

# The Cinema of Tunde Kelani

“This collection of fifteen essays explores the biographical and artistic profile of one of Africa’s leading filmmakers, Tunde Kelani. Expansive in scope and extensive in depth, the essays collectively testify to the commanding stature of the prolific auteur whose career spans decades of modern African cinema. The volume contributes significantly to the much-needed bio-critical studies of Nigeria’s trailblazing cultural producers, especially in Nollywood.”

—Nduka Otiono, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Supervisor, Institute of African Studies, Carleton University, Canada

“This collection of essays on the works of one of Africa’s most influential moviemakers is a major addition to the debates and studies on Nigerian and African cinema. Tunde Kelani, through his Yorubacentric masterpieces, has used his films to contribute to burning issues in Nigeria, Africa and by extension, the world as a whole. Reading the foreword, introduction and, eventually, the essays gives the reader a sense of being at a conference where these works are being dissected, for the first time, to reveal their philosophical, aesthetic, political and humanistic underpinnings. Although critical opinions on Tunde Kelani are scattered in theses, dissertations and scholarly essays, this is, perhaps, the first book that discusses him as a true African auteur whose works can compete, favourably, with those of auteurs in other climes. There is no doubt that anyone interested in film, teachers, students, practitioners and the general public will find this book refreshingly illuminating.”

—Tunji Azeez, Professor of Theatre, Film and Cultural Studies, Lagos State University, Nigeria

# The Cinema of Tunde Kelani:

*Aesthetics, Theatricalities  
and Visual Performance*

Edited by

Tunde Onikoyi and Taiwo Afolabi

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Scholars  
Publishing**



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To our wives and children, who endured our absences, when we were inundated with the various tasks of putting the book together: you are all appreciated.



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## FOREWORD

PROFESSOR SHEILA PETTY

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It is exciting to see the publication of this new volume, *The Cinema of Tunde Kelani: Aesthetics, Theatricalities and Visual Performance*, devoted entirely to the cinematic works of the foundational Nigerian filmmaker, Tunde Kelani. The editors Babatunde Onikoyi and Taiwo Afolabi have very astutely brought together established experts and new voices from Nigeria and around the globe to produce a treasure trove of scholarly contributions spanning topics and areas of interest as diverse as intertextuality in Kelani's work; his role as a modern auteur; his place within Nollywood; genre development; legal narratives; edutainment as "embedded entertainment" on HIV education; Trans-Sociological Hybridity discourse; representations of motherhood; gender and masculinity; Yoruba cultural practices; African indigenous knowledge; science and technology; and the recentering of Indigenous language, culture and Yoruba aesthetics.

There have been many volumes on the origins of Nollywood and its global reach as a cultural and economic powerhouse, the diasporic influence of Nollywood, and its immense global popularity, but also the controversy it stirs up. Onikoyi and Afolabi's volume, which is simultaneously delightfully entertaining yet appropriately erudite, successfully captures the essence of Kelani as an "auteur" within the cinema of Nigeria and Nollywood, and indeed within African cinema and the global industry. Kelani rightfully takes his place alongside other giants of African cinema such as Ousmane Sembène and Med Hondo, who were tireless advocates for the "Africanizing" and development of African film aesthetics from within the continent—by, for, and about Africans!

What are the ways in which Africans tell their own stories in their own voices? These are the questions that Sembène, Hondo and others have asked since the very beginnings of African film production in the 1950s and 1960s. Should African film be entertainment and commercially-oriented, or should it be pedagogical, with the goal of raising the consciousness of the African masses? What types of narrative and aesthetic structures are best suited to

African cinematic storytelling? Tunde Kelani has asked the same questions and stages his stories in what he knows best—the Yoruba experience—and this, often within a historical frame, taking into consideration that local histories are also the products of global interactions, including colonialism. Furthermore, Kelani’s insistence on promoting Indigenous languages and storytelling in his own Indigenous language of Yoruba solidly positions him within the cadre of global artists advocating for and practicing representational sovereignty. His work invites and provokes conversation with other global artists and thinkers who maintain that art and life are interconnected in Indigenous systems of thought. For example, how can we not think of the work of the pioneering Senegalese scientist and philosopher, Cheikh Anta Diop, who promoted scientific learning in Indigenous African languages as early as the 1960s, when considering Kelani’s promotion of Indigenous thought processes and ways of knowing?

In their work on global Indigenous media, Pamela Wilson, Kristen Dowell and Michele Raheja proposed the concept of, “Indigenous cultural and representational sovereignty” to allow for the use of a culture’s own particular logic to control and organize the process and product of artistic creation. Naturally, this system of representational identity evolves in different ways over time and across cultures and geographies as various peoples have appropriated film and video technology and made it their own. This implies that strategies of resistance and compliance, borrowing and re-configuring, operating within, yet stretching the boundaries, are paramount in processes of identity construction. Wilson has gone so far as to ask, “Who is able to claim to be an indigenous media producer? [...] Is there something about seeing the world through indigenous eyes that privileges any work produced by an indigenous artist as ‘indigenous’ media expression?” (88-89). All of this aptly describes Kelani and his creative process.

Onikoyi and Afolabi’s introduction superbly sets the tone for the whole volume. The editors eloquently outline how Kelani’s works function within the trope of the *Orita*, a space that is simultaneously physical, spiritual and psychological. It is a “Yorubanized discussion forum” that demands active debate and participation in the decolonizing and reconstruction of Africa (Nigeria) in post-postcolonial, post-COVID times. The very organization of the volume and rich line-up of contributions is brilliantly organized—like a “forum”—to create a space for conversation between each essay but also with the reader, who is invited into this space of contestation and critique. Finally, with this volume, the editors contribute to current debates around living cultural heritage and identity politics in globalizing cultures, as well as political and cultural sovereignty and control of representation in image

production, thus proving that freedom of expression is possible for all.

### **Works Cited**

Wilson, Pamela. "Indigenous Documentary Media" in Daniel Marcus and Selmin Kara (eds.), *Contemporary documentary*, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2016, pp. 87-104.



## INTRODUCTION

### TUNDE KELANI: THE *ORITA* OF NIGERIAN CINEMA

#### TUNDE ONIKOYI AND TAIWO AFOLABI

The essays in this collection recognize the reputation and life works of director, producer and auteur, Tunde Kelani. His eminence towers thanks to his cinematic contributions to African screen media, art, and the creative industry in Nigeria. During the 2018 Irep Documentary Film Festival, which is annually spearheaded by Femi Odugbemi—himself a documentary film stalwart—Tunde Kelani addressed an audience on his new film (a documentary) *Pyrolysis and Paralysis* (2016), concerning “charcoal production” (Onikoyi, 2017). Not only was the film rich in its inclusion of “still and moving photographs” but more critically Kelani’s deliberate attempt at creating a film which differed radically “from conventional documentary filmmaking in its use of composite media accompanied quite tremendously by a *mélange* of diegetic sounds that accentuate the affecting images” (2017: 247). Members of the audience were enthused and delighted by the shared expertise and solid experience of Tunde Kelani, and the richness and timelessness of his works. They have continued to reveal the extent of their relevance in our society for up to 40 years.

This collection is a descendent of and companion to the many existing articles, essays and commentaries on Tunde Kelani and his career. The scholars include mostly Nigerians, but also some Americans to show how familiar they (Americans) are with the dynamics of Tunde Kelani’s film form, style, techniques, themes, storylines, philosophies, beliefs, thoughts, politics and temperament as a creative storyteller.

Recently, renowned Professor of Philosophy at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, Adeshina Afolayan, with his cohort, James Yeku, a scholar who teaches African American literature and Afropolitan studies at the University of Kansas, put together an excellent special edition on Tunde

Kelani in the *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. This edition in 2020 pulled works from scholars across the globe, which engaged the works of Tunde Kelani, from a philosophical stand point—with each essay uniquely inviting the reader to “an understanding of Tunde Kelani, as a global filmmaker, whose cinematic oeuvre engages with many places, audiences, as well as media technologies” (Afolayan and Yeku, 2020: 1). The editors’ superb intervention is built upon the rare backdrop of uniqueness, something which Kelani possesses as an exception to the norm in the Nollywood film industry. This point is reflective of the comments of Gbemisola Adeoti, who stressed that Tunde Kelani’s company Mainframe Film and Television Production has “responded to the challenges of global and local markets with a view to meliorating Africa’s marginality in the world cine-market” (Adeoti, 2011: 27). Similarly, the film outfit “believes that it is better to build a formidable popular culture at home before venturing into international markets.” (27).

As editors of *The Cinema of Tunde Kelani: Aesthetics, Theatricalities and Visual Performance*, we were inspired by the rich number of essays, interviews, conversations, reviews and commentaries produced by scholars scattered across the globe—including a documentary—devoted to Tunde Kelani. We were also prompted by the individual and collective clamoring of his admirers, followers and spectators, who have challenged academia regarding the need to conduct and provide texts and new studies on his films from diverse perspectives and interests. The passion and spirit that we share has orchestrated the affinity with which we evoked this desire to produce timely knowledge on his cinema. This desire has also called forth this collection.

Indeed, we are not oblivious of the diverse offerings by numerous brilliant scholars and critics who have devoted a good number of essays to Tunde Kelani’s films and career. Key among them are Jonathan Haynes, Onookome Okome, Segun Soetan, Tunde Onikoyi, James Yeku, Saheed Aderinto, Melita Zack, Kenneth Harrow (who also features in this collection), Gbemisola Adeoti, Abiodun Olayiwola, and many other scholars too numerous to mention. Their works have dealt with issues that permeated their writings through vibrant forms of discourses such as cultural dynamics, cultural criticism, political matters, auteur criticism, popular cultural studies, health and mental issues, aesthetics, subjectivity, gender issues and many more. These studies on one man only encourage more sustained debates, dialogues and conversations on the intriguing aspects of his films, while also not ignoring his personal writings and lectures.

Kelani's works reel like archival material. He is a keen example among serious cultural drivers who understand the necessity of cultural preservation, appreciation, and evaluation; these are rare qualities conspicuously missing in many Nollywood films today. His films eloquently come across as cultural texts that express the features of visual Yoruba anthropology and its cultural matrix. They make considerable performative departures from other cinematic endorsements of many Nigerian filmmakers. This worldliness of Yoruba aesthetic practice as offered by Kelani is conveyed through visual tendencies that attract considerable spectatorship. Such tendencies are embedded in the popular aesthetics and tropes employed by the filmmaker to channel his thoughts and ideas.

Tunde Kelani's works rest perfectly on the valuable and enriching tenets of Karin Barber's long essay "Popular Arts in Africa" (1987). Kelani's creation of cultural materials includes films which are steeped in the very fabric of Yoruba culture, imbued with the qualities of human actions, experiences and reflections upon society. In a nut shell, Kelani, while disseminating immediate/cogent messages, also transforms culture in manifold ways. Debra Klein (2012), reiterates the idea that Yoruba cultural creators flaunt "popular cultural forms while celebrating their specificity and creativity" (Klein, 128: 2012). Kelani's films resonate with Karin Barber's theories which reveal the impact of "popular cultural aesthetics" on the African text and how it has emerged from the material conditions of its productions. They constitute a crop of films, among others, that informs us that "Nollywood", is indeed "an African popular cinema" (Krings and Okome, 2013), and as such, these films also function as a response "to [the] desire for a locally produced popular cinema that had been growing for decades" (Barber, 2018: 147). Films made in Nigeria in recent years have been determined to provide entertainment while replicating valuable and material occurrences that either shape audience perception, or affect them in manifold ways beyond what is anticipated. This latter response is what Manthia Diawara would refer to as an "aesthetics of astonishment". Nigerian films show resonance with immediate environments and cultures which make them immensely popular. Their consumption by audiences only shows how the films are contained "with modes of modernity, which Africans and people of African origin desire and copy [...] [and which] contain forms of tradition that they find both frightening and contemptuous" (Krings and Okome, 2013: 3).

With Tunde Kelani's cinema at the heart of the discussions that permeate this collection, it is our opinion that his works remain engaging, as much as they show their relevance among his viewers and critics. His political films

for instance (much like serious dramatic literature) are as seriously constructed as they are formidably scripted, and they strategically deploy—to capture Biodun Jeyifo’s construct—as their “organizing structural criteria, a physical or emotional conflict, a moral or spiritual contest of wills, [and] a confrontation between contending principles, [which] is almost inconceivable” (1985: 7). In addition to this, and another convincing feature of Kelani’s works, is the fact that his films do not “merely subsume conflict as their structural motif”; rather they attempt to provide peculiar resolution of a certain magnitude: “a provisional synthesis in the conflicting pulls within its constitutive actions, thereby approaching the limit of the dialectical image potentially realizable in art” (ibid., 7). Such films by Kelani not only remind us of the Nigerian responses to the insidious treasons of legalized corruption and leadership hypocrisies, or the civil responses to unaddressed policies and postcolonial quagmires, but they also creatively and artfully offer powerful visual platforms that enable common understanding; the conceptualization of frameworks to update outmoded institutions; people-oriented human rights and freedoms; and cultural approaches to both reimagining systems and advocating policies for a non-dystopian future.

Kelani’s films shape, visualize and conjure up formulas that encourage popular propositions for an alternative future. These projected and imagined outcomes may remind us of what Paul Ugor, in his book *Nollywood: Popular Culture and Narratives of Youth Struggle in Nigeria*, opined when he stressed that Nollywood is people oriented and that the “melodramatic nature of the films resonates with a threatened generation trying hard to keep afloat in the midst of very inauspicious postcolonial circumstances” (Ugor, 2016). Ugor has also argued—following Nollywood’s designation as a popular cultural art industry in Africa and given that its narratives can be structured into distinguishing categories—that its films amplify “the unthinkable and sometimes bizarre strictures that confront people in everyday life in postcolonial Africa and the egregious and occasional ludicrous and symbolic solutions crafted by both powerful and powerless postcolonial subjects in dealing with those unrelenting social challenges and threats”. This view is also applicable to Kelani’s films, which reveal how he as an African artist shows the specific realities of people in Nigeria (and indeed Africa), and sharing the “quotidian experiences of varied local communities” in works that “reconstitute, interpret, and reoffer unfolding social, political, and economic histories to its local audiences, integrating both internal and global cultural resources and knowledge” (2016: 26).

Films like *Campus Queen* (2004), *Saworoide* (1999), *Agogo Ewo* (2002), *Arugba* (2008), and *Kosegbe* (1995) explore political and postcolonial

problems of leadership and neo-colonial tendencies; they are highly rated films through which, according to Akin Adesokan, “Kelani deploys Yoruba traditions in addressing issues of legitimacy and institutional checks of corruption” (2009: 609). Firmly rooted within the Yoruba worldview, these films nonetheless contain elements that bestow upon them a universal appeal, all the while firmly maintaining a foothold in the political terrain of Nigeria and Africa. This allows his works to occupy a unique global space.

The formidable features and conventions of Tunde Kelani’s cinema draw the audience’s attention to the quality of his works. There is no doubt Kelani is the most important filmmaker in Nigeria. He stands out among his peers and contemporaries, even among the younger generation of filmmakers. He produces technically highhanded films, encapsulating sources that testify to contemporary human conditions—to the very core aspects of our familiar episteme, cultural identity, and the contradictions of modernity. His engagements with artists of the highest reputation and popularity remain constant; his collaborations with intellectual personalities continue to have certain effects on the essence of the themes, subtexts and subjects matters of his films (Kelani, 2014; Onikoyi, 2020); his authority, eloquence and articulation at international and local conferences, workshops, colloquiums and seminars are second to none; and his interventions as artiste, as a filmmaker on relevant and relative projects, and as a consultant to myriads of other projects make him a rare linchpin in the creative industry. Furthermore, he exhibits a certain inner glow as a-film-father-figure to those who wish to learn from him, or aspire to be part of his projects.

Tunde Kelani does not only tutor the younger generation in the art of filmmaking and cinematic practices, but he actually educates and prepares them for taking over in the future, knowing that they will be required to shape the film industry in years to come. This is a task he has devoted himself to for many years, one which he continues to undertake generously and gracefully. This rare quality of commitment to younger people, among other things which we shall discuss below, has clearly instigated and compelled the designation of Kelani as the *Orita* of Nigerian cinema.

### **Tunde Kelani: *Orita* Personified**

The phenomenon of the *Orita* in Yoruba cosmology is a complex one to unravel. As such, we shall adopt the notion with some caution in order to examine how we can employ the term to describe Tunde Kelani in (this) context. We rely on the ideas of Olasope Oyelaran for his concept of the *Orita*, not in terms of the quotidian use “crossroads”, but the more

concretized, *essentialized* connotation: “a-point-where-a-good-number-of-streets-meet”. This translation however, is not located in the tenets of Oyelaran, but stems from our understanding of the deeper meaning of the *Orita*, the literal significance of the *Orita*, and how it functions in the Yoruba sense.

To clear any doubt, with our proposed meaning “a-point-where-a-good-number-of-streets-meet” we refer to Oyelaran’s argument concerning the ineffective nature term “crossroads” as a translation: “The term ‘crossroads’, most commonly used to gloss the Yorùbá lexical item *Oríta*, does not adequately convey its meaning” (Oyelaran; 2018: 239). The term crossroads is too limiting and conscripted to explain the *Orita* in all its framework, outlook and functions. In theoretical terms Oyelaran offers data on the phenomenon of the *Orita*, writing profoundly:

In addition to any number of access ways and paths converging into *oríta*, *oríta* serves, in its own right, as a veritable arena of encounter, an arena of contact among beings, and for the exchange of goods and values. Each access way or path vanishes – or, better still, merges – into *oríta* in a manner similar to the estuaries of a river emptying themselves into a basin, a sea or an ocean, which may be traversed to enter into another access way. (2018: 239)

Our view is that (following the above submission) the *Orita* is an area or point of convergence, a junction that brings together some pathways; it offers people with a sense of focus, direction and the ability to accomplish missions. It is an arena that is physical, and yet spiritual. In both contexts it performs or functions for the benefit of those who are able to locate and identify it for a specific and appropriate use.

The *Orita* is also a physical meeting-point for different actions and actualizations, particularly concerning the success of an individual’s forecast. With the popularity and visibility of an *Orita*, it has specifically become an arena where people hold a rendezvous when the direction is pointed at such a space.

Incidentally, the *Orita* is a trope; a visible, conspicuous space where people negotiate the right pathway upon their arrival at the space in question. As we know, not only do pedestrians meet at the *Orita* to engage in discussions, meetings, dialogue, conversation, or even trade in different forms, but they also employ such an arena to facilitate movements towards another direction. It is a fact that Tunde Kelani (from our point of view) embodies

the “*Orita* configuration” and this “trope in human form and personality”. *Orita* represents a space for a variety of events. With his wealth of experience as a storyteller, a cultural producer, a bearer of messages, a carrier of the Yoruba worldview and the related cosmogony, a teacher of a sort, a practitioner of the arts, and a collaborator among other designations, Tunde Kelani is the “*Orita* personified” of the Nigerian cinema industry. From Oyelaran’s profound submission, we conjure up the *Orita* as a signifying trope that naturally performs semiotic functions: it “has dimensions; it is a space, an arena defined by encounters and exchanges” (239). This argument explicates quite exceptionally the many phases of Kelani and how he dynamically offers himself to the different artists and people he works with, including: theatre artists and practitioners, dramatists, playwrights, scholars, intellectuals, artists, musicians, novelists, Yoruba cultural producers, filmmakers, cultural administrators, politicians and many others. The outcomes of his collaborations are usually unique in various ways. The essence of his collaborations with numerous personalities, both at home and internationally, has made Tunde Kelani a-must-meet, and a-must-encounter figure by all and sundry.

A very interesting aspect of the *Orita* is that it assumes what we call “a marker of habitation” in Yoruba knowledge and in terms of orality. Oyelaran once again offers a philosophical specificity of this “marker of habitation”: “In Yorùbá cosmology, the centre point of *oríta* is the liminal domain of Èṣù, the custodian of àṣẹ, the primordial life force; Èṣù, the ultimate arbiter among beings – indeed, among all forces” (239). In Yoruba mythology Èṣù has been referred to as an Òriṣà who orders and keep the universe under surveillance, while “mediating between the good and evil forces of the universe” (see Debra Klein’s essay in this collection). Abimbola (2006), says that it is “Èṣù’s power” that “enables him to become the wind when he wants to travel, crisscrossing the sphere of the earth and beyond. Èṣù is multiple and vast in kind, number, and function” (2006: 18). Klein also offers a clear mythical-legendary-description of Kelani’s reputation when she attests that “the art of world-renowned and critically acclaimed Nigerian filmmaker, Tundé Kelani, is analogous to the work of Èṣù”. (Klein, in this collection). Kelani we argue, therefore, is not just the *Orita* of Nigerian cinema following our earlier submission at the outset of this section, but embodies both the *Orita* and the one who occupies the liminal domain: Èṣù. We suggest that Kelani is both the Èṣù and *Orita* of Nigerian Cinema. Debra Klein’s mythic description of the cineaste is useful here:

Kelani's films open portals to the past as they take inspiration from Yorùbá cosmology, philosophy, traveling theatre, and literature. His films challenge us to dig deeply into a collective source of cultural wisdom to discover and play with Yorùbá history, knowledge, and aesthetics. Kelani's films open the portals to the future as they challenge us to imagine a Nigeria and world free of imperialism, big man corruption, terrorism, sexism, ableism, disease, and environmental degradation. Kelani's work asks us to create a Nigeria whose democratic institutions function fairly and belong to all Nigerians. And when Kelani's art taps into our universal human desire for love and laughter, we are more likely to enjoy the beauty of this world—nature, poetry, music, dance, and masquerades. (Klein, in this collection)

The above reference to Klein's essay is crucial to the personality of Tunde Kelani as not just an important figure in the contemporary Nigerian film industry, but also within the annals of the Nigerian film industry. Far more than any of his contemporaries (whether alive or dead), and also given his indefatigable influence on the younger generation of today's budding and established filmmakers, Tunde Kelani was and has been everywhere, and his ability to identify with the changing and various technologies of different eras serves to demonstrate how significant he has become in the annals of the Nigerian film industry. Kelani was there during the celluloid era, working and collaborating with different people to produce some of the best cinematic productions at that time. He was also present during the emergence of video technology, which ushered in Nollywood as industry following the significant production of Chris Oriapku's *Living in Bondage*, Parts 1 & 2 (1990 and 1992) (Haynes & Okome 2007: 64). He is also active today, witnessing and utilizing a wealth of flourishing wisdom, and applying his keen mind to the consistent advancement of the digital era. What this means is that Kelani not only bridges the gap between the celluloid era and the video era, but also, through his vibrant collaboration with keen filmmakers eager to work with him (and engage with his vast experience) links all these eras together, demonstrating his relevance in truly creative ways. All these facts are clear testimonies of Tunde Kelani's approximation to the status of the *Orita* of Nigerian Cinema.

Since 1992, Kelani has produced many interesting films, including *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* (Parts 1, 2 & 3) (1993–1995), which treat matters of land fraud, and *Ayo Ni Mofe* (1994) which addresses issues of love and mental health. Other films include *Campus Queen* (2004), *Saworoide* (1999), *Agogo Ewo* (2002), *Arugba* (2008), and *Kosegbe* (1995). All of these films examine political and postcolonial problems of leadership and neo-colonial tendencies; they are highly rated films through which, according to Akin

Adesokan, “Kelani deploys Yoruba traditions in addressing issues of legitimacy and institutional checks of corruption” (2009: 609). Firmly rooted within the Yoruba worldview, these films contain elements that possess a universal appeal, while sustaining a foothold in the political terrain of Nigeria and Africa, which allows his works to occupy a special space globally.

It is a commonplace truth that Kelani ranks among the most recognized auteurs in African cinema, and towers above and surpasses his Nigerian cohorts. His themes connect with “recognizable structure, familiar stars, and technical consistency; he prefers to produce films in the Yoruba language, which distinguishes his personal vision from that of other filmmakers” (Onikoyi, 2021: 4). Some other films included in Kelani’s oeuvre are *Magun: Thunderbolt* (2001), *Dazzling Mirage* (2014), *The Narrow Path* (2007), *Abeni* (2006), *Pyrolysis and Paralysis* (2016), and *Sidi Ilunjinle* (2017) (an adaptation of Wole Soyinka’s *Lion and the Jewel*). Tunde Kelani’s collaborations with very interesting cultural actors endeared him to the late scholar, playwright, and cultural activist Professor Akinwunmi Ishola, as demonstrated in Kelani’s adaptation of works such as *O Le ku 1,2 & 3*, *Campus Queen*, and *Saworo Ide*. A detailed account of Kelani and Akinwunmi’s artistic relationship has been examined in depth in his documentary entitled *Akinwunmi and the Rest of Us* (2017).

Kelani has constantly maintained a tremendous level of professionalism and high reputation by producing excellent films, applying features of “celluloid filmmaking strategies with video production knowledge to create artistically appealing audio-visual narratives that endear the Nigerian film industry to the [...] world” (Soetan 2018: 4). For a period of forty years, Kelani has distinguished himself in an industry that is constantly in a state of flux. In addition to creating films and television productions, he has also started a radio program on Ogun State Broadcasting Cooperation (OGBC2 FM), which touches on matters related to the advancement of indigenous culture. He also trains the younger generation, having recently established the Mainframe Film and Media Institute in Abeokuta, Ogun State. While putting this collection together, Tunde Kelani has been shooting a film on the life and times of popular *Apala* musician, the late Ayinla Omowura. The tentative title “Ayinla”, was inspired by the production and publication of a biographical work titled; *Ayinla Omowura: Life and Times of an Apala Legend*, written by Festus Adebayo in 2019. The book traces the life of Ayinla from a developing artiste to an established and popular Yoruba musician of repute, within the annals of the *Apala* genre and of course the practice of music making among other activities.

The film is also a tribute to the work of the late *Apala* music maestro, and his contributions to the Nigerian music industry. Kelani's preference for constantly creating and recreating popular cultural art has earned him tremendous praise from critics and the press, as a custodian of history, social history, indigenous knowledge, archival materials, culture, truth, facts, and the imaginative communication of significant experiences that replicate our African world. The editors of this collection followed the rehearsals and shooting schedules from the content of a public diary kept by Tunde Kelani himself (and the famous Nigerian footballer Mr. Segun Odegbami, popularly referred to as "Mathematical Odegbami") of the events leading to the final outcome of rehearsals of the soon to be screened film. The shooting wrapped up on Christmas Day 2020. Pictures showing the rehearsals, cast and crew, as well as other shots are made available in this collection to compliment the quality of the entire book, and to offer the reader evidence on why the *Orita* of Nigerian Cinema is still a significant player in world cinema, something he achieves in the most idiosyncratic of ways.

### **The Universe of the Essays**

The essays in this collection speak volumes. The collection contains essays written by scholars and academics from Nigeria and the United States of America, most of whom are exceptional in their areas of scholarly expertise. These scholars belong to departments of English, Literary Studies, Theatre Arts, Creative Arts, Anthropology, and Performing Arts, as well as their allied departments. The nature of this convergence of scholars from different areas is a clear testimony to the works of Tunde Kelani, and his collaboration with different cohorts whose visions coalesce with his. These scholars bring into their essays a unique wisdom, which speaks a new language, and delineates fresh insights into the creativity, knack, artistry, politics, poetics, biases and integrity of practice.

The entire volume is divided into six parts, with each featuring applicable essays that speak to the theme of each part, concretizing and materializing their value. The first part, entitled "Cosmology and Culture" encapsulates three essays that uniquely address the same phenomenon. Chapter one features Debra Klein's "Tundé Kelani, Èṣù of Nigerian Cinema: Yorùbá Aesthetic Formation, Tradition, and Morality". In this essay Debra Klein draws from long-term ethnographic research with Yoruba performing artists in the states of Oṣun and Kwara, building on Yeku's concept of Alter/Native narratives (2012) and Meyer's discussion of aesthetic formation (2015) to argue that Kelani's innovative evocations of Yorùbá traditional culture can

be understood as aesthetic formations of a morality for the present and future. Kelani's films she demonstrates, evoke and create aesthetic formations that reimagine and recontextualize Yorùbá traditional culture into new allegories and myths for contemporary audiences. Klein also illustrates how Kelani's representations of Yorùbá traditional culture and morality are central to his films' allegorical impact, and the moral themes in thirteen Kelani films are identified. Through Èṣù-like storytelling, she offers evidence about how Kelani's films reimagine tradition and offer new allegories that challenge postcolonial institutions and awaken our spirit and desire for a better world. In chapter two, Catherine Olutoyin Williams in her essay, "Kelani and the Efficacy of African Science: A Study of *Thunderbolt* and *Saworoide*", demonstrates how film as a medium is a powerful instrument of advocacy which can be used to re-shape individuals and society at large. Williams examines how African cinema, using Kelani's *Thunderbolt* and *Saworoide* as examples, has become a veritable medium which uses visual codes to initiate social change. She further argues that in a filmic production, it is the point of view of the director that will be foregrounded; and viewers are then left to align with the presented view or deviate from it. It is in line with this that she shows how Tunde Kelani in *Thunderbolt* and *Saworoide* presents traditional societies steeped in socio-cultural practices (sexual politics) that reflect beliefs, customs and the people's ways of life. In chapter three Stephen Ogheneruro Okpadah in his essay "Tunde Kelani and the Canonization of the Yoruba Cinema" examines how Kelani's use of the indigenous Yoruba language, knowledge systems and code-mixing exemplifies the re-centering of indigenous Yoruba aesthetics. He also analyzes how Kelani uses history and language to capture indigenous cultural spaces and uses *Oleku* as a paradigm of Kelani's attempt at canonizing the Yoruba cinema.

The second part is entitled "Communication/Health/Archival Studies" and has only two chapters. The first of these, chapter four, is "Playing Seriously: HIV and AIDS Communication in *Arugba* as a Model for Edutainment" by Ayobami Ojebode, Obasanjo Oyedele and Patience Onekutu. In it the authors posit that Kelani's *Arugbá* is a successful piece of edutainment. In doing so, they examine the film while paying particular attention to how the auteur deploys embedded entertainment to deliver a complete educational package on HIV and AIDS. They submit that Tunde Kelani sprinkles across the story bits and pieces of HIV education, and yet weaves them into a coherent whole which jeopardizes neither education nor entertainment. In chapter five, Ayokunmi O. Ojebode and Sunday J. Ayodabo, in their essay "Name as National Archive: Capturing of Masculine Names in Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide*", reveal how the evolving field of masculinity in

Nigeria continues to generate scholarly discussions in the field of oral literature, literature and youth culture. Notably, the authors offer instances of how Kelani creates an equilibrium of gender in his characterization, designating some male characters with nicknames, roles and traits, which reinforce traditional masculine features. Their conclusion elicits how selected names are allegoric, satirical barbs and descriptive of the thematic configurations of the film, especially in epitomising history-preservation, socio-political construction and revolution for a better Nigeria.

The third part begins with an essay on dance and cinema, “The Corpus of Choreographic Styles in Tunde Kelani’s Works: A Trans-Sociological Hybridity Discourse”. This study, the sixth chapter of the book, by Toyin Olokodana-James, examines how dance and choreography have become very significant amongst the rudimentary compositional elements evident in most of Tunde Kelani’s films. James also explains how Kelani sets his choreographic works upon certain hybrid forms, an interaction of two opposing or complimentary patterns, and yet balances his projection of Nigerian autochthonous culture with glimpses of contemporaneity which have a global relevance and universality of content.

Part three continues with chapter seven and Kenneth W. Harrow’s essay “Modernity in the Work of Tunde Kelani”. The study shows how Kelani builds his films around situations in which precarity has permeated the lives of his principal characters. Although Harrow makes reference to several films, he focuses on *Ti Oluwa Nile* (1993) and *Dazzling Mirage* (2014). While these films are separated by a period of twenty one years, Harrow testifies to how Kelani, in both works, uniquely constructed the films around issues that evoke aspects of modernity, and a sense of what it means to exist in the modern world. Chapter eight features an essay by Sola Afolayan titled, “Literary Hypotexts, Filmic Intertexts and Historiographic Hypertexts: Money and Power Problematized in Tunde Kelani’s *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* and *Saworoide*”. The essay examines *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile* and *Saworoide* from an intertextual perspective to reveal how both films exhibit recognizable resemblances with extant texts. Within this analytical mindset, the films are foregrounded as instances of the auteur speaking to his audience through the technicalities of cinema. Afolayan’s study reduces notable filmic elements to textual numerates that are representative of historiographic iconographies. Consequently with the theory of intertextuality as a tool, both films are viewed as (inter)texts since they are considered as procedural cinematic *moments* in continuums that capture and define extant scenarios that are codable as texts.

The fourth part, which explores issues on “Genre and Gender”, contains two essays. Chapter nine considers “Tunde Kelani and the Woman’s Film Genre” and is written by Elizabeth Olayiwola. Olayiwola argues that some of Kelani’s films can be read and categorized as a part of the woman’s genre. Although, the woman’s genre is not a well-established genre in Nollywood studies, Olayiwola is of the opinion that the reading of selected Tunde Kelani’s films shows the possibility such a genre could evolve. Her essay demonstrates this by employing tenants of Hollywood’s woman’s genre, and she projects that a possible Nollywood’s woman’s genre might just emerge soon. Chapter ten concerns “The Representation of Motherhood in Tunde Kelani’s *Maami*”. In the essay Cornelius Eze Onyekaba takes a look at the development of film technologies and what has been the quotidian form of representation since 1992. He believes that though the medium continues to evolve and adapt to new circumstances, the essential interest of the Nigerian filmmaker has remained the retelling of the social conditions of Nigerian society through the eyes of the camera. His study considers the depiction of motherhood in Tunde Kelani’s *Maami*, while applying theories of discourse and representation as a signifying practice.

The fifth part explores something entirely new: “The End of Criticism? The Beginning of Demonstrative Law”. Similar to the work edited by Kenneth Harrow and Carmela Garittano, *A Companion to African Cinema* (2019), which elevated a new area, already gathering momentum now in the studies of African Cinema (Film Festival Studies or Curatorial Practices in African film studies, popularised by Lindiwe Dovey), we give voice to Sola Animasaun’s study on law and African cinema.

Thus in the eleventh chapter, Animasaun in his splendid essay “Law as Narrative in Tunde Kelani’s Selected Films”, addresses in innovative terms the narrative of law in selected films directed by Tunde Kelani. Animasaun meticulously critiques Kelani’s *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo* and interprets the legal narratives within the films. The essay finds that the selected films are blends of many ideas, making them conducive to a multi-disciplinary analysis, as they espouse the clashes between the ancient and the modern traditions and the episteme, whereby the modern man is desirous of enjoying the perquisites of an ancient seat without the detriments and restrictions imposed by such an exalted office.

This new entrant into the studies of Nigerian cinema is most likely to be pursued as it will encourage more interesting studies in the future of Nigerian cinema. The implication will foster interdisciplinary studies—something which cinema studies normally encourage.

The sixth and final part is devoted to the filmmaker himself—that is, to his own words—and is entitled “The Filmmaker’s Reflections: Politics & Postcoloniality”. This part considers the writings of Tunde Kelani, as a concluding reflection for the reader who may be interested in the filmmaker’s critical thoughts on his cinema and cinema in general. The first essay: “The Fusion of Nigeria’s Creative Industries” (2008), is Kelani’s personal opinion on the state of Nollywood and its relation to the other arts. The filmmaker shares his thoughts in a very short essay, and suggests pathways for filmmakers to take advantage of the potentials of other artforms. The second essay is a faculty lecture which he delivered in 2014 at the University of Ibadan, as part of a series of lectures. It was the first in a series of the Faculty of Arts Lectures, delivered by practitioners in their respective industry. In the lecture, “The Place of Indigenous Film in a Nation Rattled by Violence” (2014), Kelani talks about the universe of his works and especially how he produces his works in Nigeria. He shares his views about the state of the country, piracy, and how he has thrived in his collaborations with very significant people who have been affected and influenced by his remarkable cinema—even in a postcolonial society. The last essay, “African Cinema and Social Change” (2015), is also a lecture, this time one he delivered during the occasion of a film conference at the University of Westminster in London, 2015. The essay examines African cinema and the theme of social change. Kelani offers his candid views yet again about the state of cinema in Africa, and how social change is pursued in the works of some of the greatest filmmakers on the continent, including Ousmane Sembene. Kelani concludes by offering a short synopsis of his works and how they individually advocate for the change desired in Africa.

## Conclusion

The collection is an invitation for all and sundry to the universe of Kelani’s films. The painstaking effort of putting fifteen essays together can be very inundating and challenging. The contributors have shown that fresh ideas can be retrieved (and are still retrieved) from the longstanding works of this remarkable filmmaker. A good number of these essays also point to the attempt to achieve a non-dystopian world in the continent, and indeed across the entire world. Kelani’s films are humane in their framework, forthcoming in style and structure, and deadpan in truth, as well as factual in their presentation. His image is a true reflection of each of his most endearing protagonists, whose attitudes and ideas are steeped in the notions of exhortation.

The essays in this collection remind us about the processes, principles, and ideas that should form the basis of a new beginning in an imagined world, and how this can shape our desires in progressive ways. They illustrate how communities and citizens can revitalize their quest for what is suitable, normal and legitimate. They remind us yet again about how leadership can evolve progressively and how such leadership can be legitimized, in order to administer it fairly and provide a larger vision for the world to connect to and agree upon. Tunde Kelani's films offer us a common understanding and assumption, and a non-negotiable baseline of principles that can set a new world order in motion in the most productive way, to meet the needs of the present and the anticipated future. Perhaps, such visual illustrations can only emerge from one whose being resonates with that of the functions of the *Orita*.

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