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Cultural Representation and Signification in Túndé Kèlání's Films.

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Abstract
There has been no attempt to explore a holistic appreciation of Yorùbá cultural representation and signification in Túndé Kèlání's films despite the number of papers and commentaries on his works. What we have are just bye-pass comments. This work, therefore, is carried out to fill this gap. The corpus for the study consists of eight (43%) of his nineteen films, which by assessment of most critics are his most popular films. The Literary Cultural Theory is employed for the analyses of these films to reveal their cultural representation and signification and the reason for referring to them as cultural films through our understanding of why and how certain Yorùbá beliefs and attitudes have been constructed. Apart from their cultural significance, the films also address various burning sociocultural and political issues, and religious beliefs. Our findings reveal that Kelani's films are great narrative experiment, where he articulates his style and vision. While the Yoruba literary works, cultural and political history are the driving force behind many of his films, he has also developed a consistent and recognizable film style which viewers have identified with, for their extraordinary visual and dramatic sense.

Keywords: Túndé Kèlání, Films, Cultural Signification, Literary Cultural Studies, Style.

1. Introduction

Túndé Kèlání popularly known as TK was born on 26 February, 1948 in Abẹ́òkúta, Southwest Nigeria. He lived with his grandparents in a large communal compound where he experienced Yorùbá traditional life and culture. His love for the visuals and culture makes him to relive some of the culture he has experienced as a youth and the ones he came across in Yoruba literary texts. He went to Abẹ́òkúta Grammar School for his West African School Certificate. TK developed interest in reading Yoruba literary books at a tender age. Some of the books he read include all the five novels of D.O. Fágúnwà: *Ògbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ̀, Ìrìnkèrindò Nínú Igbó Elégbèje, Ìrèké Oníbùdó, Àdìtú Olódùmarè* and *Igbo Olódùmarè*. It was from this experience he later discovered the relationship between literature and drama. Consequently, he adopted literary adaptations as a working model for his filmmaking as some of his most successful films are literary adaptations. Such films include *Kòṣeégbé (*1995), *Ó Le Kú* (1997), *Thunderbolt/Mágùn* (2001), *The White Handkerchief* (2001), *The Narrow Path* (2006), *Dazzling Mirage* (2015) and *Màámi* (2017). Kelani has been one of the few

Yorùbá contemporary film producers, who has created an interface between film and literature His stay with his grandparents in a large communal compound at Abẹ́òkúta further exposed him to Yorùbá traditional life and culture. Possessing a camera as a child of nine years indicates his love for the visuals and photography and this later enables him to present the Yorùbá culture, which he has experienced as a youth and comes across in Yorùbá literary texts in his films.

Emenyeonu's (2010:X) view that only few producers have shown interest in employing African literature as a fertile ground for filmmaking, therefore, attests to the ingenuity of Kèlání in film adaptation:

> Although filmmaking and the film industry have evolved and made significant progress in varying degrees in some African countries, notably Algeria, Cameroun, Egypt, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Morocco, Nigeria, Senegal South Africa, neither the industry nor the entrepreneurs have shown visible interest in the conventional 'romance' between films and literature, or an appreciation of the fact that African literary works could be a fertile source for the generation of African films, more so when works of creative imaginations by Africans have won worldwide acclaim and accolades dating back to the middle of twentieth century.

Kelani is one of the few film producers that adapted literary works for film. He has surpassed others like Adé Afọláyan's *Ìjà Òmìnira* (1976), who adapted Fálétí's novel *Ọmọ Olókùn Ẹṣin;* Ìshọ̀lá Ògúnṣọlá, who adapted Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's *Ẹfúnṣetán Aníwúrà* to mention a few, in this enterprise. Kèlání, almost immediately, discovers the relationship between literature and film and decides to adopt literary adaptations as a model for his production. No wonder he has nine out of nineteen of his total productions films as adaptation[3], where he remakes successful literary texts. In each of these films, stories were interpreted in a new and contemporary fashion without altering the original messages in those writings. Kèlání has a way of ordering events into a cohesive story that is interesting to his audience.

Kèlání's trajectory into filmmaking started at the former Western Nigeria Television Service (WNTV), now Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), where he was employed as a trainee cameraman. From here, he moved to the London International Film School, where he bagged a Diploma in the Art and Techniques of Filmmaking. When he returned from abroad, he assisted and lent technical support to many Yorùbá theatre artistes in the production of their films. Such films include Adé Afọláyan's *Ìyá Ni Wúrà* and *Taxi Driver 1*and *2,* Hubert Ogúnde's *Àròpin N Tènìyàn* and Moses Adéjùmọ̀'s *Ọ̀rún Móoru* and *Moṣebọ́látán* to mention a few. Kèlání later decided to establish his own filmmaking outfit named Mainframe (Òpómúléró) Film and Television Productions in 1991. His deployment of digital equipment and his technical

[3] See Annex: Filmography

proficiency provided him the opportunity for quality productions, which has made his films popular and appealing.

Kèlání is a recipient of the prestigious African Reel Award at the Silicon Valley; African Film Festival, California, USA in 2012; Ecran d'Honneur Award at the 22nd edition in 2018; and he won the Leopold Picture Arts and Sciences award also known as The Oscars in 2019 among others.

Eight out of Kelani's films have English titles and the English language as medium of conversation and dialogue, though, in these films the Yorùbá culture is projected[4]. We believe that using the English medium in these films should not be taken as a betrayal of the indigenous language or a linguistic alienation but a method of exposing such films to a greater percentage of the public with the intention of crossing tribal frontiers. For instance, acclaimed African and Nigerian literary writers such as Wọlé Ṣóyínká and Chinua Achebe have demonstrated in their writings that an African writer can transfer his thoughts and emotions, his indigenous experience and culture through the English language, the official language of Nigeria, and still preserve the indigenous authenticity of that experience. This is exactly what Kèlání has tried to achieve in these films.

Kèlání's realization that films help in transmitting various aspects of human culture is one of the reasons he employs the film medium to showcase various aspects of Yorùbá culture. He focuses on ideas and philosophies of life common to the Yorùbá, and his knowledge that Yorùbá film, just like literature, provides various experiences of Yorùbá culture, philosophy and attitudes and helps the society to be informed and tolerant of the world, makes him a promoter of Yorùbá's rich cultural heritage. In an interview, he reveals his penchant for marrying culture and technology by saying "I needed a medium to share my cultural experience and I settled for films as a medium of expression[5].

There is a complexity in the definition of the term culture and many authors have defined it in several ways. It is most briefly defined as a society's total way, or the sum total of a people's learned pattern of life. In other words, it is a learned pattern of behavior, ideas, beliefs, as well as the artefacts that a people share and transmit from one generation to another, which may consist of a distinct behavioral pattern that is peculiar to that group of people at a given point in time. These embrace the growth of their knowledge, their beliefs, customs, institutions, duties, norms, values, skills and their general worldview and cosmology. Ajayi (2005:3) gives a comprehensive and an all-embracing definition of culture by submitting that it is:

> the means through which members of society interact meaningfully among themselves. It is an acquired collective behavior on the part of a society. It helps members of the society to identify themselves within a certain environment. Much more than this, culture also embraces the methods a group of people adopt to subdue their physical environment as

[4] See Filmography

[5] The Guardian May 6, 2018 p. 18

> well as the ways by which they find solutions to their problems. It also involves the checks and balances within a system. Moreover, it defines people's perception of right and wrong, good and bad, beauty and ugliness, truth and falsehood, life, and so on.

From the above definitions, we have observed that the term, culture, is a very complex one. It is the product of centuries of experimentation, applications and adaptation to various circumstances of life. It generates the art, custom and tradition peculiar to a community of people. We can conveniently deduce that the various aspects of Yoruba culture which are found in Kelani's films are based on so many factors, which are outlined in the definitions of culture above: the socio-cultural, political, economic, religious and other issues, which he has addressed in his films. Whatever subject he examines however, there is a consistency of a deep philosophical thought that underlines his plots. It is on this note that we shall now discuss the Yorùbá cultural expressions and worldview as found in his films, employing the Cultural Literary Theory as a theoretical background.

2. Cultural Literary Theory

Cultural literary theory is an interdisciplinary field due to its blend of various academic fields of study. The field draws from a mix of sociology, anthropology, politics, history, economics, philosophy, linguistics, literature, communication, media arts and more. The scope of this theory is wide. Apart from these fields, its scope further includes literary theories. This is why scholars have seen this theory as literary theory transforming into cultural theory (Barker 2011; Ferguson, White and Levitas 2023). The theory is the development and practice of diverse approaches of studying, interpreting and explaining literary texts and even beyond the text. In this theory, there is a contrastive relationship and complementarity with other literary approaches or studies. The complementary use of cultural literary theory, with other approaches has given adequate exposure to the learning and understanding of human values.

According to Kafle (2007), cultural studies theory also examines how culture is created, maintained, shared, and reproduced. It looks at the relationship between culture, power, and social identities. A scrutiny of the definitions of this theory, gives the impression that all other literary theories mentioned above are subsumed under it and therefore its study can be approached from various perceptions since it is multi-pronged. Consequently, subjecting Kèlání's films to cultural analysis will be done within the parameters of cultural literary theory to be able to examine critically those practices and institutions through which particular values, beliefs, routines of life and habitual forms of conduct are inculcated in the Yorùbá society.

Cultural studies can further be understood as the study of culture and the signifying practices of representation for the textual generation of meaning. The theory demands investigation of the modes by which meaning is produced in a variety of contexts since cultural representations and meanings have a certain materiality (Barker

2011). These materials in which they are embedded include sounds, inscriptions, objects, images, books, magazines, television and film. In these materials, cultural representations and meanings are produced, enacted, used and understood in specific social contexts. From these submissions, we can infer that Kèlání intentionally adopted the film as a medium for Yorùbá cultural representations and meanings. His ingenuity makes him to adopt the medium as a tool for Yorùbá cultural production and as a distribution mechanism for her cultural products.

Culture is a signifier of symbolic meanings. Cultural conventions tell us what constitutes taboos and what does not and the meanings attached to them. In the structuralist trope of binaries for instance, we have the dos and the do not, the edible and the inedible, nature and culture, each of which has meaning only in relation to its opposite. The edible and inedible, for instance, are therefore marked not by questions of nutrition but by cultural meanings, just as Kèlání presents the Yorùbá cultural convention taboo in *Thunderbolt* (*Mágùn),* which literary means 'do not climb'. His intention in this film is his account of a culture and its naturalized meaning and myth, which are to be grasped not in terms of the specific intention of the medical doctor (as we shall see later), but as a form of a signifying practice. So, culture focuses on meaning production (signification) in historical and mythical context. Culturalism, most times, therefore, stresses history and interpretes a way of understanding meaning.

The concept of film suggests not simply the picture but also all practices and with their significations. These include the generation of meaning through objects, images, sounds, costumes, dance and other activities in it. These elements are sign systems, which signify something, just as we have the same mechanism in language. Meanings in a film can only be produced in the interplay between the producer, the film text, and the audience. Cultural literary studies help "people understand where, why, and how certain attitudes and beliefs about themselves and other groups have been constructed" (Ferguson, White and Levitas 2023:1).

3. Methodology

The data for this study comprise of eight films of Túndé Kèlání out of the nineteen films produced by him. These films are his most popular films according to the audience reception of them and their box office returns. The films were watched and their contents subjected to analyses. Oral interview was also conducted with the producer. This complements the written texts consulted online and in the library.

4. Cultural Representation and Signification in Kèlání's Films

An attempt at the classificatory paradigms of Kelani's films shows that his films can be labelled as cultural films since according to him, his major aim of adopting the film medium for his stories is to "affirm Yorùbá cultural beliefs". Furthermore, Kèlání's films are also social films as they deal with social problems in the society. Social problems deal with issues that affect people in a particular society. They are the source of conflicting opinions on morally correct attitudes or incorrect personal or a group life. Social issues are not really distinct from economic or political problems. Poverty on the one hand and

materialistic wealth on the other hand, have always been the source of tension between the rich and the poor. Consequently, this leads to unequal opportunity and neglect of the masses. According to Wikipedia, a social problem is any condition or behaviour that has negative consequences for a large number of people and it is generally recognized as a condition or behaviour that needs to be addressed. A list of common social issues includes, out of several others, child abuse, civil rights, crime, domestic violence and family-related problems. Societal failure, corruption and power dynamics are also underlying factors of social problems. Social problems are, therefore, negative, undesirable and value threatening. Finding a resolution to some of these problems are the focus of Kèlání's films in order to achieve harmonious relationship between members of the society, the ruler and the ruled, and the deities and the people.

Kèlání chooses his characters to fit specific themes and traits, including their physical appearance and personality. The personality of most of his characters fits the traits that he wanted for their roles. This is why his characters are credible, charismatic, likeable, and positive role models. Examples of such personalities are Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, Late Fẹ́mi Fátọ́ba, Late Lárìndé Akinlẹ̀yẹ, Lérè Pàímọ́, Late Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá, Mrs. Dúró Ládipọ (Ọya), Kọ́lá Oyèwọ̀, Peter Fátómilọ́lá among others, majority of who are successful and iconic theatre practitioners in their own right. He also tapped from the cultural knowledge of these practitioners as the late Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá and Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí were constant stars as script writers for his films. Kèlání's background as a professional cinematographer has given him prominence as a film producer and director and his technical dexterity has given his films an uncommon level of artistry because of his detailed attention given to his productions. Apart from the names mentioned above, he has also invited and groomed relatively unknown actors and offered them roles in his films. Kúnlé Afọláyan (Arẹ́sẹ̀jábàtà) and Kabirat Káfidípẹ̀ (Arápáregángan) in *Ṣaworoidẹ* are pertinent examples.

To Kèlání, the institution of kingship has a sacred mandate that is associated with the age-long sacred institution. The king is the political and ritual head of a community according to the cosmological ideology of the Yorùbá. This ideology is what Kèlání tries to project in his films, where the Yorùbá kingship tradition forms part of the themes. Kèlání, no doubt, cherished the role, grandeur, magnificence and authority of the Yorùba king and this explains his resplendent reflection of the kings in various forms in *Ti Olúwa Ni Ilẹ̀, Ṣaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ̀*. In the first film, Kèlání marries tradition and modernity by introducing a young Yorùbá king (Délé Odùlé), who comes from a foreign land and has little knowledge of the culture and history of his community. He (King) therefore has to rely on the account of Ọ̀tún, his next in command, who for selfish interest, distorts the history of the town and collaborates with some exuberant and dishonest youths to sell part of the community's land for their own selfish gains. With this, Kèlání has brought to fore a prevalent contemporary tradition of the selection of a king in Yorùbáland, where affluence, influence, wealth and literacy are now conditions for selection with their attendant animosity and discord in such communities.

Ṣaworoidẹ and *Agogo Eèwọ̀* centre on the parables of the drum as the voice of the people. The brass bell talking drum in the film signifies the pact between the citizens of

Jogbo and their kings. The drum is symbolic and a part of the initiation process of a new king where, if the drum is beaten by the official drummer, a king rejected by the people must die. The films highlight the importance of democracy, good governance and community participation in decision making. In *Ṣaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ̀*[6], which are sequels, the cultural significance of religion as it permeates all facets of Yorùbá life, including the installation and coronation of a new king is portrayed by Kèlání. The ritual performance in the installation of a new Oníjogbo have its origin in Yorùbá religious rites. The desire to propitiate the god of Jogbo land and to usher in prosperity and peace is the main motive that warrants this ritual ceremony. In this community and according to their tradition, the king must serve the people and he is not supposed or expected to be rich. But, the strong refusal of the king Lápitẹ́ (Kọ́lá Oyèwọ), to perform these important rites in order to satisfy his inordinate ambition and self-desire to be rich through corruption leads to his fall and disgrace. Lápitẹ, the king, connives with investors in the town to export the town's major resource, *igi gẹdú* (tree log). With the support of the chiefs, who also benefitted from prebendalism; they loot the treasury of the town and run foreign accounts. They live in opulence to the detriment of the masses. When the masses, led by the trade unions protest against their profligacy, Lápitẹ́ becomes a tyrant, arresting and jailing his perceived opponents. And when the pressure by the youths and the people becomes too much for him, he seeks the assistance of the military to help suppress the people. This becomes his greatest undoing as the military, led by Làgàta stage a coup against him and kill him. Later, the militant youths kill Làgàta by inviting Àyánníyì, the son of Àyángalú, who was forcefully released from prison, to beat the brass bell drum. Làgàta as a result dies of migraine, thereby putting an end to the military rule.

The issue of integrity, which is crucial for the kingship institution in the Yorùbá traditional society is the idea Kèlání tries to project in *Ṣarawoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ̀*. But unfortunately, this is lacking in Lápitẹ́ and his chiefs. The traditional process of electing kings in many parts of Yorùbáland is sometimes compromised with a preference for someone who is influential, wealthy and educated. The traditional method which vested the power on *ifá* is sometimes manipulated and this consequently affects the character and attitude of a king (Lápitẹ́). Kèlání tries to bring to fore the sanctity of kingship in Yorùbáland. He recommends in the film that the sanctity of the kingship institution should be maintained through the principles of checks and balances which have made the Yorùbá kingship institution a model for others. The message in the film is that integrity, honesty and hard work, which are integral attributes of the Yorùbá race should be upheld at all levels.

In their analyses, many critics and scholars believe that the films are amazingly insightful about the ways the Nigerian political class has pillaged and mismanaged Nigerian economy through corruption and oppose the conventions of good governance. Kèlání uses the probing camera to push the inordinate acquisition of wealth of Nigerian leaders beyond the limits. In the films, he uses a variety of cinematic properties and

[6] Out of all Kèlání's films, these two films have attracted commentaries, criticisms and analyses by scholars and stakeholders much more than any other film..

narrative techniques to communicate to his audience and teach them about the perception of Nigerians toward their corruptible leaders. In summary, *Ṣaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ* peep into the Nigeria's political and military landscape since independence: the history of our democracy and military coups.

Kèlání consciously and conscientiously creates sub-plots in *Agogo Èèwọ̀* and *Saworoidẹ* in the scenes involving children playing moonlight games, tongue twisters and riddles under the tutelage of an elderly woman, who also narrates and entertains them with interesting Yorùbá folklore and folktales. The moon is an emblem of the night and symbolizes mystery, magic, introspection and insight. These sub-plots, have no connection with the main plot but are introduced as a result of Kèlání's passion for showcasing Yorùbá culture. Moonlight tales and games are past time practice among the Yorùbá. The setting, as we see in these films, is always within a large compound or in front of a house with children forming the audience. In some other places, children gather around the village fire and tell stories that are meant to prepare them for the future as the stories are didactic with moral lessons. Ìṣọ̀lá (1995) explains the educational significance of this oral literature genre in relation to the intellectual and social development of the Yorùbá child. According to him, apart from entertainment, moonlight games and tales teach children valuable lessons to be imbibed and adhered to for shaping their lives. Many moral values in Yorùbá culture are derived from moonlight tales.

Arugbá is a re-enactment of one of the most popular festivals in Yorùbáland, the Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo festival. This festival is an annual event in Òṣogbo, Nigeria. It celebrates Ọ̀ṣun, the Yorùbá goddess of fertility and during the festival, there is a renewal of the contract between humans and the divinity, where she offers grace to the community and her devotees, who are seeking for the fruit of the womb. The ritual activities of the festival include the offering of an annual sacrifice to the benevolent deity, Ọ̀sun, whose benevolence to her devotees helps them, especially barren women to bear children. Ẹlẹ́buìbọn (2014:141) has labelled this process as "ritualized paediatrics", where women seeking children from this goddess must maintain some elements of sanctity by not having illicit love affairs outside but maintain fidelity with their husband alone, otherwise the deity will not grant their desires. This idea is found in this maxim as expressed by Ẹlẹ́buìbọn:

A kì í ṣe Ọ̀ṣun ká ṣe àbòsí.
Bí ènìyàn bá ń sin Ọ̀ṣun tòun tàbòsí
Ẹ̀yìn etí ni Ládékojú kọ sólúwarẹ̀
Àdúrà irú wọn kì í gbà bọ̀rọ̀

One cannot be a devotee of Ọ̀ṣun
And indulge in illicit affairs.
If one worships Ọ̀ṣun with falsehood
Ládékojú will fail to listen to such devotee.
The prayer of such individual will not be answered.

The film, made with a budget of 22 million naira[7], is set against the backdrop of a corrupt society whose king is also a sexual pervert. The town, therefore, must be cleansed of filth and seek a rebirth before the festival. Though, the king embarks on economic reforms by inviting foreign investors, his weakness for women compromises his leadership and makes his reforms ineffective. Meanwhile, in the process of preparing for the Ọ̀ṣun Òṣogbo festival, a young votary virgin is compelled to carry the sacrifice of worship in a sacred calabash to the groove of the Ọ̀ṣun goddess. This task falls on Adétutù, whose selection by *ifá* is challenged after her abduction by three men. This questions her suitability for the task. The issue is resolved after her innocence is established and virginity intact since she is not raped and her abductors did not have any sexual intercourse with her.

The Yorùbá idea about purification, which Kèlání tries to express in this film, is essentially a religious phenomenon. Purification rites promote access to the gods in order to perform acceptable worship. This is done to avoid supernatural penalty and sanctions against a sinful society and to maintain ethical purity. In the Yorùbá traditional society, virginity was promoted until marriage to protect their young daughters' purity of mind, body and soul. This encourages close and deeply affectionate relationships between the gods and their devotees on the one hand and between husbands and wives on the other hand. In the Yorùbá believe, virginity is a symbol of purity.

Màámi is an adaptation of Fẹ́mi Ọ̀ṣọ́físan's novel with the same title. It is the story of a single parent, Màámi (Fúnkẹ Akíndélé) and her young son, Kashimawo (Ayọ̀mídé Abatti) raised in a poor environment as a result of poverty. In the process of raising her son, she faces a lot of challenges. Despite her low life, Màámi is enterprising, conscientious, hardworking and brave. Though, Màámi later dies, Kashimawo triumphs over all the challenges life throws at him, through the training of the mother, and later goes on to become a prominent football star in Arsenal, an English football club to become a national hero. Màámi later struggles before her tragic death to convince her son to detach from his father, who is discovered to be a cultist. This discovery facilitates his final separation from his father. The major themes in the film are: love, perseverance and fate. It dwells on the Yorùbá culture of good training, discipline and positive character, which Kashimawo and mother represent, and which are indices of the Ọmọlúàbì concept- a Yorùbá cultural concept of a good person, morality and virtue. The scenes of aṣọ-ẹbí and masquerades further affirm aspects of Yorùbá culture. *Màámi* was a commercial failure when compared with Kèlání's other films because at a time it was pirated and failed to cover its production cost (Abulude 2014). But in spite of this shortcoming, it received four nominations at the 7th African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) in 2011.

Ó Le Kú and *Àbẹ̀ní* are two-part films with similar themes of romance and love. While *Àbẹ̀ní* is set in Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, as the story flows between the two countries, *Ó Le Kú* has its setting in Ìbàdàn, Nigeria, with a large percentage of the shooting done inside the University of Ìbàdàn campus.

[7] See http://www.africanfilm.com

Àbẹ̀ní, which won three categories at the 3rd AMAA in 2007[8], tells the story of Àbẹ̀ní (Ṣọlá Asedẹkọ), born to a rich family, who falls in love with Àkànní, the son of a poor family. But, Àbẹ̀ní's father (Jídé Kòsọ́kọ́) is not in support of this relationship between his daughter and Àkànní, but prefers his daughter marrying the son of his wealthy friend (Kareem Adépọ̀jù). In spite of the challenges, intrigues and vehement rejection of their relationship, the two love-birds later decide to elope to a neighbouring country, Republic of Benin to marry and continue their love affairs. *Àbẹ̀ní* is also an allegory on contemporary Nigerian society that is corruption ridden, seeking cleansing and a rebirth. It has an interwoven themes of misgovernance, political power, kidnapping, female chastity, loyalty, HIV/AIDS and corruption. In it, there is an influence of modernity and tradition, all within the context of Yorùbá culture.

On the other hand, in *Ó Le Ku*, Àjàní, a voguish character and a final year undergraduate student of the University of Ìbàdàn is under pressure from his mother to find a partner in *Ó Le Kú.* In the course of carrying out the wish of his mother, he got entangled in a love triangle, dating two ladies- Àṣàkẹ́ and Lọlá simultaneously and Ṣadé, his childhood friend, who eventually takes the centre stage of the love drama. Apart from romance and love, the other themes we can identify in these two films are: marriage, patience and culture change in the modern process of marriage and parents influence over child's relationship.

Marriage is seen as a sacred institution in the Yorùbá socio-cultural semiosphere. Consequently, solid foundation based on Yorùbá traditional ethics and values are laid for it. In the old days, marriage processes rites, from seeking, introduction, courtship and actual marriage involve the family. Tutelage and counselling, which helps the young woman to prepare adequately for her new role and status before the final marriage rite are also family-oriented. In *Ó Le Kú* and *Àbẹ̀ní*, Kèlání presents the changes in these cultural processes, which have been affected by civilization and wants his audience to see the effects of modernization on a once cherished culture of seeking or looking for a life partner. Àjàní and Àkànní, in these films find themselves at cross-roads and faces some problems in their sole attempts to seek for wives.

Kèlání's ingenuity of dressing his characters in costumes that were trending in the 1970s to reflect the period of setting in *Ó Le Kú* has also won him many accolades. The movie later sparked a fashion revolution after its release especially with the short ìró (wrapper) and bùbá which ladies wore and which were labelled after the title of the film. Though, the advent of civilization has influenced the Yorùbá dress culture, the use of these traditional attires in this film not only points to the period of film setting but also refreshes our memory of our cultural heritage (Yorùbá costume), which is used as one of the precursors for our ethnic identity and distinguish us from others. Kèlání's ingenuity in portraying the Yorùbá cultural dress and dressing in this film is a pointer to the fact that the same purpose which dress serves in the past remain the same. In all his films, he has established the idea that costume is a semiotic element used by characters to also enhance their non-verbal communicative capacities. The use of costumes in Kèlání's films not

[8] The film won the Best Sound, Best Child Acting and the Best Picture at AMAA in 2007 according to *Mshaile News.*

only functions as cultural identification, but as signs, symbols of characters personality, and information about their occupations and gender. In Yorùbá films, costumes carry symbolic significance, reflecting historical or cultural narratives, religious beliefs, and social customs.

Thunderbolt (Mágùn) is based on the screen play written by Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí. The story is about two lovers, Yínká (Láńre Balógun), a Yorùbá guy and Ngozi (Uche Osotule), an Igbo lady, who met themselves during their National Youth Service Corp scheme. They later got married and later have to live apart as the work of the wife as a teacher takes her out of the city. The rumour of infidelity by Yínká's friend about his wife makes him feel insecured and consequently decides to lace his wife with *mágùn,* a Yorùbá traditional charm used for chastity control mechanism to punish any adulterous partner. The unsuspecting wife, who has always assured her husband of her fidelity later realizes this, when the side effect of the charm begins to affect her health negatively and had to consult a herbalist. With the help of her friend, Janet (Ngozi Nwosu) and Mama Tutù (Bukky Àjàyí), she is encouraged to accept the offer of Dr. Táíwò, a care free medical doctor, to have sex with her. Dr. Táíwò does not believe in mágùn and to prove its non-existence, he also decides and accepts to have a consensual sex with Ngozi as a way of boosting his medical research efforts. Dr. Táíwò later believes in the existence and efficacy of the charm, when he almost died but was saved from blood cough by a consortium of herbalists led by Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí, who were stationed at the scene in case of any eventuality.

Mágùn explores the interplay or nexus between the Yorùbá belief in charms and the supernatural. It is a film that promotes cultural diversity, the existence of a variety of ethnic groups culture in Nigeria, which exposes people to new tastes and experiences. The film brings out the idea of having different religious beliefs and sexual orientations in two ethnic groups: Yorùbá and Igbo. Through this film, Kèlání proves the quality, which makes the Yorùbá unique, inclusive of their language, socio-economic status and cultural background. The film is a cross-pollination of creative ideas, which results in the emergence of a narrative technique and cinematic style in the Nigerian film industry. Kèlání, in this film, also brings together actors of different ethnic and cultural background to promote Nigeria's cultural diversity and understanding. The film was screened at the Pan African Film Festival in Ouagadougou, the Milan Italiano Film Festival and the African Film Festival in New York at various periods after production.

Apart from *Thunderbolt*, written in the English language, the language of dialogue and communication in most of Kèlání's films written in Yorùbá is undiluted Yorùbá. Kèlání has the awareness that culture determines our behaviour linguistically and language functions to express and symbolize cultural reality. It is language that is employed to reflect our attitude, beliefs, points of view, create experience, and identify our ethnic leanings. Kèlání understands the idea that language and culture are inextricably linked together. The roles of language and culture affect human communication and language plays significant roles in cultural realizations. It is used to transmit culture and gives a symbol to cultural identity. By employing language purity, Kèlání can be labelled as a language purist as he employs only the Yorùbá language with

absolutely no outside influence from any other language nor radical changes or orientation. In his Yorùbá language films, he expresses the desire to eliminate certain undesirable features including grammatical errors, jargons and words of foreign origin. No wonder some of his films have been adopted for teaching Yorùbá to foreign students by some universities in Asia, Europe and America[9].

5. Conclusion

The realization that films are cultural products, commodities of commercial desire with emotional and moral designs on the audience are some of the reasons for Kèlání's productions. In his films, he affirms Yorùbá cultural beliefs and his passion for documenting the Yorùbá cultural heritage prompts him to produce films that speak to Yorùbá culture. He cleverly manages screen dialogue in a way that retains the theme, message, wit, humour and dramatic vitality of Yorùbá life without losing their visual essence as most of his films are adaptations of literary writings, which he has remade successfully. He utilized the film for cultural representations and symbolic meanings.

Kèlání expresses his cinematic language and narrative styles to lend high credence to Yorùbá cosmology and beliefs. Apart from giving his audience stories of traditional and Yorùbácentric worth, his thematic concerns are his commitment in achieving social harmony. He is a strong voice to reckon with in the Nigerian film industry and beyond.

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[9] As a teacher of Yorùbá as a foreign language in two universities in Japan and China, Kèlání's films have been used by me successfully to teach foreign students aspects of Yorùbá language and culture. I have also observed this trend with my close interaction with Yorùbá lecturers in the United States and my membership of The American Association of Yorùbá Teachers (AAYT).

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Filmography
The Films of Túndé Kèlání

	Title of Films	Year of Production		Comments	
1	*Mr. Johnson	1991		A short film in English	
2	Ti Olúwa Ni Ilẹ̀ 1-3	1993			
3	Ayọ̀ Ni Mo Fẹ́	1994			
4	Kòṣeégbé	1995		Adaptation of Akínwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's play	
5	Ó Le Kú 1and 2	1997		Adaptation of Akíwùmí Ìṣọ̀lá's novel	
6	*The White Handkerchief	1998			
7	Ṣaworoidẹ	1999		Adaptation of Ìṣọ̀lá's novel	
8	Thunderbolt (Mágùn)	2001		Screenplay written by Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí	
9	*A Barber's Wisdom	2001		A short film of 36 minutes	
10	Agogo Èèwọ̀	2002			
11	*Campus Queen	2004			
12	Àbẹ̀ní	2006			
13	*The Narrow Path	2008			

14	Arugbá	2011			
15	Màámi	2014			
16	*Dazzling Mirage	2021		Adapted from Ọláyínká Egbhokare's novel	
17	Àyìnlá	2021			
18	*Cordelia	2021		Adapted from Ọ̀ṣọ́físan's novella	
19	Ṣídí Ìlújinlẹ̀	2023		Adapted from Ṣóyínká's The Lion and the Jewel	

Films produced in the English language