrets could undermine marital unions (a point that resonates with Kunle Afolayan's *Irapada* (2006)). However, the *Violated* is more than Igwe's salutary presence in Nollywood; it is a film that conceives womanhood in a new positive light, despite the humongous social and cultural obstacles that frequently undermine their agency. Importantly, *Violated* directs attention away from the woman as "ornament" or "women as an object of exchange and as producer of producers" to women as agents of social change and familial cohesion (Sheila Petty, 188). Also, the film focuses its visual energies on the creation of women who are considered part of a whole 'sacred vessel' carrying life and strength" (188).

After *Violated,* Igwe made *Forever* (1997). *Forever,* extends Igwe's cinematic focus on another aspect of family life left untouched in Nollywood films—the importance of genotypes and Rhesus blood factors in marriages. While *Violated* centers on the pain and trauma a woman goes through when she is raped and abused, *Forever* exposes the trauma and suffering wives undergo in marriages that placed them in subordinate positions. At the heart of *Forever* is the damaging effect of the absence of maternal affection and care. The film is about Nnedi and her ordeals in

marriage. From the establishing shot of Lagos city life, the camera pans and tracks down a female figure dripping with blood in a dingy room in the suburb of Lagos. The woman is Nnedi (Ethel Ekpe), and she has just miscarried her third pregnancy. Together, Nnedi and her husband, Ukpabi (Justus Esiri) hurry out of the room to seek medical attention at the hospital. At the hospital, the doctor (Ego Boyo) tells the couple the cause of the miscarriages; she explains the Rhesus factor to the couple as the bewildered husband looks on. Ukpabi who interprets the blood factor to mean witchcraft, marries another woman, Urenna (Hilda Dokubo) and sends away Nnedi. Unbeknownst to Ukpabi, Nnedi is pregnant before he sends her away and she delivers a bouncing baby boy. For five years, Nnedi and his son, KB, live with Uncle B, Nnedi's blood brother before Chris, Nnedi's new lover takes her to the United States of America. Meanwhile, Ukpabi has no son from his marriage to Urenna, and he demands to have KB live with him, despite his initial denial of paternity.

Urenna despises KB and wishes for his downfall, especially when Ukpabi has made it known that only a male child will inherit his estates and businesses. In the end, KB takes to drugs and in no time becomes an addict. Happy that her wishes are manifesting, Urenna convinces her husband to lock KB away in a rehabilitation home. In the end, Ukpabi puts KB in rehab, and his mother, Nnedi, returns to Nigeria to search for her long-lost son.

Forever, no doubt is thematically composed as *Violated*, the only difference being that Nnedi returns to Nigeria to seek her lost son and find closure from the trauma she has endured for fifteen years. On the other hand, the film projects the ethnocentric biases that attend to inter-ethnic marriages in Nigeria. While Feyi and KB are committed to each other in love, their fathers prevent their union from blossoming. To separate the lovers, Feyi's father, Chief Balogun, sends her to the United Kingdom to continue her university education. And with the separation, KB loses the

mental balance he gains from being with her and suffers a nervous breakdown, and he eventually takes to drugs. *Forever* underscores how the absence of a mother's love can adversely affect children on the one hand, and how the lack of affections can lead to a demoralized lifestyle with negative attending consequences.

Igwe's other films include *To Live Again* (1998) and *A Barber's Wisdom* (2000). The two films are thematically composed around the topic of marriage, family cohesion, and the danger of untamed fame. For one thing, Igwe's last film—*A Barber's Wisdom*—appeals to men to drop their chauvinistic and garrulous attitudes and listen to the advice of their wives. More than any of her films, *A Barber's Wisdom* frames women as the central support any married man could ever have. It as well projects women as a particular breed of humans with the telepathic ability to project into the future with doggedness and determination. The film reimagines the institution of marriage in a dialogic dimension, one where there are no superior and subordinate but partners who jointly seek the progress of their families.

Apart from her films, Igwe is also known in Nigeria and the diaspora for her soap operas. So successful are the soap operas that they redefined sitcom series in the nation. In 2001, she created the famous *Checkmate* series after she had seen "Mirror in the Sun" produced by Lola Fani-Kayode. Initially, she had written *Checkmate* to be a stage production about a contemporary African heroine (http://www.vanguardngr.com/2014/05/end-erawhy-created-checkmate-amaka-igwe/). *Checkmate* is about Anne Haatrope (Ego Boyo), the protagonist, who must carry out a dying father's wish to revive his ailing company—Haatrope Investment. For Anne to succeed, she would need to tackle the haughty Benibor, her brother, as well as combat the treacherous manipulations of other adversaries. Apart from the adventures of Anne in her quest to revamp his father's ailing company, another thematic preoccupation of *Checkmate* is how women are treated

across a variety of contexts in Nigeria. From difficult mothers-in-law who berate their daughters-in-law over childlessness to exploitative university lecturers seeking sexual pleasure from their female students in exchange for passing grades to hot-tempered polygamous husbands, *Checkmate* exposes the various obstacles confronting women in Nigeria.

Riding on the fame of *Checkmate,* Igwe later produced *Fuji House of Commotion. Fuji House of Commotion* projects polygamous households and the quotidian commotions that they harbor. The series revolves around Chief Fuji (Kunle Bamitefa) and his three wives and their children. It trails the cacophony of voices that threaten to tear Fuji Household apart and the Chief's ingenuity at disarming the women and their tricks. *Fuji House of Commotion* is a brilliant comedy series of the late 1990s of which thematic import summarizes all the various ideas that Igwe weaves into her films and spotlights in her works—male chauvinism, exploitation of women, planned parenthood, unemployment, corruption, etc. Apart from the ordinariness of the universal life that Fuji House of Commotion represents, it is also a metaphor for the Nigerian nation. Metaphorically, Chief T. A Fuji is the Nigerian state, while her three wives represent the major ethnic divisions in the country—Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

Besides *Checkmate* and *Fuji House of Commotion*, Igwe's other sitcom productions include *Now we Are Married*, *Bless this House*, *Infinity Hospital,* and *Solitaire*. These soap operas weave their central themes around the representations of marriage, child-rearing, and love and betrayal. Mostly, Igwe's works—films and soap operas—are family oriented. The centrality of the family to Igwe's work is enormous; she beams her camera on the hidden aspects of family lives that, often, are filled with secrets and atrocities. To Igwe, there cannot be a better society without well-adjusted families, that is, friendly places where children are raised with love and affection and where spouses co-exist in love. More than anything else, the idea that humanity needs to show

love to one another and live in harmony is the focal point of her filmmaking career. And, there is no doubt that she spent her time in Nollywood to project and frame the different aspects of the Nigerian social lives and ideas about the family that need constant evaluation and improvement.

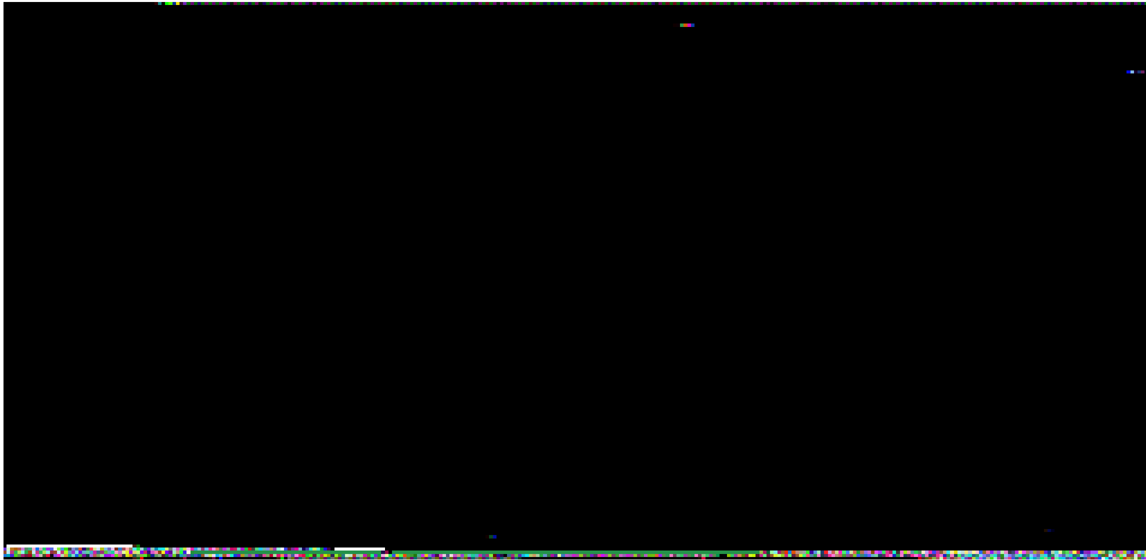


Figure 3: Chief Fuji and one of his three wives in “Fuji House of Commotion.”

Narrative Styles and Filmmaking Techniques

Maybe because of her television training, Igwe’s filmmaking strength is overtly manifested in her storytelling technique. Although she considers all other elements of filmmaking—lighting, sound, camera position to be very relevant, she privileges her scripts more. Her earlier films such as rattle Snakes, The Last Operation, and Violated bore significantly reflect her prowess at telling stories. *Rattle Snake* looks more like a soap opera than a film because of the linear narrative style that Igwe adopts. The linear narrative style makes it possible for the audience to follow the development of

Ahanna, the protagonist of the film, from his childhood to adulthood. In long shots that are mixed with intermittent close-up and medium close-up shots, Igwe invites the audience to witness the atrocities of Odinaka and the eventual transformations of Ahanna from a docile schoolboy to a hardened criminal. Like an omniscient narrator, the camera sits at a corner to capture the ongoing in the lives of Ahanna and his siblings. Because of the omniscient narrator's role Igwe assigned to the camera, actions are captured in real time, thus making the scenes to be slightly too long. Since Igwe worked the Rattles Snake from the perspective of television production, the film appears to be overly melodramatic.

But later on in other films such as the *Violated*, Igwe adopts a different storytelling technique known as "In Media Res." (Blain Brown, 120). This storytelling technique allows Igwe to open *Violated* from the middle rather than from the beginning. The *Violated* begins with a young woman who throws away her twin babies in the dark of the night. At first, we do not know who the lady is, or why she abandons her twins, but as the story moves from conflict to resolution, we can make sense of her actions in the opening scene. Igwe continues to mix storytelling techniques in her works as she advanced her career in Nollywood.

Because Igwe films are mostly family oriented, she always inched to draw her audiences closer to the core of her metanarratives. And so, she works her camera differently from other Nollywood filmmakers. Technically, Igwe sets her camera to follow her characters about without being noticed, just like a ghost. But since there is a limit to how much a camera can capture in a static position, through tracking and panning, Igwe significantly favored the use of handheld camera. It is in this way that she can trail and frame her characters as they perform their actions. Besides her skill at using a handheld camera to suggest the "all-seeing eyes" approach to filmmaking, Igwe hardly switches shots. Almost all the scenes in her films are framed in either

long shots or medium long shot. Occasionally, though, she uses close-up and tight close-up shots to portrays different points of view. That being said, Igwe rarely cut away her shots or use jump shots. In fact, to settle a scene, Igwe dissolves her shots instead of cutting away to a new scene. Anyone who is familiar with her storytelling technique would have no trouble understanding why she fades out her shots instead of cutting them away or freezing her frames. By dissolving the shots, Igwe aims for fluid transitioning from one shot to another without disrupting the flow of her story. This is because film plots, to Igwe, are like a tapestry that must not be roughly hemmed but seamlessly joined to reflect brilliant artistic finesses.

Of the all filmmakers studied in this dissertation, Igwe is the only filmmakers who paid lesser attention to the cinematic usefulness of music and lighting in filmmaking. Unlike Kelani and Afolayan, two established filmmakers who deploy lighting and music to provide visual subtext and visual metaphors in their works, Igwe rarely use lighting and music to embellish her films. Yes, she employs diegetic and non-diegetic songs to compliment the emotions and feelings of her characters as well as highlight the moods of the films, yet the songs don't provide additional meanings that the audiences can extrapolate to interpret the movie further. Maybe because of her training in theater and television, Igwe appears to be more interested in telling great stories delivered by professional actors and actresses to the extent that she invested less artistic energy in the cinematic usefulness of lighting and music in her works.

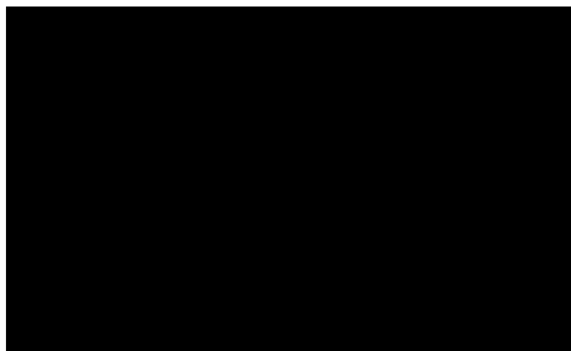


Figure 5: A Long shot of Tega and his Mother.

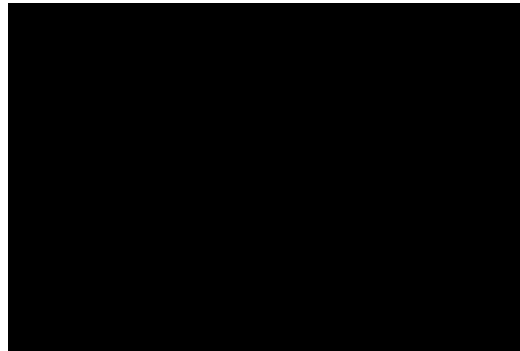


Figure 6: A long shot of Sumbo and her husband.

Breaking the Codes: Sexuality, Feminism, and the Nollywood Industry.

The Nigerian film industry otherwise known as Nollywood is not entirely a cosmopolitan affair: Its logic of representation oscillates between what it takes to be the essence of African culture and tradition and the quotidian upheavals of a postcolonial, postmodern world. Very often, Nollywood's themes represent the contentions of the nuanced, changing African ethos and the neo-liberal modernism of the twenty-first century. However, often, Nollywood leans more towards the projection of African mores and values, and it derides, occasionally, the representations of exposed female bodies and sexual organs. Nollywood panders to the culturalists' orientation to serve educational purposes. The goal of this section, therefore, is to look at Nollywood's representational logic regarding how the industry reacts to sexuality and feminine ideologies in its films. More specifically, I discuss how despite the cultural and religious restrictions, a few Nollywood filmmakers have started breaking the cultural restraining codes to include scenes of sexual

activities in their films, and how Igwe has laid the foundation for a feminist[29] representation of women, sex, and sexuality in her oeuvres.

Dominant cultural practices in Africa often circulate the notion that women are weaker copies of men: inferior gender. This instance of bias served as the pretext for the preference given to the male child. The dichotomy between the male and the female child informs traditional African sense of gender relationships and reactions. Even though scholars such as Oyeronke Oyewunmi (2007) argue that gender is a western ideology, that Africans do not mark gender, especially in the Oyo Yoruba example, we do know that gender preferences exists in Africa even among the Oyo Yoruba people. While Oyewunmi's argument holds valid in the cultural practice that privileges male children as *ọkọ*—husband, there are other cultural instances such as in the Obaship, which set apart a son as the heir apparent to the throne and the daughter as the *Iya-oba* (mother of the king), or *Adele* (queen regent). Because the African context of gender discourse is slanted, the image of the female child is often subsumed under the authority and power of the male. It means, therefore, that the female child has to prove her existence and earn her respects in a gendered society. Also, beyond the anatomical differences between men and women, African cultures and praxis attribute particular characteristics to women. These socially fixed features often framed

[29] I use "feminist" in this work to refer to filmmaking approach or orientation that underscores feminine issues and concerns in Nigeria and Africa. While I consider "feminine" to be an ideological term that describes experiences of African women, which include oppression, exploitation and servitude; I regard feminist and feminine as intertwined terms that allow me to discuss the peculiarities of the experiences of African women differently from that of their male counterparts.

women as treacherous, gullible, and untrustworthy folks. Such negative representations of women originate from the African oral tradition and religion. In Nigeria, for instance, the Ijala chants of the hunters, peculiar to the Yoruba people, is replete with images of treacherous women and dissident wives, who upturned the fortunes of their husbands and brothers. In Ifa divination system, which is the holy grail of the Yoruba traditional religion, a section of the verses (Oyeku Meji) describes women as ingrates and traitors. In this verse, "Olojongbodu, the wife of Iku (death), divulges the secret of Iku to Orunmila. Who later use the information to escape death and his antics. (See William Bascom (1991): *Ifa Divination: Communication between God and men in West Africa)*. Although Ifa does not privilege men above women; in fact, there are more examples of bad men than women in Ifa. However, Ifa verses with bad women are more popular than those with bad men. Of such example is the "Osa Meji" verse otherwise known as "osa eleye" which recounts the brutal encounter between the mothers of witches and her benefactor, Orunmila.

The lack of the phallus has often been summed up by men and societies to mean that the woman is inferior to the man and that she cannot keep secrets. What is implied is that woman cannot secure knowledge and contribute to knowledge creation. "Secrets" in this instance, does not translate to the keeping of confidential matters, it extends to the discourse of knowledge creation and the recipe for manufacturing products in the traditional sense. And that perhaps explains why men are mostly associated with the scientific understanding of curative healing and medical knowledge in the Yoruba culture. The Yoruba culture, being a patriarchal culture, therefore is similar to other Nigerian cultures that Nollywood represents in the films. And this perhaps, explains the normative representations of women as witches and men as the good medicine-man whose duty is to subdue and, if necessary, destroy the devious witch and her antics. Although cultural, yet these phallocentric assumptions cross-reference Christianity and its

doctrines, which requires men to treat women as “weaker vessels” (1Peter 3:7); and which sanctions the death of witches, “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” (Exodus 22: 18). This ideological convergence is a reflection of how much Christianity has influenced African culture and social habit formation, owing to the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the eventual colonization of African cities.

In most of the African contexts that Nollywood represents, women are to be seen and not heard; they occupy the lowest rung of the hierarchy ladder, and they are incapacitated, most of the time, to take an active role in the neoliberal economy of the new millennium. But this is more Christian than “traditionally” African. In conventional African cultural practices, women were central to economic, social, and religious activities of societies and city-states. And their roles extended beyond the domestic affairs of their immediate families to include military assignments and leadership undertakings: they lead armies, fought in battles, and served as heads of empires. Even though there has been a remarkable improvement in the representation of African experiences in recent cultural productions, issues about women, it seems, is still far from being fully resolved. Dipio (2014) writes that in Barom Sarret, “Sembene introduces what later become a mantra in his films: the African man and woman should fight on the same front in overcoming poverty” (x). How can the African man and woman fight on the same front of overcoming poverty when they are both separated into superior and inferior bodies? To fight is to have agency. What happens, then, when a body lacks the agency to claim representation and to contest scrupulous framing?

Of course, there are instances when the female folks have boldly contributed to discourses around their bodies and being. These African feminist writers such as Buchi Emecheta (1997) and

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) have embraced their shared womanhood to write and formulate theories about the treatment of women in Africa. While they claim recognition for the female folks, they posit that their position is not to contend with men or seek adversarial gender politics. Instead, they argue that they intend to advocate for the positive recognition of women in our highly gendered world (see "Stiwanism" and "Feminism with a small 'f!'" in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (2007)). By formulating theories that distinguish the needs of the African women from that of their western counterparts, Ogundipe-Leslie and her colleagues draw attention to both the psychological and physiological desires of African women. This form of feminism that is not antagonistic is useful in the overall framing of women and their hopes. It calls for the recognition of female agency in the manifestation of human activities in Nigeria and Africa. By so doing, the society, especially the producers of cultural forms would create positive images of women that are actively involved in the business of nation-building. However, despite the formulation of the African version of Feminism, it is apparent that African women, or at least the third world women, are still "subalterns" who cannot speak (Gayatri Spivak, 380). The subaltern lacks the agency to speak for himself/herself; he/she is a subject of a higher power that legislates on the affairs of his/her life. Even though the tide is changing in contemporary times for women, for they have gained more political prominence and have taken active roles in government, there are still some instances that they are framed in stereotypical roles in Nigerian popular culture, especially in Nollywood films. The continuous framing of women as a subaltern category in Nollywood is expressed in the roles women play and the interpretations given to their personal lives in the larger context of the nation. The industry frames women in pejorative perspectives across the linguistic terrains that demarcate Nollywood production styles—English, Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. The damning images of evil and bloodsucking women, bitchy beautiful women who

sell their bodies to make ends meet financially, and the born-again sisters who endure marital abuses are consistently projected on the movie screens for the audiences to consume. So constant and poignant are these stereotypes that Nollywood has established and popularized the genres of the "wicked mother-in-law" (a role that is usually reserved for Patience Ozokwor (Mama G) and Toyin Afolayan (Lola Idije)).

However, on the contrary, the Nollywood industry represents men as Chief Executive Officers of companies, business tycoons, and successful career diplomats. In some cases, boys have higher privileges than their mothers and sisters. In such instances, they [boys] are privy to the affairs of the state, which are hidden from the womenfolk. They are initiated into religious cults from a tender age, while women, irrespective of their age, are prohibited from such secret and nocturnal meetings. It could be said that Nollywood from inception underplays matters that concern women and, often, represents them in traditional gender roles; that is, a given position of subordination that undermines their natural talents and cognitive capacities. As Dipio (2015) notes, "gender relations and the positions of women in African cinema occupy a central position in the concerns of African filmmakers than is originally apparent" (1). Perceptibly, in the world that Nollywood represents, gender representations will remain the same unless women step in to tell their stories differently from that of men. And I do believe that women must rise to the challenge of rescuing their bodies from the stereotypical representations that figure them to be docile and weak, and whose positions as wife, daughter, and mother are a given.

Sex and Sexuality

As far as any critic of Nollywood can tell, the industry is yet to fully unshackle women from the gender stereotypes, while fully admitting their freedom as humans to take individual decisions as they deem fit without any egregious labels. In more definite terms, the female body in Nollywood, whether as an actress, a producer, or a director is still not free from being framed in the stereotypical perspectives of prostitutes, incompetent, and gullible. And, of course, I am talking specifically about women's personal lives and sexuality. Alexie Tcheuyap (2011) notes that "in Africa, the enjoyment of sex is very private; because intercourse is regarded as intended for reproduction, female pleasure is not culturally considered to be a priority"(179). This assertion goes to the extent that one can interpret the various images of women and their sexual escapades that Nollywood films project and the motives for making those films as dissident narratives, or as a countercultural proposition. In general, female sexuality is sanctioned in Nollywood. Whenever nude pictures of women are displayed on the screen, it is to serve an educational purpose and to fit a context, usually to highlight a sexual scandal in which the woman is the culprit, and who must be punished for her transgressive sexuality.

However, in some of the films, when men engage in sexual activities and romance, it is to display their authority, smartness, and affluence. It means, therefore, that despite the general notion that Nollywood treats sexuality and sex with sacred regard and out of profanity the industry still differentiates between women sexuality and that of their male counterparts. The industry invokes actresses' sexual dispositions and marital life as judging parameters. In other words, while Nollywood women stars are held to a particular moral standard, their male colleagues are held to none. Perhaps, the most recent examples are the hue and cry that erupted after the marriage of a popular Nollywood actress, Funke Akindele, popularly known as Jenifa to Alhaji Almaroof

crashed. She had a society wedding like most of her colleagues, where riches and material wealth were on display. However, there were public opinions that predicted that the marriage would not last since Nollywood women don't stay married—the Nollywood Syndrome. Unfortunately, the marriage did not last beyond a year before the couple broke up. In the aftermath of the broken marriage, Jenifa had to hibernate to avoid public scrutiny and gossips. No doubt that the period of "hibernation" had a severe impact on her career. In an industry that is as busy as Nollywood, a period of rest from locations and productions for any actor/actress, especially the famous ones, for that matter, is a potential jeopardy for the person's career.

When I was conducting my research in Nigeria in the summer of 2015, I spoke with a few filmmakers and crew hands; these people revealed to me that it is almost always impossible for any actress whose marriage suffers a break up to make a comeback into the industry. This is because the industry judges the morality of the female actresses through their personal lives and marriages. So, any star actress who is unfortunate to have a broken marriage is unofficially punished by the stakeholders in the industry, who happens to be men. This practice of excommunication is rampant in the Yoruba language section of Nollywood more than any of many divisions in the industry—Hausa, Igbo, and English. Perhaps this vividly explains why Funke Akindele only managed to appear in MainFrame's *Maami,* and her subsequent decision to embrace the English/Igbo language productions. The "silent sanctions" might, perhaps, be another reason why she fully develops her stage name into a sitcom comedy known as *Jenifa's Diary*.

It is ironic, though, that the Nollywood industry sanctions the sexuality of its actresses in their private lives and brings that to bear on their professional and industrial successes. Whereas regarding failed marriages, there are more than ten Nollywood actors whose marriage failed but who were not in any ways harmed by the failure. An example is Fred Amata, who had had two

failed marriages and yet is still considered a leading figure in Nollywood. Often, the public is unaware of the misdemeanors of actors and male producers because of their "cultural privileges" (http://buzznigeria.com/nollywood-syndrome-checkout-these-30-failed-marriages-in-nollywood/#).

Whether one agrees with it or not, the public, especially in Nigeria, is yet to separate the professional images of women (as actresses) from their personal and domestic lives. Sharing this similar view is Adeleye- Fayemi, who said that "popular culture, especially the film, is ruled by the "mirror-image" paradigm; where audience expectations are fulfilled when women are framed in binary relations. According to her, the binary relation assumption frames women in "powerful and dangerous," or "long-suffering" and "in this 'either-or/way' perspectives" (127). It is a paradigm cluster, a grouping category that puts labels on women. It means, therefore, that "women are shown not just as the society perceives them, but as society expects them to be" (128). For myriads of reasons, African audiences look forward to particular representations of women. As Adeleye-Fayemi suggests, there is a paradigm expectation in the way the filmmaker must or/should frame women in their films. Fundamentally, this framing of women in Nollywood is either attuned to the cultural dispositions of the people or their religious subjectivities. What this implies is that, even if any Nollywood filmmaker is willing to create a new narrative space for women, the audience is a factor to consider. The Nigerian audiences are yet to enjoy art for art's sake without injecting their cultural biases and religious subjectivities. Therefore, for a filmmaker who wishes to recoup his/her investment, there is often the urgent need to end the film in exhortatory manner. This ideology, perhaps, explains why Akin Adesokan (2011) concludes that "the aesthetics of neo-traditional cinema are exhortatory; viewing cultural and social institutions in a constructive manner" (86). In 2015, when Biyi Bamidele released *Fifty,* I was endlessly

defending the filmmaker's choice of representations and the meanings that could be deduced from scenes of sexual intimacies and affection to my colleagues with whom I watched the film. To my surprise, most of these colleagues of mine who are women felt bad that the filmmaker explicitly represents women having sex. To them, it is a violation of their privacy, and therefore, the Nigerian government ought to ban the film for its pornographic content. I guess that my point here is that even when a Nollywood filmmaker makes attempts to represent women and their agency, in all of its ramifications, the audiences have a way of finding fault with such representations. The status quo appears more appealing to a section of the Nigerian film audience.

However, despite the sacredness attached to sex and sexuality in Africa, the discourse on sex has moved from the private to the public domain. Even though the projection of sex in the public discourse is almost about the scandal and the debate that they generate; it is no longer the case that sex is confined to the inmost circle of private lives. Surprisingly though, Nollywood filmmakers, despite being aware of the circulation of sexuality and paraphernalia of erotic desires in public spaces, still underrepresent themes of sex and sexuality in their films. Nude pictures, casual sex, and pornographic productions did not become subject to broad representation for Nigerian filmmakers, "whose characters up to this point remain exceptionally ascetic and discreet' (Tcheuyap 180). Instead, Nollywood filmmakers are more interested in analyzing the various socio-political conditions in the nation than the amorous frolicking of the individual citizen. Occasionally, though, Nollywood do pay attention to the sexuality of individual citizens. But when it does that, the intention is to serve a purpose, mainly to redirect a wayward individual to the moral path.

As Tcheuyap notes, "there is a chasm in Africa between the consumption and discussion of sex, on the one hand, and its (cinematic) representation on the other" (182). The chasm has to

do with the fact that the idea of sex and sexuality is not alien to the African ways of life, after all, there are plenty oral tales and epic narrations with the theme of sexuality. An example is the myths of Ogun and Sango and Uja where Sango courts and eventually married Uja, the wife of Ogun when he was away on hunting expedition. In that myth, Uja eloped with Sango because his sexual energy matches her erotic desires. As Tchuep further notes, "the absence of open sex in films is putatively, yet another consequence of the self-inflicted challenges of 'nation-building' or 'development' which sought to avoid voyeurism and entertainment in films" (182). If Tcheuyap is correct, it means, therefore that most Nigerian filmmakers often exclude sexual scenes from their works completely. But when they depict scenes of sexual intercourse, nudity is avoided as cameras reveal intertwined legs and bodies that move under bedcovers. In rare cases, women's cleavages are partially exposed, while men are framed bare-breasted in sexual positions. This shooting technique (internal Ocularisation) ensures that "what is seen by the character is not seen by the viewer" (Tcheuyap 192). The aim of which is to discourage immorality while representing reality. It is still unclear, though, what the impact of the absence of scenes of explicit sexuality from Nollywood films would be in Nigeria, given the rate at which portable mobile devices and the internet has made the production of sexual images cheap to buy and very easy to circulate. It is, therefore, in this broad contexts of sanctioning sexual behaviors and the interpretations of social/cultural understandings of sexuality that I read the works of Igwe, especially *Violated*.

Pleasurable Desires: *Violated* and Issues of Sexuality in Nollywood Films.

From 1992 when Kenneth produced *Living in Bondage* to 1995 when Igwe released her debut film, *Rattle Snake*, Nollywood had produced about five films around the images and representations of women. The most popular among the films is *Glamour Girl* (1994) produced

by Nnebue, the controversial progenitor of Nigerian video-films. The film is Nnebue's second film; it is the first Nollywood English film as well as the first video film to figure images of alluring, predatory, devouring good-time girl, and the independent city woman (Haynes 58). The *Glamour Girls* popularize the fetishization of women in Nollywood.

No doubt, Igwe's *Violated* is a feminist script that attempts to reimagine how the Nigerian cultures frame women in the day-to-day affairs of the nation. The film represents women differently from the way male filmmakers would represent women and interpret their roles. For instance, while Nnebue frames women as dubious, sexual perverts, and innocent folks who prostitute their bodies for material gains (*Living in Bondage* and *Glamor Girls)*, Igwe exposes the debilitating conditions that mitigate against women and the realization of their potentials. What is more pronounced in Nnebue's *Glamor Girls* is the get-rich-quick syndrome and the untamed desires for crass material wealth that the young women display. *Glamor Girls* projects the idea that most women who prostitute their bodies for money and other material gains are covetous and amoral. A case in point is Helen, the tall and elegant lady who asks an innocent man in a Mercedes for a lift, only to start railing on her benefactor, claiming to passersby that he promised to pay her the sum of two thousand Naira (₦2000) for two nights' sex but now trying to cheat her by offering her ₦500. What is evident in the scene is a stereotype of women— dubious and shameless. The other fact that Nnebue seeks to establish is the notion that men are the victims of women's maliciousness and atrocious maneuvering—a masculine sense of self-pity. The idea that prostitutes are covetous, gullible, and money-minded individuals is drawn home when Helen narrates the story of her life to a man who has just had sex with her. Helen claims to have been driven into that lifestyle when her father would not give her money but instead give the money to her friends, whom her father invited to his bedroom.

This narrative fits well with the normative ideas that feed the popular notion of prostitution in Nigeria. The prevalent theme that Nnebue expresses in *Glamor Girl* is anchored on the excesses of the woman and her desire for material gains beyond the reach of her income. However right this assertion or notion may seem, it is not the sole reason why women prostitute their bodies to make ends meet. The other reasons why women live wayward lives is what Igwe projects in *Violated*. *Violated* is a space-clearing gesture; it is a narrative that digs deeper into the core of the society to reveal the complex system that shapes the lives of Nigerian women. Unlike Nnebue who frames Helen as gullible and insatiable, Igwe frames Peggy in contexts that complicate the justification of prostitution and other wayward attitudes, especially when women are marginalized.

We know too well that *Violated* is about luxury, pleasure, and desires. In fact, Haynes (2016) says that "the level of luxury represented—the mansions, the Mercedes stretch limo, the pleasure yacht—was unprecedented and effectively unsurpassed in Nigeria" (82). For a fact, *Violated* is the first Nollywood film to incorporate glitz and glamor that represents aristocracy and class in a fashion similar to European and American films, especially the James Bond 007 series. Locally, the glitz and the glamor that *Violated* display speak to the desire of every young woman in Nigeria, if not in the whole of Africa, to have a loving man who could "spoil" them with luxury. Interpretively, the boating scenes and other scenes where Tega displays his affection for Peggy illustrate the idea that all a woman wants is money and enjoyment. There is a famous saying among the Yoruba people of Nigeria that *owo ni obinrin mo* (all a woman want is money). However, what Igwe, in contrary, does with the luxury and its charms in the film is to make a bold claim that contradicts the general notion that all that women want is luxury and money. Despite the charms and the money, Peggy is not easily bought by Mama Tega. Instead, she seems to be troubled with the secret of her lost twins. Therefore, she spends a good time of her life searching for her son

before she eventually traces her to the Peters. This shift in interpreting desires implies that Igwe, herself a woman and a mother, understands the plight of women more than her male counterparts and as such represents their dilemma in her works.

By framing Peggy as a survivor, a woman who must survive the oddity of life by her cunning, Igwe expresses the possibility that turbulent times could pass for the reasons why some women devise dubious survival strategies to cope with hurting economic and socio-cultural conditions. The narrative that Helen spins in *Glamour Girls* is one-sided, it is devoid of empathy but instead, fills the audience with anger towards her. While the audience inches to see Helen doomed, they probably wish Peggy a better life. Despite her sin, Peggy is remorseful and strives towards the betterment of her existences beyond the cusps of desperation. Peggy has a turbulent past; she has delivered a set of twin out of wedlock, and she has thrown away the babies. One night, in the rain, she crams her twins into a box and abandons them. She hides herself to see what happens to the babies, and luckily for her, Mama Soldier saw the twins and carries them to a nearby hospital. This representation is similar to the Biblical story of Jochebed and Moses. When Jochebed heard that the Pharaoh had ordered all male babies to be executed, she took Moses to the edge of the Nile and set him afloat in a basket of bulrushes to save his life. Pharaoh's daughter eventually saw the boy and decided to raise him as her son (Exodus 2: 3). For Jochebed, her reason for abandoning Moses is known—the king sought to kill all the newly born male children of the Israelites. But, here in the opening scene of *Violated,* no one knows why Peggy abandoned the babies until towards the end of the film. In fact, Peggy's identity is not revealed in the night, until later when she goes back to Mama Soja to claim the children. In the words of Haynes (2016), "*Violated* is about maternal feelings: Peggy's traumatic past that has to be processed before she could move into a future with Tega" (X).

Peggy's resolution to locate her lost son ignites the maternal feelings in the film. As Peggy gets closer to reclaiming her son from Sumbo, who unknowingly is the surrogate mother of the boy for years, the possibility of nervous breakdown heightens for the two women. *Violated* is not about explicit sexuality but the consequences of immoral sexual behavior and keeping of secrets. The film is about mothers' feeling in general and how it is important for couples to communicate and not keep secrets. For years, Mrs. Olu Peters kept the secret about the paternity of Junior away from her husband, Joe, while Peggy kept her past life a secret from Tega until Mr. Amadi blows the bubble on her. It is evident that Peggy's life is in chaos: on the one hand is the problem of Mama Tega's domination and her threat and on the other is Peggy's apprehension about the whereabouts of her son. It is no doubt that the chaos further drives Peggy to concentrate her energy and resources on finding her twins.

Unlike *Glamor Girls* or *Living in Bondage*, *Violated* has a theme of inner feelings and psychological attachments. This deep internal feeling is emotionally designed to connect Peggy to the world around her—from the rape scene to the final meeting of Junior and to the ultimate realization that it was Mr. Amadi who raped her. This emotional connection is so deep that Peggy's persona becomes that of a victimized and traumatized individual. It is, perhaps, Igwe's success at representing Peggy as a victim of male chauvinism and societal biases that further distinguishes *Violated* from films of, say, Nnebue or any other male directors in Nollywood. By framing Peggy as a victim of sexual violence, Igwe can paint in bold relief the shame and level of deprecation that women endure in their quest for love and happiness. What Igwe seems to be suggesting here is the need to always carefully observe and understand women's condition before passing judgments. It is possible that a few audiences might have cursed the mother of the abandoned babies for her callousness, as does Mama Soldier. However, towards the end of the film, it becomes apparent

that Peggy was abused by Mr. Amadi and that she abandoned the babies to pursue her life career, for she knows that the society attached a stigma to a woman who gives birth outside of wedlock.

Also, Igwe vividly represents in the film how Peggy surmounts her life challenges and how she remains undaunted despite Mama Tega's threats, so that, what becomes a focal point in the film is how she processes her trauma, especially the fact that her son, Junior, is raised by Mrs. Sumbo as her legitimate child. And her figuring out, through intuition, that Mr. Amadi was the rapist. These two events are traumatizing for Peggy. Perceptibly, what Igwe points the attention of the audiences to here is how women are often at the receiving ends of men's folly and atrocious behaviors. Upending the general notion that women are egregious and docile, Igwe projects Amadi and his treatment of Peggy as callous and inhumane. At first, Mr. Amadi appears to be a pious gentleman who is committed to his family, and who loves his wife dearly. But once it is revealed that he is the rapist who fathered Junior, he loses his respect and ends his life in desolation. Without hesitation, Igwe seems to be suggesting that "virility is the battle cry of masculinity and that it goes hand-in-hand with violence" (Dipio 109). Who would have thought that Mr. Amadi, despite his humiliation of Peggy, is responsible for her woes?

There is no doubt that Igwe is concerned with how the social construct of gender emasculates women and emboldens men, even when they [men] are committing a crime against humanity. Peggy has been a victim of lie and deceit. Her life is almost ruined by the lies invented by Mr. Amadi that a band of robbers invaded their house, on the night that his wife was taken to the hospital. For Peggy, she believes that she was raped by one of the robbers until, by sheer intuition and through smell, that she reasons that it was Mr. Amadi who raped her while claiming that armed-robbers broke into the house. Even if Mr. Amadi is not punished in the film, the fact that his wicked antics are finally exposed is enough for Igwe to drive home her point that women

are often the victim of male violence and manipulation. Here, Mr. Amadi is the master manipulator: he manipulates his wife to send Peggy away and also attempts to discredit her in the presence of Mama Tega by revealing her true identity and name. Accordingly, the gender dynamic in the film reiterates Igwe's notion of the idea that the Nigerian society is overwhelmingly "governed on the terms of patriarchy, as male identity and male-centeredness make power rest in the hands of a few men" (Dipio 110). However, a few of the men in *Violated* are more "refined" and understanding than Mr. Amadi. This representation of quiet, honest and trustworthy men, contrasts sharply with the dominant image of egoistic men that Nollywood often projects; it, instead, aims to restructure the abnormal representation that put men and women in a "master and servant" paradigm. This calculated attempt by Igwe is her way of rhetorically collapsing the hegemonic structure that undermines women agency. This rhetorical move, not only removes the male power of eroticizing women as objects to be possessed; it "demystifies the phallic idea that all women are reproductive apparatuses in waiting" (Sheila Petty, 188).

The idea that women are, often, victims of domestic abuse who need empathy rather than subjective dismissal is also the reason that Igwe made his male characters, apart from Mr. Amadi to be courteous, understanding and empathic. In order, for Tega to live well with Peggy and enjoy marital bliss with her, he would have to be considerate of her emotional conditions and psychological disposition. No wonder, then, that Tega followed Peggy to the Peters' when she traced her lost son to them. Even though Peggy's trauma is external, she has quickly moved to absorb the traumatic event into her mind, thus confirming Terr's assertion that "Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind" (8). So, because Peggy has internalized her trauma, she dedicates her energy towards finding her lost son, to the extent that

she almost abandons her little child. Her feelings about her lost son "pass from shame to guilt, and numb loss to full engagement, steely determination, and then reunification" (Haynes 106).

Noteworthy about Peggy and her resolute determination to locate her lost children is the tenacity of purpose. Peggy's tenacious attempts to find her missing twins, especially the boy, underscores Igwe's representation of women regarding their emotional attachment to their children. The description is a reification of the notion that women, as mothers, can sacrifice their lives for their children. The idea is to express the beauty of motherhood and how maternal feelings differentiate women from men. Peggy, despite her economic condition and social status never abandons her twins. The night she leaves them, she stays hidden in the cold to see who takes the babies. And for years, she keeps sending money to Mama Soldier to take care of the children. There is something more humane about her that describes her motherly instinct which is different from that of Mr. Amadi. Mr. Amadi is not like Peggy. He is callous, selfish and egocentric. Unlike Peggy, he never cares about the children he fathered and is not remorseful for his shabby treatment of Peggy. In the end, he is revealed as an irresponsible man, who has his blood in three children. He is the father of Courage and Junior and as well as the father of his legitimate child. The audience empathizes with Peggy as she makes efforts to find a lost son. At the same time, there is thrilling suspense that Peggy may lose Tega in the process and that she could suffer a nervous breakdown in case she misses her chance with Tega.

But, again, Igwe pulls another surprise by making Peggy and Tega come together as lovers, while Peggy continues to search for her lost son. Perhaps what Igwe attempts to underscore here is the creation of free space "within women, where purposes are found, and decisions are made, a basis from which they come to terms with their patriarchal societies" (Dipio 107). Although Haynes (2016) notes that *Violated* is "a film about marital issues," I am of the opinion that the film

is also about agency and women's ability to make choices, even in desperate situations. Peggy has two options: to abandon her lost son and settles down to enjoy marriage with Tega or to continue to search for the child that she may not find. However, she chooses to look for her lost son, and she seems to be unperturbed with the possibility that Tega could walk away from the relationship.

In the words of Haynes, "however Peggy may feel, the film makes the marital issues more important than the maternal ones for the audience" (107). In my opinion, I doubt whether the film is about marital issues more than it is about feelings and affection. Although the relationship between Peggy and her daughter Courage "are never more than sketched in perfunctorily," yet there is ample display of love and affection between Mrs. Olu Peters and Junior (108). Even though one may conclude that Mrs. Olu Peter is holding on to Junior as collateral for her marriage, her teary face and emotional reminiscence of how she nursed Junior back to life when Peggy abandoned him, reflects a profound psychological bond between a mother and a child. And, perhaps, it is possible that Peggy understands that she shares no loving relationship with Junior, hence, the decision to leave her with Sumbo while she forms a new family with Tega.

I claim that *Violated* is more about women agency to make an individual decision and not all about marital issues because the film disrupts the Nollywood logic of fertility. In Nollywood, fertility issues are not covered up; they are exposed and scandalized. But in *Violated*, despite the preponderance of questions of paternity, psychological closure is achieved without any public scandal. Here, two women—Sumbo and Peggy—resolve their differences, with one deciding to let go of her child to help the other secure her marriage. What we have here is a cult of sisterhood where psycho-emotional needs rank above natural desires. In this representation, there is a reversal of roles and attitudes. In Nollywood's logic of representation, women are often placed in diametric opposition; they are, most of the time, framed as rivals and ferocious mothers who can sacrifice

their lives to protect their children. Nollywood never misses the opportunity to explore and replay women's motherly instinct. But here, on the premises of care and nurturing, one can make a bold claim that Junior is Sumbo's child in every way. It is she who provides Junior with all the needs: physiological need; safety needs, belongingness, and Love needs.

In this context that the concept of motherhood is complicated—complicated because even though Peggy is the biological mother of Junior, it is Sumbo who performs all the supporting roles in the boy's life—Igwe further suggests that women exhibit dynamic affections for humanity and that they possess kind hearts to accommodate others. This deconstruction of the notion of motherhood connects with a Yoruba maxim: "On bi, ko to on wo" (she who gives birth to a child is not as important as the caregiver). Motherhood, therefore, is not expressed at all times as a factor of biology, and that explains why *Violated* explores the deep inner feelings of Sumbo and Peggy, especially Peggy's willingness not to impose her biological right of possession over Junior. By relinquishing her motherly right of ownership, Peggy can achieve the psychological closure she needs to live happily with Tega and her new child without making a scandal out of Junior's paternity. Unlike other Nollywood films and Africa cinema, the film idealized motherhood vertically; it explains motherhood beyond the biological process of birthing to include rituals of child-rearing and nurturing. In the end, instead of functioning to repress and deny Peggy happiness, the extended definition of motherhood allows her to make decisions that are best for her life and soothing to Sumbo.

In contrast to Peggy, who enjoys a happy end in the film, Mr. Amadi, the rapist, comes to a sad end: Mama Tega fires him from his job, and his embittered wife abandons him when she discovers that Mr. Amadi is the father of both Courage and Junior. Also, there is a repetition of pattern here: Mrs. Amadi choosing to divorce her philandering husband just as Peggy decides to

let Sumbo keep Junior. The fact that Mrs. Amadi could be courageous enough to decide to leave her husband, suggests to me that Igwe is reimagining women's agency; that is, the power to make decisions that directly impact their lives without the fear of social reprimand and cultural sanctions. Apparently, this type of representation is not common in Nollywood films where women who suffer from marital abuses and cultural exploitation often endure emotional injuries because they fear social sanctions and reprimands if they end the relationship.

There is no doubt that Igwe is concerned with issues about women and children in her film, and that she places a high premium on the connection between the home and the society. It is perhaps because of the connection that she establishes between family and the community that informs her juxtapositioning of matters of romance and fertility as central themes in the film. There are few instances of love and romance that are played out melodramatically in the *Violated,* however, "the emotions are often connected to secrets and so express themselves as restlessness, irritability, brittleness, or frustrated anger" (Haynes 109). This is the difference between *Violated* and other Nollywood films where emotion is not connected to a central theme or when connected, are outrageously blown out of proportion (Larkin's Aesthetic of Outrage). Frequently, uncontrolled emotions in Nollywood films escalate to a violent degree to the extent that wives stab their husbands to death because of extramarital affairs and siblings poison their family members because of inheritance. In short, there is often a vulgar display of emotion in Nollywood films to the extent that one begins to wonder whether the narratives are reflections of the immediate Nigerian/African societies or an episode from one of Daniel Fagunwa's magical realism. The sophistication in how Igwe represents women in *Violated* reflects the filmmaker's understanding of women's emotional power and their ability to make psychological resolutions that beat Nollywood's didactic rhetoric. But here in the *Violated,* morality, especially regarding the fact that

Peggy allows Sumbo to keep Junior is weighted and balanced between rational logic and claiming. Even if it is immoral for any mother to give her son away, the rationality behind Peggy's action outweighs the need to keep Junior. When Sumbo, in tears asks: "why do you want us all to suffer, because you want to indulge your belated maternal instinct?", Igwe is passing a message. And that message is asking Peggy to reconsider the foolishness of claiming a child that she had abandoned some eight years ago. And in this way, Igwe portrays Peggy as working from "the fringes of society, transgressing the boundaries defined by longing/not belonging and encouraging spiritual and moral superiority in Africa's hope for the future, the children" (Sheila Petty, 191).

Violated therefore is about desire and feelings, about emotions and empathy and the lack of it. Its logic of representation frames women in a more pluralistic perspective beyond the linear figuration of women in Nollywood. The film also has a robust transnational cinematic orientation regarding its appropriation of everyday narratives and African experiences.

Chapter 5. Sustaining Trash: Auteur Criticism and Nollywood's Future

Many critics of African popular culture and film studies, often, keep an arms-length relationship with Nollywood films. They frequently label the films as low quality disposable cultural products with short lifespans, and they claim that the films are always about intangible aspects of African lives and not about the pressing matters that confront the Nigerian socio-political landscape and the African continent at large. While these claims appear to be true, given the fact that some Nollywood films are still made with shoestring budgets and poorly put together, such condescending label significantly undermines scholarly inquiry about the industry's most accomplished filmmakers who make quality films. While there is a need to focus on the sophistication of style and ideological leanings of Nollywood as a film tradition, it is also critical to pay keen attention to the filmmakers themselves, who make the films, and not just the films. Unfortunately for the Nigerian filmmakers, especially the professional ones, most critics of the industry critique the films and generalize that critique to the entire industry as unsophisticated and trashy.

Bearing this notion in mind, therefore, I have, in the previous chapters, examined the creative abilities of some notable Nollywood filmmakers, whose works reflect professionalism and not the amateurish practices that are prevalent in Nollywood. In exploring the multivalent form of Nollywood films, I have drawn on auteur critical framework as my interpretive model to critique the dominant assumptions that uphold celluloid films as "the authentic" mode of filmmaking in Africa while dismissing video technology as a nondescript tool for filmmaking. Through this study, I have observed that what constitutes the definition of African cinema is more than political films with obvious anticolonial and Pan-African ideological undertones. I also found that the creative potential of some Nollywood filmmakers accommodates explorations of indigenous

cultural values through which they reimagine, renegotiate, and reinterpret postcolonial terrains—political, social, economic, and religious—in Nigeria and Africa. I have identified that Nollywood filmmakers fall into two broad categories—Mainstream and Auteur filmmakers. This dissertation claims that even though the mainstream filmmakers are many and produce more films, the auteur filmmakers, even in their limited numbers, produce films that meet dominant international standards in storytelling and technique. Also, this dissertation advocates for a more open definition of African cinema beyond the old conception, which disenfranchised video filmmakers from being recognized as canonical figures of African filmmaking practice. Paying attention to films of three prominent Nollywood filmmakers—Tunde Kelani, Kunle Afolayan, and Amaka Igwe—this study explores some artistic innovations and stylistic idioms that set the filmmakers apart in the large Nollywood industry.

In chapter one of this dissertation, I claim that Nollywood is not the opposite of any dominant film tradition in the world and that it is a unique film industry that deserves to be studied holistically regarding production processes, aesthetic formulations, and ideological foregrounding. In essence, I claim that the cross-cultural approach that has been, hitherto, deployed to investigate Nollywood is proving incapable of a holistic study of the industry, especially in light of recent cinematic improvements as demonstrated by key filmmakers. I also claim that to keep referring to Nollywood films as "trashy" serves no useful analytic purposes since that would only amount to throwing the baby out with the bathwater (a view that is shared by notable Nollywood scholars and critics such as Manthia Diawara, Jonathan Haynes, and Kenneth Harrow).

For clarification, I maintain that it is not that Nollywood has not enjoyed robust academic attention, but that the extensive scholarly attention always have, too narrowly, focused on genre, actors/actresses and the thematic preoccupations of the films to the extent that the criticisms often

project single narratives about the "unsophisticatedness" of the movie. This mode of critical thinking limits canonical understanding of Nollywood films obscures the agency of the filmmakers, and it creates a categorization that sets up a hierarchy of video and celluloid films.

So, borrowing from Harrow's idea, I have deployed the term "trash" as a rhetorical metaphor that could help explain, explicitly, the uniqueness of Nollywood as a film tradition. I argue in this dissertation that contrary to the notion that Nollywood is always all about exigent narratives and shoddy productions, there are professional filmmakers who adapt cultural practices and re-appropriated exogenous discourses to make quality films that comment on local events and global phenomena. Interestingly, these hybridized methods transform a few Nollywood filmmakers to bricoleurs, who artistically blend available resources to create new forms of visual culture in Nigeria. Evidently, these filmmakers, who I categorized as auteur filmmakers, have made films that have provoked a rereading of Nollywood films, especially with their artistic maneuvering that resulted in the production of a growing body of films that is now called "The New Nollywood."

The "New Nollywood" films are replete with themes that highlight the various problematic issues of the twenty-first century in Africa, such as migration, political corruption, religious intolerance, kidnapping and trans-border trafficking, and etcetera. Therefore, because these films are so richly made regarding their cinematic sophistication and Afrocentric thematic preoccupations, I claim in this dissertation that Nollywood films are essential to the twenty-first-century definition of African cinema. Not only that Nollywood revived audiences' interests in African cinema, but it also provides Africans a platform to reimagine and represent their socio-economic and cultural conditions. And as a result, a few Nollywood filmmakers are qualified to be regarded as canons of African cinema.

In chapter two, to reiterate my argument that Nollywood is not the opposite of other dominant world film traditions, and that a few of its filmmakers merit being referred to as canons of African films (a category that often excludes video filmmakers), I interpreted how Tunde Kelani symbolically embed cultural figures, social imageries and linguistic codes such as proverbs, metonymy and metaphor in his films to represent political inclusion, claim agency for underrepresented groups, and advocate for the preservation of African cultures.

I underscore why Kelani incorporates concepts and ideas from Yoruba culture and tradition in his works to comment on historical and contemporary socio-political events in Nigeria. By integrating history and elements of the multiple Nigerian cultures in his films, Kelani aims to use his works to disseminate reformative ideas that can transform the nation from its present status of a "failed state" to a politically stable country. Like a pastiche, Kelani's works incorporate shared strands of cultural knowledge to help the audiences understand and interpret the various socio-political and economic events that he engages with, and which portray his political and cultural ideologies. Often, these cultural templates are metaphors that provide information for the audiences about government entities and personalities that Kelani allegorizes in his works. And in effect, the metaphors draw audiences' attention to the overarching ideology that he wishes to express in a particular film.

Beyond the insertion of mythology and oral traditions into his works as allegories, Kelani also articulates aspects of African culture: from the practices to the products of culture, he inserts different cultural information into films and expresses delight in preserving those praxes that are almost erased due to the twenty-first-century technology-driven modernity. By representing these cultural artifacts and practices in his works, Kelani is, no doubt, making efforts to archive the fast disappearing Yoruba culture for future generations. On the other hand, this preservation effort has

also opened up counter-opinions about specific cultural practices which privilege patriarchal exploitation and foster subjective feminine ideologies. Also, I argue that The prodigious spread of Kelani's films in Nigeria and abroad has to do with his style of filmmaking that extends beyond his appropriation of Yoruba language and culture. His success as the most celebrated Nollywood filmmaker is occasioned by his professional handling of the camera. The video camera, unlike any of the production equipment in Nollywood, significantly set apart filmmakers in the Industry. Good filmmakers utilize the camera to provide detailed narratives to the audience as well as provide extra-diegetic information that adds visual aesthetic to their works. And Kelani greatly takes advantage of the camera to tell good stories. Through his dexterous handling of the camera, he inserts non-verbal cues in his works to provide the audiences rich visual subtexts that they can interpret for deeper meanings. The camera is so important to Kelani that he never repeats a camera model in his works. I think that in Nollywood, today, Kelani's knowledge of cinematography is exceptional. He is, indeed, the father of "cinematic digital video filmmaking" in Nigeria, if I may use the phrase.

In chapter three, I examined the films of Afolayan and theorized an origin-identity model to describe the uniqueness of the themes that are dear to him, and which he often represents in his films. The origin-identity model that I theorized is informed by Chabal's idea of 'origin' as it relates to African cultural understanding and enunciation. Critical to Afolayan is the concept of identity and nationalism, two big concepts that he uses to question the notion of citizenship. In particular, Afolayan examines how despite the clamor for federalism, ethnocentric biases work to exclude non-indigene citizens who live in places other than their own linguistic and cultural territories, from participating fully in socio-economic activities of their host communities. He uses his films to advocate for "total inclusion" and the erasure of ethnic parochialism in Nigeria and

Africa. Afolayan expresses the importance of ancestral origin in his films, but he claims, through multiple representations that one's ancestral origin, while essential to individual successes, is also almost always insignificant in fulfilling ones' destiny and fate. So, he represents a cosmopolitan ideology that emphasizes cross-border mobility, and how multiple identities are formed in and around geographical locations and sacred boundaries—great spaces from which one can express one's identity and belongingness.

Furthermore, like Kelani, Afolayan represents African traditions, belief systems and cultures in his works. He privileges sacred beliefs and the roles they play in one's life, primarily how they function as metanarratives for explaining destiny and fate. However, unlike Kelani, Afolayan is interested in testing the reliability of traditional ideologies, especially mythical allusions, in the contemporary world. On the one hand, he focuses his cinematic attention on the manifestations of fate and predestination as they emerge from the ruckus and chaos of our neoliberal capitalist world, and on the other hand, he demystifies fate and destiny by claiming that "coincidental events" sometimes disrupt ordinary manifestations of everyday events (See *Irapada,* 2006; *Phone Swap* 2012; and *The Figurine*, 2009).

On nationalism, Afolayan opines that the idea of nationhood is not defined solely by the political bureaucracy and the official red-tapism associated with it, but by the conducts and behaviors of citizens to one another. Through his projection of "good' and 'humane' citizens, Afolayan condemns ethnocentrism and opines that biases of language, religion, and cultural affiliations fracture national unity and cohesion. Therefore, instead of focusing on the issues of faith, ethnic alignment, and cultural superiority, he represents the evil inherent in ethnocentrism and religious privileging. Furthermore, he cinematically reimagines how positive conducts to

fellow citizens could help individuals achieve their goals in life and, how Nigeria, as a country, would benefit from such a tolerant attitude.

Regarding technicalities, I claim in this work that Afolayan is among the few Nollywood filmmakers who understand the importance of camera position and framing angles. Methodically, Afolayan plans his shots so that they can help him tell great stories that are rendered in crisp pictures. Importantly, Afolayan shows his exceptional understanding of lighting as a critical filmmaking tool. More than any of his colleagues, he uses light to strongly compliment the various points of view of his characters as well as use light gradations to embellish specific scenes in his films that he wishes to call the attentions of his audiences to, especially scenes of violence.

In chapter four, I examined the critical position the late Amaka Igwe occupied in Nollywood, arguing through a close formal and narrative analysis that her films have feminist sentiments that disrupt patriarchy and phallocentric ideologies. I posit in this dissertation that unlike Kelani and Afolayan, Igwe provides her audiences ample representations of the various factors mitigating against women and how the Nigerian social system and culture privilege men and undermines self-hood in women. In her portrayals of women, Igwe creates narratives that deconstruct the idea that women are weak, callous, and wayward. She frames women in certain precarious situations that undermine their rights and privileges, which are often orchestrated by the imbalances in gender relations in Nigeria.

So, as a counter-rhetoric to the dominant notion among cultures in Nigeria that women are deceitful and promiscuous, Igwe reimagines and represents how promiscuity and deceit serve as the last escape route for oppressed and abused women to have access to an economic life that will eventually buy their freedom. This does not mean that she sanctions prostitution and other condemned practices as desirable pathways to economic liberty and cultivation of selfhood for

women; she only illuminates the hidden factors that predispose women to accept such condescending lifestyle. In many of her works, therefore, she represents women as hardworking, resilient, intelligent, and passionate. However, she also brings into focus how women, sometimes, create the space for men to manipulate and exploit the women folk as a result of co-wives' rivalry and jealousy.

Furthermore, as a feminist filmmaker whose primary preoccupation is to highlight and represent, in strong visual narratives, the various obstacles confronting the Nigerian women, Igwe concerned herself with issues that border on children and the family. To Igwe, the family is an essential socializing institution where children acquire a formative education that eventually shapes them to become responsible citizens. Therefore, she seems to be suggesting that broken families cause children to be delinquent, and ultimately constitute social nuisances to the nation. Also, she links antisocial behaviors and criminal activities among teenagers and youths in Nigeria to a lack of mentors and positive role models.

Igwe's overarching ideology in Nollywood underscores the harmonious relationship between parents and children on the one hand, and the need for conviviality, love, and unity among spouses/lovers on the other hand. She thinks, through her representations, that the best solution to conflict resolution is dialog and respect for other people, especially as it relates to gender-privileging in Nigeria. This mode of thinking is unique in Nollywood, where there is an imbalance in gender representations, and where each gender accuses the other of various atrocities, most of which are rooted in biases and misinformed opinions. Altogether, her films and television dramas underscore the adverse effects of gender hierarchies in our contemporary societies and how socio-cultural prejudices and misconceptions about women feed the narratives that undermine the status and agency of women in Nigeria.

Also, I claim that apart from exposing how gender stratification and cultural biases undermine women agency in Nigeria, she privileges a specific approach to filmmaking, which settles around a unique storytelling style and camera work. I said because Igwe makes films about family and women, she favors a narrative style that enables her to draw her audiences closer to the core of her metanarratives by making the camera to follow her characters about to assume the "all seeing eye" position of an omniscient narrator. Lastly, I also posit that to settle a scene, Igwe prefers to use transitions to dissolves her shots instead of cutting away to a new scene—a style that allows her plotlines to flow smoothly with minimal interruption from scene change.

Through the three filmmakers that I studied in this dissertation, I have been able to extensively foreground the various ideas that Nollywood filmmakers engage in their works, and how the most excellent examples of Nollywood filmmakers deserve to be inducted as essential canons of African cinema/film. Also, my dissertation has opened up the possibility of applying auteur criticism to the study of video films.

Conclusion: Nollywood and Its Critical Future!

Nollywood, no doubt, has become a global phenomenon whose critical future would best be shaped by auteur criticism. I am not making this assertion because it is easy to conclude so, but because Nollywood is growing meteorically, and it requires a capacious critical framework to study and critique it. The Nollywood that bursts into the academic sphere about three decades ago

is no longer the Nollywood of today. When the late scholar, Foluke Ogunleye (1994), admonished cultural studies scholars and Nollywood enthusiasts not to disdain the industry as "a mere flash in the pan" because it might be "Africa's golden opportunity to have more than a salutary presence in [the] vast marketplace of globalization" she seemed, at that time, to be speaking out of tune (xi). This is because many scholars then, including those who have now published copiously on the industry, had already dismissed the industry as a cinematic phenomenon that will die with time because of its video origin. But today, Nollywood stands so sturdily that other African countries have deemed its filmmaking techniques worthy of emulation (see *Global Nollywood,* 2014).

Even if Nollywood is still not regarded as a national cinema because of the ethnic diversity in Nigeria and because the Nigerian government is yet to rely on it as a source of revenue, the industry is still the most successful cultural product that the nation has exported to the global world in recent years. Not only do we have Nigerian filmmakers collaborating with other African filmmakers and their European and American counterparts, but also Nollywood films are now being shot in major cities and economic capitals of the world—London, New York, Toronto, and Paris—to name a few places.

The idea that Nollywood is a global phenomenon and the "Pan-Africanism we now have" is correct and timely (McCall, 1). This is because apart from how Nollywood films transcend various cultural landscapes in Africa, the films have also gained popularity among African-Americans, Asians, Latinos, and Caribbeans in the US (personal experiences). I have once encountered an elderly Asian woman in a nursing home who binge-watched Nollywood films. Similarly, I have come across Caribbean men and women, Jamaicans to be precise, who have lost count of Nollywood film titles that they have watched. Also, I have Mexican colleagues who can mention names of famous Nollywood stars. Surprisingly, too, I have bought Nollywood films from

a middle-aged white woman in a garage sale in Madison, Wisconsin! So, Nollywood is no longer a film industry whose product is cherished by Africans and their diaspora offspring, but by audiences across linguistic divides and cultural spaces: thanks to Netflix, IrokoTv, and Ndanitv. What could be more magical than the image of a white American man playing the role of a priest in a Yoruba film (*You and I, 2014*)? There is no doubt, therefore, that Nollywood is global and that it has successfully subverted the classical modes of aesthetics formation in African cinema.

Now that Nollywood has been established as a global product, to critique the films in the future adequately, the cross-cultural approach would not be enough to unpack the artistry of each filmmaker; only auteur criticism will provide the best analysis. It will best allow us to sift directorial skills and separate the most insightful leaders from the pack. To better grasp the resonances of the symbolism in the films, the ideological concepts, and the thematic preoccupations the filmmakers embed in their works, critics will have to study the artistic nuances present in each filmmaker's works. Such detailed study will help critics, and film scholars recognize technical and didactic functions of music, reflexive cinematic techniques, sophisticated narrative structure, and juxtaposition of stunning images that carry rich cultural information. The auteur critical model will also engender critical examinations of the various cinematic elements such as lighting, camera movements, director's technical skills, and the overall efforts of filmmakers in the industry.

As I have argued in this dissertation, Nollywood is a unique film industry that is not the opposite of any dominant film tradition in the world. So, to further make the study of Nollywood films appealing, a paradigm shift which favors extensive critical analysis of shots, contextual analysis of the films and an understanding of the ideological orientations of the filmmakers is of utmost importance. Auteur criticism, no doubt, will also reveal how qualitative some Nollywood

films are, and as a result promote the right of the filmmakers to be regarded as canons of African cinema—a move that will ultimately bridge the schism between African films that are formatted in celluloid and African video films.

In conclusion, I am of a firm opinion that this dissertation has revealed that some Nollywood films are not "trashy" as suggested by some critics of the industry, especially Armes Roys. And that to label the films as "trashy" is to superimpose certain foreign attributes of film production on Nollywood, and this will suggest that the industry is the opposite of Hollywood or Bollywood or the Asian film industry. To me, Nollywood is as authentic as any film industry in the world; it is uniquely African in orientation and *glocal*[30] in approach—it caters for the cinematic yearnings of the local audiences and sustains its global appeals. To fully understand Nollywood, there is a critical need to study filmmakers holistically. A holistic study of the filmmakers will mean that when critics, scholars, and the audience watch the films, they look beyond the cinematic errors and the "trashiness" but instead read the unique mode of cinematic expressions that each of the filmmakers works into his/her films. Such readings must also bear in mind the socio-economic conditions under which the filmmakers operate, which, most times, are stressful, time-consuming, and lacking in social amenities.

Lastly, Nollywood has produced its auteurs, even if the number is still relatively small; it will get bigger in years to come. The process began with the "New Nollywood," and it has started yielding positive results. From 2015 to 2016, two auteur filmmakers have joined Nollywood—Daniel Oriahi (*Taxi Driver: Oko Asewo*, 2015) and Kemi Adetiba (The *Wedding Party*, 2016).

[30] Glocal in this instance refers to a multi-perspective understanding of global ideas and local hermeneutics.

Even though the two filmmakers are relatively new to Nollywood, they have proved that they are in the industry to make high quality "world standard" films. Although one may be tempted to dismiss the possibility of having a large pool of auteurs in Nollywood, say, five years from now, given the slow pace at which the industry produced its auteurs, let me quickly sound a warning that I do not foresee a time in Nollywood when auteur filmmakers will outgrow the mainstream filmmakers in number. However, auteur filmmakers will dictate the pace of artistic development in Nollywood. Whatever technical innovations and aesthetics inventions Nollywood auteurs create in their works will go a long way in shaping the industry's overarching idea of cinematic aesthetics. For example, since Afolayan added color to his film, the *Figurine* (2009), mainstream filmmakers have also started engaging the services of colorists to enhance the picture qualities of their films. What this desire to make quality films suggests on the part of the mainstream filmmakers is that they look forward to auteur filmmakers for technical innovation, which they too can copy in their art. To me, therefore, auteur filmmaking is the hope and aspiration of Nollywood; and not until critics of the industry and cultural studies scholars are ready to dismantle the hegemonic definition of African cinema, which privileges celluloid productions, can Nollywood auteurs be regarded as canons of African films.

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