

Òrúnmìlàn Film-Philosophy: Aesthetics of Èjìgbèdè Èkú in *Saworoide*

Abstract

This article discusses a relationship between the philosophical praxis of Òrúnmìlàn and aesthetics of Èjìgbèdè Èkú (i.e., the costume of the living and the costume of the dead) in *Saworoide* (dir. Tundé Kèlání's, 1999). I construct the Yorùbá/Òrúnmìlàn philosophical method of Èjìgbèdè Èkú in the contemporary Nigerian narrative film as case study of how contemporary African filmmakers, like their oral artiste counterparts, continue to articulate their inherited traditions via cinematic storytelling. In doing that I draw on what I call the Òrúnmìlàn “parable of *Eégún*” (masquerade) to establish what I designate the philosophical/therapeutic questions of Èjìgbèdè Èkú; and thus, argue that Èjìgbèdè Èkú gives “presence to non-presence” so that the living/present can dialogue with the dead/past as a way of healing, re-moralizing, and/or decolonizing the living through cinematic storytelling. I conclude that Òrúnmìlàn film does not solely rekindle, and teach us, a valuable aesthetic practice of self-reflection or self-reevaluation but also decolonize and de-westernize film-philosophy¹.

Keywords: Africa, Film, Decolonization, Philosophy, Storytelling, Òrúnmìlàn and Yorùbá

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I. Introduction

An important aspect of verbal and visual arts in ritual contexts in Africa is the way they affect their audience, initiate and non-initiate alike.

Rowland Abiodun, (1994, 309).

'Aso funfun ní sunkún aró, ipìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ ní sunkún èkejì rẹ̀ tantantan' – it is the white cloth that cries for specific dyes; the opening of a metaphor begs for its completion.

– *Òtú(r)á Méjì* in Tundé Kèlání's film *Saworoide*.

The next sections of this article discuss the philosophical praxis of Òrúnmìlà and aesthetics of Èjìgbèdè Èkú (i.e., the costume of the living which is also a costume of the dead) in *Saworoide* (dir. Tundé Kèlání's, 1999). I construct the Yorùbá/Òrúnmìlà philosophical method of Èjìgbèdè Èkú in the contemporary Nigerian film as case study of how contemporary African filmmakers, like their oral artiste counterparts, continue to articulate their inherited traditions via cinematic storytelling. In doing that I draw on what I call the Òrúnmìlàn "parable of Eégún" (masquerade) to establish what I designate the philosophical/therapeutic questions of Èjìgbèdè Èkú; and thus, argue that Èjìgbèdè Èkú gives "presence to non-presence" so that the living/present can dialogue with the dead/past as a way of healing, re-moralizing, and/or decolonizing the living through cinematic storytelling. I therefore conclude that Òrúnmìlàn film does not solely rekindle, and teach us, a valuable aesthetic practice of self-reflection and self-reevaluation but also decolonize and de-westernize film-philosophy.

Hence, this article is providing the world with Òrúnmìlàn film as a way of decolonizing and de-westernizing scholarship in film-philosophy which has been dominated by European/western philosophers who have explored the manifestations of specific European/western philosophical traditions in Hollywood narrative film, European Art film and non-African experimental films.

Hereunder, I am bringing a decolonial perspective into the ongoing discussion on the relationship between film and philosophy with the aim to establishing and clarifying the contribution of Yorùbá/African cinema to the global discourse of philosophical concern. I am aware of specific explorations of the relationship between film and philosophy that have been engaged by some scholars of contemporary African cinema. For instance, Kenneth Harrow's (2013) book *Trash: African Cinema from Below* embraces the problem of trash (which is synonymous with African cinema) not solely as the problem of value between the so-called more and lesser cultures, but also as the condition of philosophy that is rooted in the trashiness of artistic recycling of ideas. Drawn upon postcolonial and feminist theories/philosophies, (such as, Fanon and Spivak), Kathleen Scott & Stefanie Van de Peer (2016) discussed how African female suffering and postcolonial gendered violence are constructed and shared through world cinema. Updating Deleuze's project on political cinema, Matthew Holtmeier (2016) draws examples from two films set in Algeria, (Gillo Pontecorvo's (1966) *Battle of Algiers* and Rachid Bouchareb's (2010) *Outside of Law*) and argues that political films that rely on the formation and transformation of subjectivity to depict a becoming-political of their characters against identified oppressors are biopolitical cinema. Ivo Ritzer (2018) discusses African cinema as "Post-Third Cinema" that finds a theoretical frame in the philosophy of relationality. Adesina Afolayan (2017, 525) grounds his reading of African cinema "on Deleuzian experience: Can the compelling significance of the African predicament force African philosophers to look for answers, and even questions, in Nollywood?"

In this paper, I am formulating a new way of understanding cinematic storytelling from within an African philosophical framework which I call the "Òrùnmiliàn film-philosophy". Based on the condition of philosophy that pushes the interactions between the past and the present within the performance and ritual contexts of *Egúngún* into cinematic context, I therefore discuss Òrùnmiliàn

film-philosophy as an example of the concepts of film as articulations and/or prolongations of inherited African philosophical traditions. For *Èjìgbèdè Èkú* is pregnant with cultural, political and/or philosophical meanings in the postcolonial Africa, the *Òrúnmìlàn* film-philosophy is important to understand the interaction of the past and the present, the known and the unknown, the dead and the living through cinematic storytelling.

II. *Òrúnmìlàn* and the Parable of *Eégún*

*Òrúnmìlàn*² the foremost Yorùbá diviner/philosopher/narrator radicalizes Ifá knowledge system. Though *Òrúnmìlàn* and Ifá are used interchangeable, but one can think of *Òrúnmìlàn* as the progenitor/inventor of Ifá the divination tool/technology and the encyclopedia of Yorùbá knowledge system. Wande Abimbola (1975, 32) asserts that “Ifá is recognized by the Yorùbá as a repository for [the] Yorùbá [indigenous] body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore.” And in Ifá corpus is the knowledge of Yorùbá societies, historical events, philosophical ideas, and mythical characters that continue to inspire Yorùbá arts and artists from the ancient to the contemporary times. Perhaps that would explain one of the key reasons why Stanley Cavell (1974, 585) finds “the mythical in the typical . . . to be the natural mode of revelation for film . . . the power with which the director, in his pact with his audience, begins. For this reason, I analyze the myth/parable of *Eégún* (Masquerade) as the entry point to the concept of *Èjìgbèdè Èkú* that clarifies a symbolic and natural mode of revelation for *Òrúnmìlàn* film directors, such as, Tunde Kelani who is perhaps the prominent figure. In the oral text of *Èjì Ogbè*, *Òrúnmìlàn* narrates:

² To learn about *Òrúnmìlàn* and/or Ifá, please read Wande Abimbola (1968, 1969, 1975, and 1977), Abosede Emanuel (2000), and Sophie Oluwole (2017).

“Ní ojó tí Eégún dé ayé, ìbejì ni wón bí i. Ọkán ku, Ọkán wà láàyè. èyí tí ò wà láàyè wáá sunkún títí, Ni wón bá dọgbán, Wón d’ásọ Eégún. Wón mú èyí tó wà láàyè lọ sínú igbó. Wón gbé asọ Eégún náà bó ẹnìkan lóri. Ènì tí ó gbé Eégún náà n pé èyí tó wà lááyé pé: Má títí wàá o, ihín ò rọ o o.’ Èyí tó wà lááyé bèrè sí sunkún, Eégún náà yára wọ inú igbó lo. Asọ tí a dá bò aláàyè lóri Ni à n pè ní ẹkú Eégún. Ẹkú ayé ò, Ẹkú ọrun, Ni à n pè ní ẹjìgbèdè ẹkú³ –

when masqueraders are born, they are born twins. One dies while the other lives. The living cries endlessly to the extent that the people devise a means to stop him. For this reason, they make a masquerade costume; they take the living to a forest; and cover someone else with the masquerade costume. The wearer of the masquerade costume disguises like the dead and says to his twin brother who lives that: do not come yet, there is no comfort here. The living starts crying again, the masquerade therefore enters the bush.

Ọrúnmilà reminds us that the cloth which is used in covering the living is what we call ‘masquerade costume’. The costume of the living, the costume of the past/dead/spirit is what we call Ẹjìgbèdè Ẹkú. On the one hand, Ẹjìgbèdè Ẹkú is made of symbolic elements/objects, (such as, ancestral clothes, dead animal skins, horns, bones, and other dead objects), to unlock memories of the past and/or dead ancestors. These elements/objects embody metaphysical/mythological language because it is believed that masqueraders are Yorùbá ancestors who entertain, and celebrate with, their peoples during the annual festival of Egúngún. That would explain why masqueraders are called *ará ọrún* – those who come from the world of the dead/spirit. On the other hand, Ẹjìgbèdè Ẹkú is made of material objects, (such as, everyday clothes, shoes, bags, and other objects that are

³See page 2 of ‘Wande Abimbola’s (1977) *Awon Oju Odu Mereerandinlogun*, Oxford University Press.

in vogue), that speak contemporary language in a metaphorical manner. For this reason, Èjìgbèdè Èkú embodies both the metaphysical/mythological objects of the dead/past and the material objects of the living; and thus bridges the transitional gulf between the world of the dead and the world of the living. It is brought alive when used to cover an actor/performer who impersonates a Yorùbá ancestor/character, and thus speaks oral/verbal language of the living to heal or re-moralize spectators during the performance. Having explained what Èjìgbèdè Èkú symbolizes, let us now turn to the analysis of the first part of the parable.

To start with, the twins (i.e., the masqueraders), in Òrúnmilà parable, stand for a character and a spectator that is needed for a theatrical or cinematic storytelling to be engaged, or 'born' in Òrúnmilà's word. The dead/past and the living inhabit two different worlds, namely, the theatrical/cinematic narrative world and the world of the audience or the world of the living. Now, let us imagine how a person who is longing for a dead/past partner/ancestor would feel when that person is presented with the possibility of meeting such a partner again. The longing for the dead which prompts the crying of the living can be understood within the context of attachment (or emotional bond), one of the terms that "are common to both narrative artworks and psychoanalysis" (Derrida 2015, 26); and the plan to stop the crying of the living is considered to be the process of theatre-making or film-making in which: masquerade costume is made; an actor who impersonates the dead is cast; and the performance space, where it deems possible for the living and the dead to meet and converse, is found in a forest. Hence, the idea of meeting and having a conversation with the dead (or the past) that appears to us from an unknown world can be understood as the basis of the sense of intimacy between performer and audience in the Yorùbá theatre and cinema. Such a performer-audience interaction/relationship gives credence to the therapeutic essence of Yorùbá/African theatrical or cinematic experience.

The therapeutic nature of Òrúnmìlàn film-philosophy, (whose essence is healing), is demonstrated by the actor, in the Òrúnmìlàn myth of Eégún, who wears the masquerade costume to disguise like the dead or past ancestor; and says to his living twin brother that “do not come yet, there is no comfort here”. Thus, the parable of Eégún does not solely establish the influence of visual and oral-aural symbolism of Egúngún on both Yorùbá/African theatre and then cinema, but also give credence to why the silent era was not recorded in the history of Yorùbá/Nigerian cinema. The Òrúnmìlàn parable affirms the evolutionary theory of the foremost Yorùbá theatre and film scholars, such as, Joel Adedeji (1998) and Biodun Jeyifo (1984) that traced the origin of Yorùbá theatre, (which later influenced narrative aesthetics in Yorùbá cinema), to the celebration of the dead who are reunited with the living during the annual festival of Egúngún.

However, the possibility of meeting and having a conversation with the past, which is not without problem of a certain sort, is the condition of philosophy in the conception of the costume of the living and the costume of the dead/past as èjìgbèdè èkú, that is, the symbolic object in which the worlds of the dead and that of the living unfathomably and metaphysically commingle. By way of analogy, èjìgbèdè èkú in the Yorùbá/African theatre and cinema can be understood as the symbolic apparatus such as costume and/or costume-props that unlock historical and/or past knowledge, and thus auto-revive audience memory of the past in a symbolic manner. Of course, èjìgbèdè èkú represents the past that affects, influences, or comments on, the present. Paradoxical as it may sound, èjìgbèdè èkú obscures the distinction between the past and the present, the known and the unknown, the world of the living and the world of the dead, the perceiver and the perceived, as well as illusion and reality that are interwoven within its metaphysical symbolism.

In the second part of the story, Òrúnmìlàn recounts that:

“Ní ojó kan, iyá èjì ní wẹ, Eégún sì ní bọ wá. Eégún gbé asọ iyá ẹ lọ. Wọn ní, kí l’ó gbé ọ l’ásọ lọ? Ó ní àìmò ní ẹ. Wọn ní kín ní jẹ àìmò? Ó ní èkíní ní Eégún, èkejì ní Orò. Bí èyàn ò bá mọ wẹ, ta ni ó gbé asọ idí ẹ lọ? Wọn ní kí wọn ó bi Eégún. Eégún ní òun ò gbé e. wọn ní kí wọn ó bi Orò. Orò ní òun ò jalè. [...] Ifá má jẹẹ kí wọn ó gbé asọ idí mí lọ⁴.

One day, the twins’ mother is taking (a) bath while a masquerader appears at the village square. The masquerader steals his mother’s clothes. People then ask the woman: what steals your clothes? The unknown, she responds. They query: what is the unknown? The woman replies: the first one is Eégún, the second is Orò. Then, they raise the investigative question: if one does not know how to bathe, who steals their clothes? They interrogate Eégún, Eégún denies stealing the clothes. They ask Orò; Orò responds that he doesn’t steal.... Ifá do not allow the unknown to steal the clothes that cover my nakedness.

In this part of the story, Òrúnmilà establishes the essence of Egúngún moral plays as the dramatizations of specific moral questions in the Yorùbá communities. He draws our attention to the two ways of understanding the languages of Egúngún moral plays. The first one is “psychological/private language” known to a certain moral agent/character while the second is a “communal/social language” understood by other moral agents who interact or relate with that moral agent/character. Describing the language of our inner knowing, Òrúnmilà translates the privacy that associates with bath-taking into the process of getting rid of immoral behaviour that questions/bothers our conscience. Inasmuch as people bathe privately, then, one can say that the

⁴ See page 2 of ‘Wande Abimbola’s (1977) *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, Oxford University Press.

process of getting rid of moral dirtiness, (that is known only to a moral agent), is carried out in a private space (such as bathroom) where no one sees our “moral nakedness”. While people also bathe in the rivers, the consciousness that comes with keeping our moral nakedness private is what matters in this context. But considering unbecoming moral behaviors that are known to other moral agents as “communal language” of a certain sort; the clothes in Òrúnmilà story can be described as the symbolic objects that may put a moral agent behind what John Rawls (1999) calls “the veil of ignorance”. It is important to clarify that behind “the veil of ignorance” a moral agent knows nothing about their moral attitudes. So, the clothes ought to be removed before engaging in the core process of dealing with unbecoming moral attitudes that are not known to a specific moral agent.

But to remove the clothes in a public space is to expose our “moral nakedness” to ourselves and to others. Because, of course, to allow such clothes to be stolen and thus be used by others/performers as costumes and/or costume props is to provide others with èjìgbèdè èkú that may aid the interpretation and exposition of our moral nakedness to us and to others. Of course, it is possible for the performers of moral plays to expose moral nakedness of other moral agents by deploying symbolic apparatus such as èjìgbèdè èkú. It is also possible for a moral agent who is also a cinematic audience to identify their costumes onstage or onscreen. And when that happens, it is natural and practical that the moral agent (the audience) would feel bothered or even troubled that their moral nakedness has been exposed. It is based on the natural and practical reasons that the Yorùbá people use the metaphor of òpa (stick) and pètèpètè (mud) to describe “moral play” as the spatter of mud that covers other people’s bodies when one hits the mud pètèpètè with a stick òpa. The Yorùbá saying, therefore, pleads with those who may be covered with the spatter of mud not to be offended but to yield to corrections through self-reflection or self-reevaluation. As the

saying goes, *pètèpètè táa nà ní òpa; èni tó bá tabà kó má fi se ibínú, kó bá wa tún 'bè se*. Hence, it is evident that the clothes in *Òrúnmilà* story do not solely serve as the source of inspiration and motivation for the dramatization and exposition of immorality especially in the performances of *Egúngún*; but they also serve as symbols of identifications through which it recurs to moral agents (spectators) that their past and private worlds have been dramatized, and psychoanalyzed.

The significance of the moral play of *Eégún* is to reveal our unbecoming moral attitudes to ourselves for self-reflection. It goes without *Yorùbá* saying that *tójú bá sepin amá nyò han ojù ni* – when the eyes oozed mucus, we will remove the discharge to show it to the eyes. Sufficed to say that it is possible for the eyes not to feel the effects of its own discharge; but it might be difficult for the eyes to see and know the nature of what oozes from within itself without removing and showing it to the eyes. The *Yorùbá* ethical-aesthetic practice of showing eyes its own discharge forms the basis for Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic argument that a mentally imbalanced patient can be healed through the process of interrogating their past and unconscious experience. However, my understanding of the concept which becomes the major discovery in Freud's psychoanalysis is based on the *Yorùbá* saying that *ojó tí wèrè bàmò pé wèrè loun, ojó nà lara è yá* – an insane person becomes sane the moment or the day he realizes that he was insane.

To *Òrúnmilà* film-philosophers, the ethical-aesthetic practice is not unconnected with the fact that human beings are naturally selfish; and that would explain why Iris Murdoch (1985, 78), insists that “how can we make ourselves better? is the question moral philosophers should attempt to answer.” Meanwhile, the critical tradition that can make us better is what *Òrúnmilà* film-philosophers met; and the critical tradition is part and parcel of *Egúngún* performative expression and experience. Thus, when people ask: who steals your clothes? And the woman's response that it is the unknown. That question leads to another question: what is the unknown? One is *Eégún*

and the other is Orò, she answers. If one does not know how to bathe, who steals their clothes? They ask Eégún. Eégún denies the stealing of the clothes because Egúngún moral plays indirectly dramatize and interpret unbecoming moral attitudes without naming the moral agent(s) of ridicule. With that in mind, everyone thinks that Egúngún moral plays have exposed their moral nakedness, even when the object of ridicule is an important figure in the community. But as the saying goes the king does not arrest a performer. In other words, it is believed that a performer had never been arrested for being critical of prominent characters while performing/acting. We can understand Eégún's ignorance of the stealing within the context of what Linsey McGoey (2012) conceives as "ignorance as emancipation". This idea of ignorance as emancipation allows Eégún to freely criticize prominent characters without being penalized.

But unlike Eégún, Orò is a deity whose ritual performance is done in secret. It is believed that Orò doesn't steal. In fact, sacrifice is offered to Orò while searching for stolen items within the Yorùbá communities because it is believed that Orò would find the items and punish the culprit(s). So, it is already sufficed that Orò does not engage in the public business of dramatization in the interest of moralization. However, it is based on moral reasons that Eégún exposes unbecoming moral behaviors; and that is the reason why people pray to Òrúnmilà to avert shame that comes with such moral plays. To Yorùbá, shame is more tragic than death. Hence, the morality in the artistic expression of Eégún formed the basis for the manifestations of èjìgbèdè èkú in Tunde Kelani's film *Saworoidẹ*.

III. The Questions of Èjìgbèdè Èkú in *Saworoidẹ*

In Tundé Kèlání's *Saworoidẹ*, the manifestations of èjìgbèdè èkú are evident in a tripartite symbolic apparatus, namely, adé idẹ a brass crown; ilù saworoidẹ a drum with brass jingle bells; and àdó idẹ a small brass container. These objects represent some anachronistic metaphors within

the context of the cultural, philosophical, and socio-political epoch of Yorùbá. In the ancient Yorùbá political system, *adé idẹ* symbolizes the power of the king; *ilù saworoidẹ* represents the voice of the people; and *àdó idẹ* contains substance used for the ritual that binds a King to their ancestors and peoples. So, the film shows us the apparatus that metaphorically links the past/ancient/pre-colonial Yorùbá world to the postcolonial world in Nigeria, Benin Republic, Ghana, Cuba, Brazil, and the United States. Though they stand for power and politics, (between Yorùbá kings, their ancestors, and people), which have been devalued and subdued in the contemporary political dispensations, but their metaphorical and metaphysical meanings are indestructible. Such indestructibility of meanings, which lingers on in the people's mind, allows the Yorùbá past to dialogue with the present in Kelani's *Saworoidẹ*. The indestructible meanings may open the audience's cognitive portal to epistemic download triggers by identified symbols as a device for reflecting together, (in which the known interacts with the unknown as the past affects our knowledge of the present), in the Yorùbá/African cinema. In fact, the Òrúnmilà/Yorùbá consciousness of indestructible philosophic meanings, (in oral writing of Òtú(r)á Méjì as quoted at the beginning of this article), is re-echoed, and re-affirmed in the opening sequence of the film – *Saworoidẹ*.

Tunde Kelani's *Saworoidẹ* tells the story of a city-state called Jogbo. The story is allegorical to post-independence Nigeria where the indigenous socio-political system of the people is obliterated due to modernity. It is expected of any king of Jogbo to be of service to his people. For this reason, every Jogbo king is expected to do the coronation ritual that ties a new king to their ancestors and to the people. But during his coronation, Lápitẹ (a Jogbo King in the film), refuses to do the ritual. Considering himself a modern king, Lápitẹ goes for his coronation ritual with a gun with which he stops the ritual; and then, threatens the initiates not to tell the world that he has not done the ritual.

For this reason, Lápitẹ is considered by the initiates as his own king rather than the king of the people. Meanwhile, the implication for any king who refuses to do the ritual of coronation is that another person will be competing for their crown while the king lives. But Lápitẹ insists that he does not want to be tied to the people of the past.

Lápitẹ represents a leader who thinks of buying big cars and transferring commonwealth to his foreign bank accounts as the criteria of being modern. To fund his lavish spending, Lápitẹ gives a free hand to foreign timber merchants to cut trees from Jogbo forest. The foreign timber merchants cut trees without replacing them with new ones. They destroy farm products at the expense of Jogbo farmers. So, while the people unite against Lápitẹ for his business dealing with foreign timber merchants and for his lavish spending that makes them poor; Lápitẹ seeks the military support of General Làgàta in the interest of silencing the voice of the people. Of course, General Làgàta wins the battle for himself as Lápitẹ's throne is usurped by the General. Thereafter, Làgàta connives with some chiefs to continue their corrupt business as usual. But in the end, the people triumph over Làgàta because he is unaware of the pact that binds every Jogbo's king to the people. He knows nothing about the pact that represents an unwritten agreement between a king and the people. That pact that binds every Jogbo's king to the people is translatable to metaphors, (of the white cloth that cries for specific dyes; and the opening of a metaphor that cries vehemently for its completion), in the oral text of Òtú(r)á Méjì that opens the film.

It is important to stress that the pact between the king and the people is not without problems of certain shots which I describe here as the problems of "metaphysical/ethical twoness". To clarify that, let us imagine how a red colour applied to a white cloth would alter the appearance of the cloth while the metaphysical meanings of white and red colours remain indestructible. Meanwhile, the indestructible metaphysical meanings of colours alter the appearance of objects they are

applied to; and the objects inevitably attract/absorb these colours in the same ways the knowledge of the present attracts the indestructible knowledge of the past. So, if we think of Lápité as a white cloth and think of his ancestors and peoples as various colours that he attracts, (because of his socio-political responsibilities as a king), then, we will see the metaphysical/ethical problem of twoness that attached to his position. Of course, the metaphysical meanings of crown, throne, beads, staff of office and other paraphernalia that symbolize power and authorities are indestructible but those who occupy such positions of power are destructible. For this reason, the problems of metaphysical/ethical twoness are inevitable moral and political disagreements between the king and the people.

The philosophical problem of twoness which is translatable to the indestructible past of the city-state of Jogbo is in contact with its destructible present in Kelani's *Saworoide*; and the contact of the past and the present is symbolized by adé idẹ, ilù saworoide, àdó idẹ and those who inherit the objects of authority and political power. With a storytelling technique that demonstrates how African sages transmit their inherited knowledge of origins from one generation to another, the dialogue between the past and the present is aptly illustrated at the beginning of the film. The archetypes of such sages in *Saworoide* are: (Bàbá) the progenitor and the king who shares the historical knowledge of Jogbo and dies at the beginning of the film; and Bàbá Òpálábá (the local griot/narrator) who stays at the king's courtyard to know about certain mysteries behind the origin of Jogbo. Bàbá the king and Bàbá Òpálábá are the narrative agents that tell the story of the pristine Jogbo not solely to other characters in the film but also to the film spectators.

Bàbá the king, (through his interactions with others), tells the story of a peaceful Jogbo to the audience. While the opening sequence of the film that captures the integration of artistic forms (i.e., singing, drumming, dancing, and acrobatic displays) that shows the celebration of Bàbá the

king's death, in the film, is an important storytelling concept borrowed from "African total theatre". For the concept affords a sort of dialogue between the past and the present, Kelani the director relies on the movement of camera and that of objects/beings in the narrative universe to capture the celebration. But the celebration is essential to create an imaginary of the past, (i.e., the worthy life of a popular king), for moral teaching/lesson. Carrying the corpse of the king while dancing, the people sing that: "our father is gone. The helper is gone. He did not fetch water and pollute the river for those who are coming behind him. The helper is gone." For this reason, the deceased King and Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá are the narrative agents that bridge the gap between the narrative universe of the cinema and the world of spectators in the postcolonial Africa.

Through the lens of camera, Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá speaks directly to spectators as if they dwell in the same world. The director of the film aids the presentational mode by deploying a low level shot to elevate Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá to a moral God who sees and questions unbecoming moral attitudes. Hence, the film pushes the oral tradition of Yorùbá into cinematic context as a way of re-moralizing every moral agent against corrupt practices. And that would explain why Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá sings that "these leaders are wicked, they are wicked. They promise to serve the people but end up stealing the commonwealth. This matter will have serious consequences, it will have consequences." With the song, Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá does not solely forewarn the people of Jogbo especially the corrupt leaders but also speak directly to African and non-African spectators as a way of teaching moral lesson. The essence of the song finds similarity in how and why the past king tells and reminds his descendants about Jogbo's origin before his death.

It follows that a fortiori equates the story within the story, in the film, to the Yoruba/African "epistemology of looking-back" which is translatable to the process of learning from, or referring to, the past to avoid the mistakes therein and to allow the unavoidable problems of the past to

peacefully co-exist with that of the present. As the saying goes, *tí ọmọdẹ bá subú, áwo iwájú, bí àgbà bá subú á wo ẹ̀yìn wò* – when a teenager falls, he/she looks at the front; but when an adult falls, he/she looks at the back. The Yorùbá epistemic method of looking-back finds critical and cultural similarities in the symbolic image of Sankofa bird in the philosophy of Akan people of Ghana. Katharina Schramm succinctly sums up the philosophy that “the future lies in the past” or “You need to know your past in order to move forward” - this is how the adinkra - symbol Sankofa is often interpreted” (2010, 191). Hence to Yorùbá, (like the Akan people), the Òrúnmilà philosophical problem of twoness describes the essence of the knowledge of the past (or yesterday) while addressing the epistemic problem which may protrude beyond the present (or today) into the future (or tomorrow).

It is based on the ignorance of this epistemic background in the narrative universe of *Jogbo* that the past conflicts with the present and the present beckons the uncertain future. King ‘Lápitẹ rejects and desecrates the tradition of the land, and destroys the indestructible metaphysical epoch represented by the metaphors of *adé idẹ* a brass crown; *ilù saworoide* a drum with brass jingle bells; and *àdó idẹ* a small brass container. It is not unreasonable to believe that these symbolic metaphors of the past have indestructible meanings that bind the sacred to the secular; the psychical to the physical; the past to the present; the known to the unknown; the dead to the living; the king to the people; and the present to the future. But Lápitẹ meets his waterloo as the film demonstrates how metaphysical and/or metaphorical meanings haunt their objects of significations.

It is evident that ‘Lápitẹ is the archetype of a twins’ mother, (in the Òrúnmilà parable of *Eégún*), whose *ẹ̀jìgbèdè ẹ̀kú* becomes garments of shame that are stolen and displayed in the film. As the name implies, – ‘Lápitẹ means – *Ọlá* – royalty – *tó* – that – *pi-tẹ* – is built on the foundation of shame. As explained earlier, his rejection of the ritual of coronation that makes a new king does

not solely negate the socio-political tradition or system of check and balance, (that binds the king to his people as well as the past to the present), but also desecrate the very foundation upon which his kingship and kingdom were built. It is important to recall that *adé idẹ* (a brass crown) represents the kingship and the king; *ilù saworoide* (a drum with brass jingle bells) stands for the voice of the people; and *àdó idẹ* (a small brass container) symbolizes the strong bond between *adé idẹ* and *ilù saworoide* because it contains the strong links, (which is used for incisions and oath-taking), that binds a new king to his predecessors or ancestors as well as his people. So, to reject the very metaphysical meanings that connect one to his people is to disconnect oneself from the voice of the people; and to disconnect self from the voice of the people is to disagree with, and disrupt, the very foundation that gives one voice. As the Yorùbá saying goes, *ohùn èyàn ni ohùn ọlórún* – the voice of the people is the voice of the God; and a tree does not make a forest. That would explain why it is believed that ‘Lápitẹ’*s* kingship is not only isolated metaphysically from the kingdom but also built on the foundation of shame that always ends in nothing other than itself.

Like the *ẹjigbèdè ẹkú* that facilitates the dialogue between the dead and the living, ‘Lápitẹ’*s* costume and costume-props symbolize the physicality, without presence, of the past and unknown beings/characters in the physical material world. It is based on philosophical reflections that the Yorùbá, like other Africans, give symbolic images or voices to the past, absent and/or unknown beings/characters that dwell in the metaphysical world. And the purpose of giving voice to the past, the absent and the unknown is to learn from them through historical, political, and philosophical reflections. Such reflections inform the recreations of limitless human archetypes and symbolic ideas in which Yoruba cineastes such as, Tunde Kelani, Femi Lasode, Biyi Bandele and Kunle Afolayan just to mention a few, give voices back to the past and the unknown via the deployment of *ẹjigbèdè ẹkú*.

VI. Conclusion

It is demonstrated to us through the parable of Eégún that human beings are moved not only by what they identify but also by what they hear from the identified thing/being. That explains why the living/spectator, in the oral text, start crying as soon as the impersonator of the dead insists that there is no comfort in the world of the dead. Such an appearance of the dead which makes the living/audience to react to the dialogue shares philosophical resemblance in what Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, calls the “visor effect”. Derrida asserts that “since we do not see the one who sees us, and who makes the law, who delivers the injunction, (which is, moreover, a contradictory injunction), since we do not see the one who orders “swear”, we cannot identify it in all certainty, we must fall back on its voice” (p. 7). The aspect of the parable shows us how spectators react to the appearance of èjìgbèdè èkú in cinematic storytelling. It teaches us that while èjìgbèdè èkú can make us/spectators to be critical of a character, (such as, Lápitẹ the King of Jogbo in *Saworoide*), it can also make us/spectators to see another character, (such as, Bábá the King and Lápitẹ’s predecessor or Bábá Òpálábá), as an object of admiration. It is important to emphasize that Eégún the performer (in Òrúnmìlàn theatrical/cinematic storytelling), appears to their twin (the spectator) from the unknown world to entertain, criticize and thus heal/decolonize the mind of their twin (the spectator).

The aesthetics of èjìgbèdè èkú permits us to clearly see that similar costumes, (in western cinematic tradition), have paradoxical effects of colonizing, of hypnotizing, and/or of conquering the mind. For instance, the transformation of Robert Powell, (in Franco Zeffirelli’s (1977) film *Jesus of Nazareth*), to the character of Jesus, and the audience reception of the character demonstrate how such costumes can make God out of a cinematic character. Arguably, the fetishization of costumed physique of Robert Powell as the physical manifestation of the son of God is the reason why the

actor is mistaken for Jesus in Africa and beyond. Despite that the actor openly declares that he is not Jesus Christ, his costumed images are still hung in most Christian homes and churches in Africa, Europe and beyond. Perhaps because in the Zeffirelli's film, Jesus Christ wants spectators to come to his father in the heaven through him. But I ask: how can we get to his father through him while we still live? So, it is against the sustainability of emotional attachment, (that comes with such fetishization of costumed images), that the dead in the parable of Eégún quickly disappears, and thus suspends their interaction with the living. It is also the reason why Òrúnmilà keeps reminding us that the clothes that we used in covering the living is what we call 'masquerade costume'. It is evident that the philosophical teaching of Òrúnmilà does not involve the fetishization of costumed images via tempo-spatial concealment and displacement/replacement of the living (actor) as in the case of Robert Powell. However, the example of Jesus Christ is drawn from the Zeffirelli's film to clarify that the aesthetic value of èjìgbèdè èkú is, (not in fetishization of costumed images but), in critical tradition and/or self-reflection via theatrical and/or cinematic storytelling for re-moralizing, healing and/or decolonizing the living (i.e., the spectator).

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