

A Critical Study of History and Nationalist Discourse in Nollywood Narratives: Tunde Kelani's *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò*

by

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Abstract

This article examines the contribution that Nigerian Nollywood cinema makes to the discourse of nationalism and history in post-independent Nigeria and in other African countries. Specifically, it explores how Tunde Kelani's films *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò* serve as socio-political weapons that condemn authoritarianism in Nigeria and in Africa. Kelani's works move from aesthetic mode to foreground cinema as a strong arm of constructing nationalism, allowing the audience to read ordinary Nigerians as political conscious, despite pervasive repression. With an underpinning of theory of nationalism, this article demonstrates how the two films advocate sovereignty by according voice to combat bad administration. It also argues for an inward look into solving the African socio-political predicament by suggesting an exploration of the wealth of African culture to attain a stable democracy.

Key Words: nationalist discourse, sovereignty, history, socio-political, Nigeria, Africa.

Introduction

Most literary critics of African Nationalism focus more on canonical texts and literatures written in languages of ex-colonizers, – English, French, or Portuguese – and overlook the rich works of literature in African languages such as Hausa, Igbo, Twi, Yorùbá etc. Following *Saworo Ide* (1999) and *Agogo Èèwò* (2002), films that are encoded in the rich culture of Yorùbá language, I address the contribution of the Nollywood cinema to nationalist criticism within the framework of the socio-political history of Nigeria. According to Christopher Miller African literature (by implication Nollywood cinema) addresses the question of the nation; thereby contributing to a national discourse that enriches an emergent 'universe of discourse' that is specific to post-independent African/Nigerian society (147).

Using Miller's and other nationalist theories, I apply hermeneutics and historical perspectives to study nationalistic concepts in the above films. I contend that these works register the voices of common people as a weapon for fighting against African authoritarianism which impedes the building of an egalitarian society and nation.

Kelani, a frontline internationally sought-after Nollywood director, is one of the most prolific African directors with an average of one film per year between the periods of 1993-2010 (Adesokan 2011 82). Even though Kelani maintains that his works cannot be categorized under the rubric of Nollywood, his themes and the historical timeline of production of video films (from 1990s to the present) fall in line with the era of serious structural transformations that witnessed "the emergence of some self-consciously political directors... whose orientation reflects the fragmentation of social and political choices during and after the military era" in Nigeria (Adesokan 2009 2). The discursive negotiation of nationalism in Nollywood that emanates from the structural transformation in Nigerian politics, especially from the 1960s, forms my main focus in this essay. Although reference is made to other African countries, my analysis of the two films draws most specifically on the Nigerian socio-political situation. The purpose is to elucidate how Kelani weaves political and socio-cultural discourses in *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èwò* in response to nationalist and historical events in Nigeria and indirectly some African nations.

Theory

The survival of a nation underpins the foundation of nationalism, for there is the need for a nation or its anticipation before one can talk about nationalism. With this in mind, Benedict Anderson conceives of a nation as "an imagined political community" (124). First the idea of a nation¹ is a space occupied by a group of people, making a nation communally based, limited and also sovereign in nature. The limitation is caused by the fact that no nation can solely encompass all the members of a particular human race. Yet, similar races exist in different nations across the continents due to different kinds of displacement (planned or accidental); for example the world-wide Jewish Diaspora and the presence of the Black race dispersed beyond Africa. Second, a nation is considered sovereign due to its formation from specifically socio-historical communities in which its members enjoy freedom. Sovereignty as a concept has diverse interpretations but in our argument a sovereign state, devoid of individualism, has the responsibility of making meaningful decisions and choices in the total interest of the land and the people. Anderson's third stipulation is that a nation as a community considers itself to have a deep horizontal comradeship² in spite of the diverse social strata within such a community. Regardless of social class, nationalists tend to demonstrate strong commitment to the survival of their nation. Such nationals are activists who clamor for improvement in the affairs of their nation. Their discourse is a nationalist one that interrogates the administration of their nations in a meaningful manner.

The certainty of every nationalist movement is that it is always predicated on existing oppression or an anticipated oppression by a ruling power. Disparity or inequality in the distribution of the nation's resources, relative deprivation, and status discrepancies are elements that precipitate nationalism among diverse groups in a nation.

Nationalist discourse projects the self-interest of its practitioners in matters of the management of the political, social and economic affairs of a community of people who identify with a common territory. For example, Segun Gbadegesin (7) describes nationalism as a principle of self-determination that enables members of a national community to decide on issues that concern the welfare of their society. In this case, a nation's political community may be multinational or multiethnic especially in the example of large nations formed out of an earlier amalgamation of different states due, for example, to colonialism. In such a setting, a sense of nationalism could arise if a particular group feels out of place and begins to seek or campaign for self-determination based on their presumed distinct identity. While a campaign of this nature may be seen as disruptive, such demand has nationalist tendencies in that the diversity and self-determination found in a multiethnic setting can lead to the interrogation of the sanctity of the extant nation.

Given that most African nations are multiethnic by nature; post-independent nationalism includes the criticism of disproportionate distribution of the resources of the nation. Paul Brass (41) observes that the conversion of cultural differences into bases for political differentiation in multiethnic settings can also bring forth the concept of nationalism. In these societies the existence of a socially mobilized population within the nation is enough to trigger nationalist discourse in the citizens' day-to-day contributions to the socio-political situation of their community.

The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups constitute resources for nationalists - politicians, policy maker, writers, filmmakers, and so on – in the campaign to ensure that social and political advantages are spread to all and sundry. Cultural forms, for example:

become symbols and referents for the identification of members of the group, which are called up in order to create a political identity more easily. The symbols used to create a political identity can also be shifted to adjust to political circumstances and the limitations imposed by state authorities. (Brass 15)

The development of nationalism such as in many independent African countries always highlights the inequality in the distribution of national resources among marginalized ethnic groups. Post-independent nationalism arises in response to continuous exploitation of one social class by another, indeed, some argue that nationalism is a response to apparent inequality, asserting that nationalism arises when the masses feel frustrated and deprived as a result of an observed imbalance in the distribution of goods and services in their society (Lawoti and Hangen 8; Eaton 16). Whatever the case, the certainty of every nationalist movement is that it is always predicated on an existing or anticipated oppression by a ruling power.

Immediately after African countries gained independence, African writers and filmmakers (like in the colonial era) show interest in the political representation of the inadequacies of the new postcolonial states inherited from colonizers. In respect of the work of these writers, Christopher Miller argues that “[T]he push for national literatures among critics... suggests the possibility of seeing African nation-states in something other than a pathological way, as ‘normal’ polities that have resolved (or, at least, ended the debate over) the question of their own existence” (149). The African writers’ discourse centers on the means to realize a nation in its proper sense, for in reality the entities inherited from colonizers were mere territorial boundaries and not fully fledged nations in any real sense of the word. To buttress the writers’ view points, characters that represent commoners display agency in fiction written to combat autocracy. This is all the more so because leaders of such states manifest the characteristics of the maladministration of erstwhile colonizers. Thus, these post-independent writers are nationalists whose works critique the self-government as apparatus for reproducing and perpetuating inequality. To this end literary nationalism constitutes “the political reality of discourse within nation-state borders, the power of government to influence...” literary or popular culture (Miller 151). But the critique of nationalism goes beyond novels; poems, music and especially films serve to critique the excesses of independent African states.

Nollywood Cinema

Like most nationalist literature, Nollywood cinema is a synthesis of historical, political, economic, social, and cultural institutions, as they manifest in the real life experiences of post-independent Nigeria and, indeed, in a number of African countries, as well. Nollywood cinema, a product of Yorùbá traveling theatre and the Igbo Onitsha Market Literature drama series became well established at the end of the various military regimes in Nigeria. In the era of an oppressive government intolerant of criticism, the Nollywood cinema remains one of the few vibrant organs of the society whose voice is not smothered by these autocratic regimes of post-independent Nigeria. This characteristic explains why the Film Policy for Nigeria reiterates one of its objectives as being “to enable [cinema] contribute to national development.” As Foluke Ogunleye specifies:

Many of the filmmakers have also assigned to themselves the role of socio-political commentators. We therefore see in their films a stern rebuke against materialism and crass consumerism on the part of the masses and expressions of disenchantment with aspects of governance, and with activities of agents of oppression- the police and the army. (8)

Apart from being the cultural vanguard in the entertainment industry, Nollywood cinema contributes to understanding the socio-political affairs of post-independent Nigeria in which democratic and disruptive military regimes alternated governance. Under such circumstances, film or fiction texts are deployed as the *vox populi* employing satire or farce as a means of implementing a nationalist discourse that oppressive government would normally not allow from regular populace. Beginning in the 1990s, a period when the world decried authoritarian regimes that pervaded African countries, Nollywood cinema became more relevant in its nationalist discourse via films that condemn autocratic African regimes.

Saworo Ide/ a talking drum with brass bells and *Agogo Èèwò*/ sacred gong are Nollywoodian versions of portraying the past through the allegoric narratives of Jogbo, an imaginary African nation.³ Both films feature Jogbo kings/rulers. *Saworo Ide* features Lápité depicted as a traditional king/ civil ruler, and Colonel Làgàta a military head of state and usurper of Jogbo's throne. In *Agogo Èèwò Bòsípò* – the king – adds new chiefs to the corrupt cabinet – Balógun, Séríkí, Òsì and Òtún –who had served under Lápité and Làgàta. Most of these ruling elites ignore the voice of the people and the rich cultural injunctions of their nation to collaborate with foreign loggers, defrauding Jogbo land and entrenching massive oppression of the inhabitants. Active nationalists are Jogbo's various social and generational levels – the farmers, the youth, including the much younger children Lébe, Eyébà and Labùà – and the three old sages i. e. Òpálàbà and Iyùn who represent grandparents, and finally Amawomaro the diviner. They continue to raise their voices in the effort to call nationalist awareness to the seeking of justice and critiquing of the socio-political degradation of life in Jogbo.

People's Voice and Democracy

From the onset, the titles of the two films *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò* draw allusions to the cultural symbol of voice of the African people. The drum with the brass bells and the sacred gong are cultural symbols and means of communication⁴ in African societies. Sound as symbols of the titles of the films has metaphoric significance. The sound of the Saworo Ide – suggests a nationalist symbol of the culture, the voice of and commitment to the people of Jogbo that Lápité rejects by refusing to take an oath of office and to have ritual incision⁵ which he should share with Àyàngalú, Jogbo chief drummer. It is noteworthy that Àyàngalú and his drum suggest the voice of Jogbo commoners (Ashaolu 121).

The ritual blood incision of the two characters demonstrates a blood link, a form of bond between the ruler and the people; Lápité breaks the bond by his refusal of oath of office and ritual blood incision. Through Lápité's refusal of the incision and oath taking, the audience is able to deduce an antithesis of good leadership as Lápité's refusal draws attention to post-independent Nigerian rulers' inability to adhere to just governance right from the beginning. The critique of Nigerian leaders' history becomes more poignant as the scene, in which Lápité rejects incision and oath, is portrayed against the backdrop of the walls painted green and white, the colors of the Nigerian national flag. A sequel to the betrayed bond leads to his rejection of the people's voice: "Kò sí àyonuso fún ará ilú kankan. Èmi ò lórò kankan báwon so, inú won n bí èmi báyí. No citizen of Jogbo dares talk to me. I have nothing to tell them, I am mad at them right now."⁶

Furthermore, Lápité declares ritual incision ceremony closed, threatening the diviners with a revolver and declaring: "mo ní a ti parí orò, a ti setán- I said the ceremony is over as far as I am concerned." His use of a gun illustrates the power of force, a means through which certain rulers smother the voice of the people. The gun represents an anti-democratic symbol, seen via prevalent military coups in post-independent Africa. Through Lápité's roles it also represents an object that counters the people's will. Through the use of a gun, this scene can be read as the process of governance-by-force, a means through which some African leaders impose their will on the people. For example, Sisk maintains that the war in Liberia was caused by a regime that has been accurately described as dysfunctional and autocratic (116), with its use of gun against any form of opposition. In the films under consideration, the gun symbolizes Lápité's unjust means of remaining in power as he and his chiefs widely plot the assassination of their opponents. Their roles call the audience's attention to similar characters in Ray Eyiunmi's anti-democratic film *Ojelu/The Squanderers* (2011), another Nollywood production. It is not surprising that the gun in *Saworo Ide* represents the practice of political antagonism among Nigerian politicians in the present Fourth Republic where killing of party opponent is fairly common.

Lápité walking out on the diviners at the ceremony underscores the minds of the ordinary people in post-colonial Africa as Àyàngalú comments: "[o]ba ara rẹ̀ mọ̀ l'elẹ̀yí. This is a king for himself." The issue of serving the nation runs parallel to the need to be bound to the people of Jogbo via a ritual incision that underscores a blood-related pact between the drummer, the King, and the commoners. Lápité's blunt rebuff of the people's wish suggests his self-centeredness. By focusing on himself to the detriment of the nation, nationalism becomes less important than individual power, which highlights his rejection of people-oriented communal ideals, characteristics of traditional African culture.

Whereas Lápité refuses the oath taking and incision so that he can be wealthy via corruption on the throne, his self-interest exhibits an anti-nationalist inclination of certain African rulers who serve their personal interest rather than the interest of the masses. His refusal of the two icons of assumption of office spells a disjunction between the king and the nation. Not only does Kelani argue forcefully about the upholding of cultural nationalism emblemized by the ritual incision, but he also places strong emphasis on nationalist discourse which advocates allegiance to the nation. The irony of taking the oath of office for post-colonial rulers in African history lies in the fact that, upon assumption of office, the oath becomes mere words to which such leaders never adhered. Lápité's refusal to take the oath of office also exemplifies a parody of the non-fulfillment of electoral promises that politicians make to voters before election.

That *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò* are nationalist as well as historical films is evident in the fact that many scenes allude to valid historical events in the socio-political terrain of Nigeria. For instance, Òpálàbà draws reference to the pre-colonial history of the Yorùbá in the portrayal of good and bad governances of the 18th century Old Oyo Empire. Òpálàbà, in his historical nationalist discourse, romanticizes the regime of Aláàfin Abíódún during which the Yorùbá people enjoyed a peaceful reign (Akinyemi 2007 130). Because chaos reigns in Jogbo, Òpálàbà romanticizes: "Abíódún ò bá padà wá j'oba. Abíódún I wish your reign could be repeated."⁷ While Òpálàbà shows nostalgia for this historic regime to be re-established in Jogbo and, by implication, in post-colonial Nigeria, he decries Aólè Arógangan's regime of the same Oyo Empire. The sage laments: "L'áyé Aólè la d'àdìkalè. L'áyé Arógangan l'òpòlò gb'òde. We packed our luggage to go on exile during Aólè Arógangan's reign. Frogs invaded the city during his reign." At the end of Òpálàbà's homily, Kelani's message comes to the fore with pathos because such reference to historic past foregrounds the present Jogbo in want of a political ideal. Òpálàbà likens the present regime in Jogbo to that of historic 18th century Aólè Arógangan's regime (Akinyemi 2004 87), when life was difficult for the Yorùbás. This comparison strikes the balance between past and present governments in his campaign for the nationalist's need to draw on historic African sources and cultural ideals- symbolized by Abíódún's regime- in order for Jogbo (and by extension Nigeria) to experience a peaceful reign.

The absence of a peaceful reign is an evidence of failed civilian and incessant dictatorship regimes currently under lull, which characterize most African countries. Just like most African countries, Jogbo also exhibits the history of successive regimes, both civilian and military, as we have witnessed in Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, to mention a few. In particular, Nigeria's recent history becomes pertinent in interpreting Làgàtà's seizure of power and wearing a mufti flowing gown over his army uniform.⁸ By donning the sacred brass crown/ *adé ide*, Làgàtà ridicules democracy and the election process in Jogbo. But Kelani wastes no time in repudiating the historical interference of the army in African countries for, upon donning the brass crown, Làgàtà is struck dead as he listens to the magical drumming of *Saworo ide*.

His death is historically reminiscent of Nigeria's General Sani Abacha, a military head of state, who died suddenly in June 1998 around the time he wanted to succeed himself as the president of Nigeria. Làgàtà's self-succession to the throne is a symbolic critique of military intervention via a coup d'état that was a common occurrence in most African countries from the 1970s to very recent times.

Just after ascending to the throne via a coup d'état, Làgàtà seeks to validate his stake in Jogbo politics as he declares:

Mo sì ti d'ara yín l'ónì o, èmi Làgàtà yó dé adé ide lóníí. Nípa béè, ìdílé tó n joba nílú Jogbo ti lé 'kan báyií. Àwa ológun náàa ti di ìdílé tí yòò ma j'oba n'ílú Jogbo. Today, I become one of you as I wear the brass crown. By so doing, I have added a number to the royal lineages of Jogbo. We, the military, have become a ruling house in Jogbo.

Làgàtà's speech enables the audience to read an abuse of sovereignty much more so that colonel Làgàtà is a professional soldier, and as such, untrained for governance. While his speech registers autocracy, an antithesis of the people's voice, it hints at the misnomer in governance characteristic of most ruling military juntas in Africa.

In realistic traits; Làgàtà's roles satirizes Sani Abacha, one of the most notorious military rulers in African history.⁹ Just like Sani Abacha displayed anti-nationalist traits of dictators, Làgàtà upon ascending the throne of Oníjogbo, agrees with Balógun and Séríkí to clamp down on Jogbo human rights activists,¹⁰ and other nationalist groups. Làgàtà's intolerance of the opposition becomes another means of mimicking the Nigerian history of the military rule of the 1990s. It satirizes the historical Abuja two-million-man march in support of Abacha's insistence on self-succession from a military ruler to a civilian president in 1998. Just as some Nigerians participated in this real march, *Saworo Ide* features a similar march of sycophants who identify with the autocratic military rule of Làgàtà as the Oníjogbo of Jogbo land. They acknowledge Làgàtà's rule chanting "ti Làgàtà l'àwa ó se, ti Làgàtà l'àwa ó se. È bá à tàkìti ké forí sole - We support Làgàtà whether you like it or not, we are for Làgàtà." It becomes evident that nationalist identification is not considered relevant; rather individualism and the support for even bad regimes are celebrated. The sycophants' march and their individualistic roles enunciate the fact that preference for individual survival over nationalism is one means of hindering national developments. That military government is anti-nationalistic becomes evident in the way Kelani chastises individualism given that Làgàtà, with whom these self-interested sycophants identify, dies upon wearing the traditional brass crown. The brass crown is significant and symbolic because, it is the prerogative of Jogbo kings and in the story line it is linked with the brass bells (saworo ide), which is in the custody of Àyàngalú.

It is significant that Kelani's lens also captures characters who exhibit proper nationalist traits for the survival of Jogbo. Even though Jogbo society reaches what Adesokan describes as "the state of emergency" (2009 6), progressive townspeople maintain an activist stand in their nationalistic determination to save Jogbo from total socio-political collapse. At the beginning of Lápité's reign, a Jogbo farmers' group seeks justice when they complain about foreign loggers' destruction of natural resources. At the group's public manifestation, serious issues are raised such as the lack of political accountability and the problem of environmental degradation. But Lápité refuses to grant the farmers an audience. The latter decry: "Tani yó gbà wá kalè l'ógun agégedú- (2ce). Kò s'ígi n'ígbó kò s'éranko, kò sí kòkó mó kò s'awùsá. Lápité ko tó j'oyè o mo óhun to wí. Who will save us from the affliction of loggers? They deplete the forest, no more trees, no more animals, no cash crops, and no food crops. Lápité, you made many promises before you ascended the throne." Lápité's insensitivity to their cause makes Fádíyà, the farmers' leader, to engage his group against the plunderers of natural resources in order to save Jogbo from economic and environmental strangulation occasioned by the activities of the cabal.

The nationalist scuffle between Lápité and the farmers elicits a replay of the historical uproar of the Àgbékòyà (Farmers-Say-No-to-Oppression) Movement¹¹ against the government of the Western State of Nigeria in the late 1960s. Just as the Àgbékòyàs clamored and denounced government policies that disfavored agriculture and cash crop exportation in Nigeria (Adeniran 365), the Jogbo farmers' movement opposes the loggers' activities and seeks justice from Lápité's anti-progressive laws. More importantly, the farmers' voices underpin the fact that sovereignty belongs to the people. The subtle reference to Àgbékòyà in *Saworo Ide* is a nationalist discourse that suggests a way for the government to learn from historical mistakes.

In *Saworo Ide*, Kelani emphasizes the resoluteness of the Jogbo farmers' group as it metamorphoses into a youth coalition which enables the audience to read the indomitable power of the voice of the people. The transition of Jogbo farmers' movement into a larger coalition encompasses the youth of the community in their collective campaign for social change. This coalition evokes the emergence of the Oòduà People's Congress (OPC), a nationalist activist movement, formed in the 1990s in South-western Nigeria. The OPC, similar to Fádíyà's call to his townsmen, sets out to challenge the government of Nigeria in the neglect of its social, economic and political responsibilities to her people.

Simultaneously as the farmers' group and the youth activists struggle to redeem Jogbo's battered resources, Lápité reinforces security for unrestrained exploitation of forest resources by foreign¹² loggers. The resources under contest represent the national economy and its protection by Jogbo activists; the resources symbolize the preservation of the Jogbo nation itself. From a more recent history, the loggers' threat to return to their country if the activists persist becomes an allegory of the current militancy that foreign oil companies face in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. All the while, Lápité's rejection of the nationalists' call for change illustrates how Nigerian leaders ignore the cries of environmental degradation of the Ijaw land in the Niger-Delta.¹³

Oral Literature

What makes Kelani's reference to history more interesting is that he digs deeply into the rich language and culture of the Yorùbá to evoke nationalist discourse through the use of orature, i.e. oral literature- poem, proverbs, songs, games and ditties to send cautions about the future of national stability in the political landscape of Nigeria. For Akintunde Akinyemi, oral literature in the two films constitutes a means of preserving oral literary form (2004 123), but in this study we would like to contend that their use underpins the director's effort to invest oral literature discourse with the responsibility of propagating cultural and political nationalism. Mostly articulated by commoners in Jogbo, within these ordinary entertaining artistic renditions are inserted the power of nationalist discourse that authenticates the supremacy of the sovereignty of the people over autocratic government. The films prove that: "oral literature has increasingly been used and manipulated as part of political rhetoric" (Kaschula xiii) in African societies. For instance, *Saworo Ide* opens with a scene where ifa incantations are chanted followed by another view in which the ancient Onjogbo hands over the pact between the Jogbo kings and the people. *Agogo Èèwo* also begins with Òpálàbà's poetic recitation about the intricacies of administering Jogbo and, by allusion post-independent Nigeria. His constant oratory rhetorics, "Jogbo bí orò, Jogbo bí orógbó. Jogbo akin to the fearful oro cult,¹⁴ Jogbo bitter like the bitter kola" lay bare the pervasiveness of brutal governance in place.

The two films show that oral literature – whether poetry, songs, or plays – becomes a discourse and weapon of exposing and denouncing the excesses of the ruling class. It allows the oppressed masses to gleefully register their nationalist condemnation of bad governance. This kind of discourse packaged in oral literature enables Kelani to uphold his role as a nationalist with "freedom: the power to say no" (Teno 70-71) to oppressive governance in Africa. In this way, oral literature (song, poem, tongue twisters) registers Jogbo commoners as true nationalists, substantiating the fact that sovereignty lies in the people's voice. The oral discourse hints at the demand for upholding sovereignty because careful attention paid to poems, songs and games demonstrates the power of artistic aesthetics. It also allows most of the singers, tongue twisters and poets to get away from the iron arms of autocratic Jogbo rulers – Lápíté and Làgàtà.

Apart from nationalist discourse in songs between Iyùn and her grandchildren, Kelani evokes nationalist discourse that reproaches political malpractices as Eyébà, Lébe and Labùà – three children of Jogbo- argue over taking turns with a yo-yo that Eyébà monopolizes. He holds fast to the yo-yo, prompting questions from the others:

Lébe: Jé k'emi náà fàá, sé'wo nìkan lo fé máa fàá ni? It's my turn to swing it.
 Eyébà: "Kínni? Méèlò ni mo tí ì fà? Mo sèsè bèrè ni o." What? How many turns have I had? I have just started.
 Labùà: Há há, sé'wo nìkan lo fé máa fàá ni? J'e k'áwa tókù náà fàá diè ká má fàá ní àgbàfà. Is it only you? Don't be selfish, let us swing it in turns.
 Eyébà: E ò kúkú mà fà náà ... You are not even good at it.
 Lébe: Ta ló bá o só bè? Èmi ganan, mò lè fàá dáadàa jù ó lo. Who tells you so? I'm better at it than you are.
 Eyébà: Èmi ni mo l'áse lóri kànnàkànnà, mo sì lè féyin yòókù fà. You can have a go at it only with my permission.

Eyébà's refusal to take turns is a parody of African leaders and their inclination to hold on to power forever. The tussle over who should swing the yo-yo, a mere toy, becomes significant as it implies that power play is childish. Eyébà personifies greed, not at playing with the yo-yo but at holding on to it [power]. His role evokes an antithesis to democratic ideals. The ensuing arguments evoke the constant dispute that characterizes African nations in their political power plays. First, the yo-yo represents power, while the dispute symbolizes a nationalist discourse of power tussles that chastises most Nigerians and indeed African leadership patterns. A close attention to the children's dispute shows that Eyébà claims Lébe and Labùà do not know how to play the yo-yo well. But banal as the children's play seems, Eyébà's hold to power and his selfish character draws upon some African leaders e.g. Robert Mugabe (Zimbabwe), Obiang Nguema (Equatorial Guinea) Paul Biya of Cameroon and even Nigeria's Ibrahim Babangida's similar claims to stay in power. Second, Lébe and Labùà's challenge to Eyébà's monopoly of power concurs with Larry Diamond that where the system remains "unfair and rulers [are] abusive, African civil societies are becoming more vigorous, experienced, and committed to democratic norms, challenging constitutional violations and demanding political accountability" (xii). Diamond's statement attests also to contemporary power tussles in Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Socio-Economy

Beyond his nationalist view of power sharing, the director also broaches issues in Jogbo nation's economy to display the reality of an endemic corruption that threatens the success of major democratic institutions in Africa. Kelani castigates the mismanagement of the Nigerian economy not only in the films under consideration but also in his other works, for instance *Koseegbe* (1995). While the masses campaign for change in *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò*; in *Koseegbe*, Mákùn a customs officer and a forthright character contends with the hyper-corrupt system of the Nigerian Customs and Excise. In *Agogo Èèwò*, the audience discovers that nationalist discourse can sometimes be generated when the masses accost Bòsípò and demand to know the rationale behind the corruption of his cabinet.

“Nígbà tí e d’órí oyè, se bí e l’érí l’éka fún wa wípé e ó dékun ìwà ìbàjé. Kábíyèsí, ó se wá jé léhìnkùlé yín ganan n’ìwà ìbàjé òhún ti wá n gbérí? When you ascended the throne, you promised to eradicate corruption. Your Highness, how come corruption thrives under your administration?” Their question underscores the projection of the nationalist discourse of economic transparency as an aspect of sovereign power that lies in the hands of the governed. Here the masses condemn the prevalent corruption and blame the economic failure of Jogbo on the greed and insensitivity of its ruling elites.

The films’ critique of economic nationalism also extends to issues of unemployment, battered currency, dependence on foreign economies, massive emigration and wanton stealing of public funds, the wide gap between the ruling elites and the ruled, and so on. For instance, the narration is characterized by the use of imagery and allusions to the breakdown of national economy of Jogbo. Implication for the depleted economy of Jogbo manifests in Òpálàbà’s discourse, underscoring the deplorable condition of the national currency of Jogbo. In a letter to his son Fálolá, who resides in an un-named Western country, the extent of Jogbo’s economic degradation, corruption and the attendant trauma of its inhabitants come to the fore. Old man Òpálàbà dictates these words for Eyébà, his school age grandson, to write:

“Adie ilú Jogbo ti bà l’ókùn, ara o r’okùn ara o r’adie ni o. Bí òò bá fowó ránsé, owó díè ni kó fi ránsé sí mi o, owó tiwa ti ya yèyè. Kó má sì ra mótò ránsé si mi o àwon olè ò jé kí àwon onímótò o simi nì’lú o. Jogbo’s situation is very tense now. If you would send money let it be a small subsistence as our currency is now worthless. Cars are out of it because armed robbers make life difficult for car owners.”

Fálolá, to whom the letter is addressed calls to mind the large scale emigration of capable Nigerian hands to the West due to the poor economy and insecurity, hence Òpálàbà’s advice in an earlier letter that Fálolá should not consider returning to Jogbo because of its political and economic instabilities.

Apart from Òpálàbà’s observations on the economic crisis, his letter also underscores the pervasive insecurity of the people of Jogbo. Just as neither money nor wealth guarantees comfort and safety in Jogbo, insecurity and robbery pervade in Nigeria. More significantly, the film highlights the unequal distribution of national wealth typical of corrupt political systems. However, implicit in weak and corrupt nations such as Jogbo is the understanding that economic crisis looms large¹⁵ as is the case in present day Nigeria. Òpálàbà’s missive broaches dysfunctional national economies as violent crimes and unemployment create a backdrop for life-threatening armed robberies in Jogbo. Similar situation explains the rationale for introducing the Structural Adjustment Program¹⁶ in Nigeria in the 1980s. Poignant scenes in the two films mimic how innocent people are injured, raped and killed by hoodlums in broad daylight, thus underscoring the allusion to Wole Soyinka’s *Season of Anomy* (1973).

The economic breakdown becomes striking in Agogo Èèwò after a daylight robbery in a market; an unnamed trader deplores the state of Jogbo society: “E ò e rí pe ayé Jogbo ti wá bàjé tán po! You see! Jogbo is now in a complete mess!” Further, Jogbo’s national economy comes under lampoon in the words of the armed robber who discovers a condom in the pocket of his victim, a cab driver. The former lambasts the cabbie in nationalist terms: “O ò tiè lóótó lénu. Ara nnkan t’ílú ò fi tòrò nìyí. You can’t even tell the truth. That is why this nation is not progressing.” The robber then pockets the condom as part of his booty. A national virtue of ‘asset’ (condom) declaration may seem out of place here, yet such a discourse goes to all citizens rather than to the robbed. It is ironic and humorous that such moral teaching comes from an armed robber. Giving moral voice to a criminal such as in this scene is not a common nationalist discourse. However, it is in this manner that even the perverted in the society contribute indirectly to a nationalist discourse that drives home the extent of social degradation currently in place. The object of contention, condom, can be read as a metaphor of economic and demographic regulation. It illustrates a message of nationalist discourse of family planning – a practice very relevant for mitigating national economic hardship in a poor economy such as Nigeria with her ever-increasing population¹⁷ and dwindling per capita income. The robber’s discourse suggests that a planned family via the use of condom may be a check to national overpopulation which is inimical to a battered economy. This scene underscores honesty of assets declaration and planned life as the ideals of a nation that seeks to enjoy national economic buoyancy.

In *Agogo Èèwò*, nationalist discourse and economic survival of Jogbo go hand-in-hand. Due to the excessive corruption of Jogbo rulers and chiefs during Bòsípò’s reign, foreign investors propose the privatization of Jogbo industries. Privatization, though based on the premise of national development, suggests a loss of control of national resources by Bòsípò’s regime. This sort of privatization throws into relief the outcome of indiscriminate corruption and the decline of the national economy of Jogbo. The recommendation of privatization by foreign investors evokes the story of a nation in economic distress. Once again, the commoners’ voice prevails as Bòsípò’s interest in privatization earns him the nickname “akótilétà, arungún squanderer of the common heritage.” It is significant then that *Agogo Èèwò* identifies economic mismanagement as one of the failures of African government in the post-independent era. Jogbo’s citizens’ anti-privatization discourse lends credence to such critique against privatization of industries in the history of Nigeria both in 1988 during the military regime and the early 2000s when the Nigerian democratically elected government embarked on privatization of government-owned companies.

Conclusion

Saworo Ide and *Agogo Èèwò* exemplify Kelani's campaigns for a nationalist awareness of the people's voice as it is tied to sovereignty through which those in power should be called upon to serve the people and not vice versa. Implicit in his depiction of Nigerian society is the idea that via his non-ruling characters, Kelani demonstrates how Nigerian nationalists never relent in their efforts to ensure that sovereignty prevails in Nigeria. The incorporation of the aged and especially young characters in the discourse of the nation serves the purpose of raising hope about the future of socio-political trends in Nigeria. By so doing, people's voice condemns individual self-interest and integrates unifying nationalism through which a nation should draw from its past to understand the present and to guide its future.

Both films have provided a space for reading the concept of postcolonial nationalism and the history of Nigeria/African nation states. However, the larger part of the socio-political challenge that troubles Nigeria/African countries still remains to be explored. Even though *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò* center on Nigeria's post-colonial nationalist discourse and history; they focus only a part out of the whole of the region. In other words, the nationalist issues, though well represented in *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò*, cover only a single geographical zone – the Yorubaland in the south-western region of Nigeria. This regional representation can be explained by the fact that Nollywood cinema is carved into the three major regions – the Hausa, the Igbo and the Yorùbá – three principal linguistic zones of Nigeria. But the concept of nationalism and history of a nation goes beyond a specific part of a country as diverse as Nigeria with over two hundred ethnic groups (Adediji, Ademola 212). Among others, religious violence and ethnic issues are poignant problems that undermine the stability of Nigeria. Perhaps, a critical work on the problematics of religious and ethnic violence, will provide an all-round study of Nollywood narratives.

Endnotes:

¹. The term nation, state and nation-state are used interchangeably, yet they have different meanings. A nation is a group of people who share common descent, culture, language and emotional identity. The people may or may not necessarily share the same territory, for example in Africa the Yorubas exist in more than one country. In geographical terms, a nation consists of a territory occupied by a single ethnic group or many ethnicities. A state is an organized political government under which people of a nation or a group of nations are ruled within a territory. A nation-state is a state or country populated primarily by the people of one nationality, that is people sharing the same origin, culture and language. It is also a sovereign government consisting of an independent geo-political unit inhabited predominantly by a people sharing the same culture, history, and language.

An example is the Lesotho where over 99% of the population are Basotho where the geographic territories occupied by boundaries of an ethnic population and a political state coincide. George White (27) clarifies the terms using the nation as a synonym for such words as country and, state rather as a human group identity. Country and state refers to a politically organized territory which shows that human identity is closely tied to place and territory. Indeed the term nation-state reflects the intimate bonds of people and place.

². Anderson conceives of horizontal comradeship as the sharing of collective values and sentiments which makes it possible for all citizens of a nation, regardless of their social, economic and political status, to share the same sense of commitment that ensures the survival of their nation. See Benedict Anderson “Imagined Communities.” in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. Ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Routledge, 2006, p. 124.

³. Oral tradition as a means of narration employs the method of allusion and reference to imaginary lands, typical of nationalist weapons used against colonial hegemony in Algeria. Frantz Fanon stresses the importance of oral tradition which is more vibrant in African cinema than in literature. Such narration of nationalism opens with “What I am going to tell you happened somewhere else...” (*Wretched of the Earth* 2004, 174), anticipating Kelani’s introduction of Jogbo- an imaginary land in *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Èèwò*.

⁴. Saworo Ide the brass bells are attached to ‘talking drum’ – a drum capable of giving tonal Yorùbá sounds. The drum mimics words such that beating it can emit messages for greeting, or for sending messages among people who are accustomed to its language. The gong is also used to send notice to or to summon people in traditional African settings. See Mobolanle Egunoluwa Sotunsa “Exploiting Resources of Yorùbá Drum Poetry” in *Focus on Nigeria: Literature and Culture* (Matatu no. 40). Ed. Gordon Collier, Rodopi, 2010. p. 402.

⁵. Through an injunction that the founding Oníjogbo (traditional title of Jogbo kings) handed down to future kings, his directive is encoded in form of a pact between every new king and the chief drummer. The injunction requires that future kings and the drummer have ritual incision on their skin upon which they rub a herbal potion afterwards. The remaining potion is kept in the latter’s drum. Such a pact links the nation’s drummer, Àyàngalú, his drum, and future kings of Jogbo.

⁶. All English translations are mine and I accept all errors that feature therein.

⁷. Òpálàbà romanticizes the historical Abíódún’s reign calling to mind similar lamentations of the 18th century Yorubas as they suffered hardship under Aólè Aróangan, a tyrant, who succeeded Abíódún.

⁸. Just after the independence of African countries between 1960- 1970s, the military took over many regimes which they deemed “undemocratic.” The military regimes were themselves autocratic, but as from the late 1990s, military regimes continued to wane in Africa, especially given that both local and international political observers condemned military rule with its authoritarianism. Larry Diamond and Marc Plattner credit the change to the world’s and “... African public’s pushing for greater accountability in the form of free, regular, and genuinely contested elections” p. xiv.

⁹. Kelani’s parody of General Sani Abacha becomes iconic in that on Làgàtà’s lapel are the initials S. A. Làgàtà- the initials depict the letters starting the first and last names of Sani Abacha. Làgàtà’s name means “third party” in Yorùbá. This connection draws out his character, a soldier turned ruler, a political intruder and indeed a third party in the democratic governance of Jogbo. Apart from Abacha’s passion for playing games and drinking alcohol, he was noted for constantly wearing dark glasses while he was the Nigerian Head of State. See *Breaths There The Man*, Ravi Gupta. Leadstart Publishing PVT, 2014, p. 59. Kelani immortalizes Abacha image in Làgàtà’s character as he also wears dark glasses, drinks and play games.

¹⁰. On January, 30 2012 Sani Abacha’s personal assistant and accomplice in crime, Al Mustapha, received a death sentence for murdering a Yorùbá female nationalist and activist Kudirat Abiola. See, Wale, Adebani. “Glocal Naming and Shaming: Toponymic (Inter)National Relations on Lagos and New York Streets.” In *Place Names in Africa: Colonial Urban Legacies, Entangled Histories*, Ed. Bigon, Liora. Springer International Publishers, 2016, p. 211.

¹¹. During 1968-1969, Agbekoya farmers coalesced in the Western state of Nigeria to make their voices heard about agricultural laws that run against the interests of farmers. See Tunde Adeniran, "The Dynamics of Peasant Revolt: A Conceptual Analysis of the Agbekoya Parapo Uprising in the Western State of Nigeria," *Journal of Black Studies*. Jun., 1974, no. 4: pp. 363-375.

¹². Evidence that the loggers are not indigenous is in their constant reference to countries where they come from or other countries in which they operate. For instance, when nationalists fight the loggers’ exploitation of Jogbo land, the front line logger Kújénrǎ warns Lápité: “àwa ti di erù wa o, a n padà sí ìlú wa tí ò bá sí ààbò tó nípon” inscribed in *Saworo Ide* as “we have resolved to return to our country if there is no security.”

¹³. In 1995, the climax of the Niger Delta ecological nationalism culminates in the execution of five Ogoni nationalist leaders among who is Ken Saro Wiwa. See William Slaymaker, “Echoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses” in. *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* Eds. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson. Blackwell, 2007, p. 690.

¹⁴. Among the Yorùbá race, the Orò cult is a men's secret society invested with the power to execute judgment in their community. Orò as a cult is not female-friendly. Olajubu, Oyeronke. *Women in the Religious Sphere*. SUNY Press. 2004, p 23.

¹⁵. Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, the former Governor, Central Bank of Nigeria, cites "the recent report of the National Bureau of Statistics [Nigeria] where over 100 million Nigerians are said to be living below poverty level" in "We have a dysfunctional economy" *The Nigerian Tribune*, Feb. 2012, p. 3.

¹⁶. Structural Adjustment Program, introduced in 1986 by the military Ibrahim Babangida's regime, was put in place to stimulate economic growth and give room to more international loans. See Toyin Falola and Ann Genova. *Historical Dictionary of Nigeria*. Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009, p.339.

¹⁷. Nigeria is one of the most populous countries in Africa, with an estimated 125 million. Its family planning program is one of its more important instruments of population control. See Donella H. Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis L Meadows. *The Limits to growth: The 30-year update*. Chelsea Green Pub, 2004. p. 23.

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