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Ọ̀rúnmìliàn Film-Philosophy

An African Philosophy through Cinematic Storytelling

Bello, Saheed Adesumbo, 2023

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**University of Bayreuth
African Studies
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Ọ̀rúnmìliàn Film-Philosophy

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Saheed Adesumbo Bello currently undertakes a pioneering work that he calls "the New Ọ̀rúnmìlà project" titled: "The Reclaim of Reason: Ọ̀rúnmìlà, Orality, Skepticism and Morality", at the Department of Philosophy, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Netherlands. He taught theatre and film theories as well as theatre design and technology at the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria. Saheed was an International Fellow at the Bayreuth Academy of Advanced African Studies, University of Bayreuth from February 1, 2021 to July 31, 2021. His research focuses on African philosophy, intercultural philosophy, Ọ̀rúnmìlà oral philosophy, film and philosophy, religion and literature as well as literature and film. He holds a PhD from the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos with a designated emphasis on literature and film. His publications include: "Ọ̀rúnmìlà Epistemic Reproduction: Nigerian Film Philosophy via Divinity and Orality," *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* 13, no. 2 (Spring 2022); 'Se "Iya" Ni'wo yi?: Questioning Motherhood in Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan's Drama,' in *Nigerian Female Dramatists: Expression, Resistance, Agency*, edited by Bosede Funke Afolayan, Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2021; ''Scenodecography': The Praxis of Light-Tech-Driven Design in MTN project Fame' published in *Dramatized Media, etum*, 2015; and 'The Pirate of Nollywood' published in *Theatre, Media, and Cultural Re-engineering in Nigeria: an ovation of excellence to Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma*, Kraft Book, 2017.

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An African Philosophy through Cinematic Storytelling

Dr Saheed Adesumbo Bello[1]

1 Introduction

The ongoing discussion on the relationship between film and philosophy 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; I shall join the discussion and analyse some films that articulate Òrúnmìlà, an African oral philosophy. This is important as I doubt that Africa is not once again left off the global discourse of philosophical concern. While I am not saying that the foremost philosophers who predominantly –and not interested in African films – doubt that African films can philosophize, I doubt that these philosophers of film have not inherited the Eurocentric bias championed by David Hume and Immanuel Kant that Africans and their descendants are intellectually incapable of philosophical reasoning. Against the Eurocentric notion, there are objections raised by the voices and works of some of the foremost Africanist and ideological philosophers, both oral and professional: Placide Tempels' Bantu Philosophy (1969); Henry Odera Oruka's "Sage Philosophy" (1998); Sophie Olúwọlé's Socrates and Òrúnmìlà (2017); Paulin Hountondji African Philosophy: Myth and Reality (1983;1990); Kwasi Wiredu Philosophy and African Culture (1980); Abiodun Bodunrin "The Question of African Philosophy" (1984); and the new crops of professional philosophers who engaged in the emerging counter-critique of the critique of ethno-philosophy. However, my skepticism is based on the idea that the Eurocentric stereotype served as the springboard to the "way that pre-colonial knowledge, [of Africa], has been set aside, marginalized, deprived of its internal dynamism and power of self-regeneration and self-criticism, prevented from absorbing, assimilating, and freely developing contributions from outside for its own benefit" (Hountondji 1990: 27). It is also based on the structure of hierarchy that rated Africa third world globally – the concept of rating what Jonathan Haynes and Ivo Ritzer call "third worldism" – as well as the epistemic politics through which the inherited oral

thoughts of the people are conceived as primitive and non-philosophical (Haynes 2010; Ritzer 2018).

Inasmuch as the Eurocentric bias, according to Barry Hallen, "had profound consequences for Africa's status vis-à-vis philosophy as an international enterprise [as] Africa's indigenous cultures were, in both principle and fact, disqualified from occupying a place in the philosophical arena" (Hallen 2002: 4). Is it not doubtful that Africans are once again considered too inept to philosophize through films? Though it has been proved beyond a doubt that philosophies are embedded in inherited oral philosophical texts of the people; the inauguration of African philosophy as an academic enterprise was a recent development that began as a reaction against the false ahistorical conception of Africa/ns by the non-African philosophers. And it is evident that the interdisciplinary debates on films as philosophy emerged while African philosophers are still struggling to take African philosophy to the center of the international philosophical arena. Adeshina Afolayan affirms that by declaring that "African philosophy, since its inauguration, has refused to engage African cinema" (Afolayan 2017: 525).

Meanwhile, specific explorations of the relationship between African films and philosophies have been engaged by some scholars of contemporary African cinema. For instance, Kenneth Harrow 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. Ritzer conceives "Post-Third Cinema" that finds a theoretical frame in the philosophy of relationality (Ritzer 2018). Adesina Afolayan 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?" (Afolayan 2017: 525). But here, I am exploring how African/Yorùbá films can articulate original and innovative philosophical concepts.

2 The Concept of Film as Philosophy

The process of articulating, refining and prolonging philosophical tradition is what Stephen Mulhall clarifies as the very idea of film as philosophy (Mulhall 2007). This is conceived by philosophers who claim that films can articulate or illustrate pre-existing philosophical concepts in innovative ways. In doing so, he distinguishes and relates three ideas of film as philosophy: film as philosophizing, the philosophy of film, and film in the condition of philosophy. He describes film as philosophy by stressing the philosophy of film as the most familiar and central idea that allows film to attain "the philosophical citadel: the activity it refers to is constructed on the model of 'philosophy of history', 'philosophy of science', 'philosophy of religion', and so on." (Mulhall 2007: 280). In other words, the model of philosophy or philosophy in its essential parasitic mode, according to Mulhall, permits film to raise reflective questions about basic resources and grounding assumptions or conceptual presuppositions. Mulhall's concept of film as philosophy is inspired by film that inherits a specific narrative universe, film nature, characters, thematic contents, and other basic resources that are questioned as to the conditions of its own possibility. Substantiating his points, he focuses on critical analysis of films that actively question their own conditions of possibility by drawing examples from "common generation of sequels and series in contemporary Hollywood as one way in which film attains the condition of modernism (in which its own history becomes an unavoidable problem), and thereby the condition of philosophy." (Mulhall 2007: 183). He therefore claims that the condition of philosophy is discovered by Stanley Cavell.

Of all the philosophers that conceive narrative films as articulations and/or prolongations of pre-existing philosophical traditions, Stanley Cavell is perhaps the central figure. His work *The World Viewed* (1971) establishes that the condition of philosophy for Hollywood fiction films is the condition of viewing a past world. "In this, movies resemble novels, a fact mirrored in the sound of narration itself, whose tense is the past", (Cavell 1971: 308). Though Cavell claims that he tries to keep Wittgenstein and Heidegger from overlaying what he had in mind to say about film, it is evident that his conception of film as a projected world is not dissimilar to human ways of viewing the absent and past world as conceived, though in different ways, by these philosophers. But what Cavell conceives as projected reality allows actors, who have been captured and projected onto the screen as characters, to sit next to their audience in the cinema. The projected reality can be described in Derridian terms as the movement of "the ghosts who parade past" (De Baecque et al. 2015: 30). Or is there any way to describe the movement of characters that occurs in two different worlds simultaneously other than to say that one is real while the other is unreal?

The projection of unreal/past characters to real/present spectators is one of the conditions of philosophy that allows the past to dialogue with the present in the Cavellian sense. The condition of philosophy lends credence to Derrida's claim that "hypnosis, fascination, identification, all these terms and procedures are common to film and to psychoanalysis, and this is a sign of a "thinking together" that foregrounds (De Baecque et al. 2015: 26), (in Mulhall's words), "the relation between reason, emotion and imagination in aesthetics and ethics, and in philosophical discourse more generally." (De Baecque et al. 2015: 27). The condition of philosophy does not solely push the problem of interactions between the past/unreal and the present/real into cinematic context but also finds resemblance in Ọ̀rúnmìlìàn film-philosophy that will be discussed in the next section.

Following Cavell's lead, Martin Woessner explores how one of Cavell's philosophy students at Harvard, – Terrence Malick deploys his films, such as, *Badlands* (1973), *Days of Heaven* (1978), and *The Thin Red Line* (1998) among others, to "push [Heidegger's] philosophy into new contexts" (Woessner 2011: 132). Similarly, Nicholas Diehl uses Christopher Nolan's three films, *Memento* (2000), *The Prestige* (2006), and *Inception* (2010) and draws philosophical methods from Socrates elenchus to show parallels between the properties and possibilities of narrative film and those of Socratic dialogue (Diehl 2016). But while the projection of unreal/past characters to real/present spectators is central to Cavell's film-philosophical project; Christopher Falzon deploys Plato's cave to discuss modern cinema, (a place/space where spectators can see a projected world), as a metaphor for the modern world where humans are held captive by what Cavell describes as mechanically projected realities.

Christopher Falzon's book *Philosophy Goes to the Movies: An Introduction to Philosophy* describes film as an illumination of philosophical positions as he counters prejudice against the visual image as an avenue to philosophical enlightenment. Falzon argues that philosophers, like Plato in his myth of the cave, have always resorted to the use of vivid images as metaphors to clarify their philosophical positions. While he is unable to defend his claim by using visual images in films, he points to "the very structure of modern cinema [as] reminiscent of Plato's cave." (Falzon 2002: 4). He describes the structure (arrangement) of the modern cinema as a darkened enclosed space where the movie-goers seem like Plato's captives. But the very structure of modern cinema as a space where the art of the cinema (i.e. projected world) is viewed by spectators is not the same thing as the film itself. Though Falzon argues that Bernardo Bertolucci's film *The Conformist* (1970) uses "Plato's cave image quite deliberately and explicitly in the film to comment on the imprisoning delusions of fascism" (Falzon 2002: 24); but his argument is not clearly worked out

as he is unable to elaborate how films are used to illustrate the concept of fascism. Perhaps that would explain why Thomas Wartenberg comes to his rescue by analyzing how Charles Chaplin's film *Modern Times* (1936) uses Plato's cave-like images to illustrate Karl Marx's theory of alienation (Wartenberg 2006). Though Wartenberg claims that film can philosophize beyond mere illustration, he ends up exploring how the film provides us with a specific interpretation of the mechanization of human beings that Marx attributes to capitalism.

Despite Falzon's shortcomings, his translation of Plato's cave to the structure of modern cinema links his philosophical concept to what Cavell conceives as projected reality. While Falzon's analogy of the myth dwells more on the structure of modern cinema as the metaphor of the modern world, the structure gives support to modern cinematic storytelling described as 'the mechanical projection of reality' in Cavellian terms. Arguably, the concept of mechanical projection of reality is influenced by Wittgenstein's remark that "a picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Wittgenstein 1999: § 115). Insofar as Cavellian film's as philosophy actively questions their own conditions of possibility, (i.e., the conditions of modernism), one can say that a picture that held us captive, according to Wittgenstein, is deeply rooted in the restricted conditions of being modern. With the conditions of being modern, and the use of the media of storytelling for colonial conquest emerged what Ali Mazrui's conceives as *A Triple Heritage* (Mazrui 1986) that threw Africa(ns) into what Bruno Latour describes as "the conflicts of values in which the moderns, [like Africans], have found themselves entangled." (Latour 2013: 53).

But while it may sound paradoxical, there is a Yorùbá saying that a person who is hit by a vehicle would be carried to the hospital for healing by using a vehicle. Insofar as it is possible to hypnotize, manipulate and colonize the human mind and knowledge production by using the media of narration/storytelling; then, it is also possible to decolonize western knowledge of, and about Africa(ns), as well as to heal Africa(ns) by using the same media of storytelling. For this reason, African filmmakers, (inspired by notable African poets, dramatists, and novelists, such as, Aime Cesaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Femi Osofisan and countless others), deployed their inherited oral philosophical traditions, such as Ọ̀rúnmìlà oral philosophy, as a way of resisting colonization and for healing/decolonizing Africa(ns).

3 What is Ọ̀rúnmìliàn Film-Philosophy?

> *'Aṣọ funfun ní sunkún aró, ìpìnlẹ̀ ọ̀rọ̀ ní sunkún èkejì rẹ̀ tantantan'* – it is the white cloth that cries for specific dyes; the opening of a metaphor begs for its (Ọ̀rúnmìlà oral text of *Òtú(r)á Méjì* in Túndé Kèlání's film *Saworoidẹ* 1999).

Ọ̀rúnmìlà is the foremost Yorùbá diviner/philosopher/narrator whose oral corpus radicalized the Ifá knowledge system. Ọ̀rúnmìlà and Ifá are often used interchangeablye. But one can think of Ọ̀rúnmìlà as the progenitor of the Ifá knowledge system, and Ifá as the divination tool as well as the encyclopedia of the Yorùbá knowledge system. Wande Abimbola explains that "Ifá is recognized by the Yorùbá as a repository for [the] Yorùbá [indigenous] body of knowledge embracing history, philosophy, medicine and folklore." (Abimbola 1975: 32). 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. Bello asserts that "in the same way the myths of the archetypal gods and heroes have always provided referential dimensions in Ifá divination, their natures, (which are both divine and human), have also provided limitless but complex narrative materials for the Yorùbá/Nigerian/African cineastes and directors." (Bello 2022: 56). That would explain one of the key reasons why Stanley

Cavell 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." (Cavell 1974: 585).

Arguably, the Ọ̀rúnmìlìàn natural mode of revelation for film and/or cinematic experience is, first and foremost, based on the re/creations of what I call symbolic reality. For this reason, it strikes me while exploring Falzon's analogy of Plato's cave that there is a major distinction between projected reality and symbolic reality; and that distinction reveals the point of departure between western film-philosophy, (as conceived by Cavell and Falzon) and African cinematic storytelling – 'the Ọ̀rúnmìlà/Yoruba film-philosophy'. But to clarify my understanding of symbolic reality; let us analyze Ọ̀rúnmìlà's parable of Eégún (Masquerade) in which the philosophy of art as well as unrestricted epistemic production and dissemination via African cinematic storytelling can be understood. In his oral text of *Èjì Ogbè*, Ọ̀rúnmìlà narrates:

> Ní ojọ́ tí Eégún dé ayé, ìbejì ni wọ́n bí i. Ọ̀kán ku, Ọ̀kán wà láàyè. èyí tí ò wà láàyè wáá sunkún títí, Ni wọ́n bá dógbán, Wọ́n d'ásọ Eégún. Wọ́n mú èyí tó wà láàyè lọ sínú igbó. Wọ́n gbé asọ Eégún náà bọ́ ẹnìkan lórí. Ẹni tí ó gbé Eégún náà ń pé èyí tó wà láàyé pé: Má tìí wàá o, ìhín ò rò o o.' Èyí tó wà láàyé bẹ̀rẹ̀ síí sunkún, Eégún náà yára wọ inú igbó lo. Asọ tí a dá bò alààyè lori Ni à ń pè ní ẹ̀kú Eégún. Ẹ̀kú ayé ò, Ẹ̀kú ọrun, Ni à ń pè ní èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú[2] –

> Translation: When masquerades are born, they are born twins. One dies while the other lives. The living cries endlessly to the extent that the people have to device a means to stop him. For this reason, they make a masquerade costume; they take the living to a forest; and they 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.

Ọ̀rúnmìlà 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 Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú. Ọ̀rúnmìlà conceives masquerade costume as Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú because it is made to embody both the metaphysical/mythological language of the dead/spirit and the everyday/oral/verbal language of the living. On the one hand, Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú 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 masquerades are Yorùbá ancestors who entertain, and celebrate with, their peoples during the annual festival of Egúngún. That would explain why masquerades are called *ará ọ̀rún* – those who come from the world of the dead/spirit. On the other hand, Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú is made of material objects (such as everyday clothes, shoes, bags, and other objects that are in vogue), that speak contemporary language in a metaphorical manner. For this reason, Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú 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 spectators during the performance. Having explained what Èjìgbèdè Ẹ̀kú symbolizes, let us turn to the analysis of the first part of the parable.

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[2] Abimbola, Wande: *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, 1977, Oxford University Press, p. 2.

To start with, the twins; (i.e., the masquerades), in the Ọ̀rúnmìlà parable stand for a character and a spectator that is needed for a theatrical or cinematic storytelling to be engaged, or 'born' in Ọ̀rúnmìlàn terms. 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, (which is explained later); 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 nature of Yorùbá/African theatrical or cinematic experience; and that therapeutic nature of the narrative artworks supports Derrida's claim that "hypnosis, fascination, identification are terms and procedures that are common to film and to psychoanalysis." (De Baecque et al. 2015: 26). But if the structure of Plato's cave can be translated into the structure of modern cinema; the unrestricted natural world (i.e., the forest), in Ọ̀rúnmìlà's parable of Eégún affirms that Yorùbá/African cinematic storytelling favours any found space/environment that enlivens therapeutic storytelling.

Unlike Plato's myth of the cave where people were held captive and deceived by viewing the dangling shadows of puppets on the wall of the cave, the therapeutic nature of Yorùbá narrative artworks is demonstrated by the actor, in the Ọ̀rúnmìlà myth of Eégún, who wears the masquerade costume to disguise like the dead or past ancestor; and says to his living twin brother "do not come yet, there is no comfort here". Conversely, the dangling characters/objects in Plato's cave are mere puppets that cannot talk. It therefore strikes me again that Plato's parable is relevant within the context of the western classical silent era from where the examples of silent cinemas can be drawn; and the Ọ̀rúnmìlà 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 cinema. The parable affirms the evolutionary theory of foremost Yorùbá theatre scholars, such as, Joel Adedeji and Biodun Jeyifo 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 (Adedeji 1998; Jeyifo 1984).

However, the possibility of meeting and having a conversation with the past, which is not without problems 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 ẹ̀kú, 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 ẹ̀kú 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 ẹ̀kú represents the past that affects, influences, or comments on, the present. In fact, Stanley Cavell's assertion, (which re/echoes Bazin's conception of film as a representation or reproduction of the past), that films make sense in past tense finds philosophical resemblance in the symbolism of èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú (Cavell 1971). Paradoxical as it may sound, èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú 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 Túndé Kèlání's *Saworoidẹ*, the manifestations of èjìgbèdè èkú are evident in a tripartite symbolic apparatus, namely, adé idẹ a brass crown; ìlù 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 a king; ìlù saworoidẹ represents the voice of the people; and àdó idẹ contains a substance used for the ritual that binds a King to their ancestors and peoples. So, in the film, the apparatus metaphorically links the past/ancient/pre-colonial Yorùbá world to the postcolonial Yorùbá 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, their metaphorical and metaphysical meanings are indestructible. Such indestructibility of meanings, which lingers on in the people's minds, 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 identifying symbols as a device for "thinking 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 Ọ̀rúnmìlà/Yorùbá consciousness of indestructible philosophic meanings, (in oral writing of *Òtú(r)á Méjì* as quoted at the beginning of this section), is re-echoed, and re-affirmed in the opening sequence of the film – *Saworoidẹ*.

Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide* 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 because of 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 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.

Lápitẹ́ 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 the 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; Lápitẹ́ 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 his 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 beginning trope of a metaphor that cries vehemently for its second); in the oral text of *Òtú(r)á Méjì* that opens this section.

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 these colours in the same ways that the knowledge of the present attracts the indestructible knowledge of the past. So, if we think of Lápitẹ as a white cloth and think of his ancestors and peoples as the various colours that he attracts, (because of his socio-political responsibilities as a king), then, we will see the metaphysical/ethical problem of twoness attached to his position. Of course, the metaphysical meanings of the 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 *Saworoidẹ*; and the contact between the past and the present is symbolized by adé idẹ, ìlù saworoidẹ, àdó idẹ and those who inherit the objects. 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 *Saworoidẹ* are: (Bàbá) the progenitor and the king who shares the historical knowledge of Jogbo and dies at the beginning of the film; and Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá (the local griot/narrator) who stays at the king's courtyard in order to know about certain mysteries behind the origin of Jogbo. Bàbá and Bàbá Ọ̀pálábá 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.

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 ọmọdé 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 the Sankofa bird in the philosophy of the 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 (Schramm 2010: 191)." Hence to the Yorùbá, (like the Akan people), the Ọ̀rúnmìlà 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; because the 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; ìlù saworoidẹ a drum with brass jingle bells; and àdó idẹ a small brass container. It is not unreasonable to believe that the 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. For this reason, Lápitẹ meets his waterloo as the film demonstrates how metaphysical and/or metaphorical meanings haunt their objects of significations.

But for humans are moved not only by what they identify but also by what they hear from the identified thing/being; the living, in the Ọ̀rúnmìlà parable, start crying again 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 audience react to the dialogue shares a philosophical resemblance to 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" (Derrida 1993: 7). However, this aspect of the parable demonstrates how spectators react to the appearance of èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú in cinematic storytelling. This is important to teach us that while èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú can make us/spectators critical of a character, (such as, Lápitẹ the King of Jogbo in *Saworoide*), it can also make us/spectators see another character as an object of admiration. The transformation of Robert Powell in Franco Zeffirelli's (1977) film *Jesus of Nazareth* to the character of Jesus; and the audience's reception of the character is an example of how èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú can make a character an object of admiration.

But Ọ̀rúnmìlà teaches us that the use of èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú to transform a character into an object of admiration must be suspended with the disappearance of the character which is required to quench the emotional response of the living (the audience) to the appearance of the dead. Perhaps the fetishization of the 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. Meanwhile, Eégún the performer (in Ọ̀rúnmìlìàn cinematic storytelling), appears to their twin (the spectator) from the unknown world to entertain, criticize, psychoanalyze, and thus heal/decolonize their twin (the spectator). But in Zeffirelli's film, Jesus Christ wants spectators to come to his father in heaven through him. But I ask: how can we get to his father through him while we still live? So, it is against non-suspension, the symbolic fetishization of costumed images, and the sustainability of emotional attachment that one can understand why Ọ̀rúnmìlà reminds us by stressing that the cloth that we used in covering the living is what we call 'masquerade costume'. One can say that the teaching of Ọ̀rúnmìlà warns us against the unnecessary fetishization of costumed images via tempo-spatial or spatial, concealment and displacement/replacement of the living (actor) as in the case of Robert Powell. For this reason, Ọ̀rúnmìlà stresses that the essence of èjìgbèdè ẹ̀kú is in critical tradition via theatrical/cinematic storytelling for healing/decolonizing the living (the spectators).

Ọ̀rúnmìlà proceeds to the second part of the story:

> *Ní ọjọ́ kan, ìyá èjí ń wẹ̀, Eégún sì ń bọ̀ wá. Eégún gbé aṣọ ìyá ẹ̀ lọ. Wọ́n ní, kí l'ó gbé ọ l'áṣọ lọ? Ó ní àìmọ̀ ni ẹ̀. Wọ́n ní kín ní jẹ́ àìmọ̀? Ó ní èkíní ni Eégún, èkejì ni Orò. Bí èèyàn ò bá mọ̀ọ́ wẹ̀, ta ni ó gbé aṣọ ìdí ẹ̀ lọ? Wọ́n ní kí wọn ó bi Eégún. Eégún ní òun ò gbé e. wọ́n ní kí wọn ó bi Orò. Orò ní òun ò jalè.* [...] *Ifá má jẹ̣́ kí wọn ó gbé aṣọ ìdíî mí lọ[3].*

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[3] Abimbola, Wande: *Awon Oju Odu Mereerindinlogun*, 1977, Oxford University Press, p. 2.

> 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, Ọ̀rúnmìlà establishes the essence of Egúngún moral plays as the dramatizations of specific moral attitudes to be corrected 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, a private language known to a certain moral agent/character while the second is a communal or social language understood by other moral agents who interact or relate with that moral agent/character. Describing the language of our inner knowing, Ọ̀rúnmìlà 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 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 privacy 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 the Ọ̀rúnmìlà story can be described as the symbolic objects that may put a moral agent behind what John Rawls calls "the veil of ignorance" (Rawls 1999). 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. 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 their interpretation and exposition of our moral nakedness. Though it may seem impossible for the performers of moral plays to expose the moral nakedness of other moral agents based on their deployments of symbolic apparatus such as èjìgbèdè èkú, it is not impossible for a moral agent who is also a theatre or cinematic audience to identify a character that looks like their double. Isn't it natural and practical that such a moral agent 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 ọ̀pa (stick) and pẹ̀tẹ̀pẹ́tẹ̀ (mud) to describe "moral narrative" as the spatter of mud that covers other people's bodies when one hits the pẹ̀tẹ̀pẹ́tẹ̀ with a ọ̀pa. 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. As the saying goes, "[P]ẹ̀tẹ̀pẹ́tẹ̀ táa nà ní ọ̀pa; ẹni tó bá tabà kó má fi se ìbínú, kó bá wa túnʼbẹ̀ se". Hence, it is evident that the clothes in the Ọ̀rúnmìlà 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 become the symbols of identifications through which it recurs to the moral agents, who are members of the audience, that their past and private worlds have been problematized, dramatized, and psychoanalyzed.

The significance of psychoanalysis in the moral play of Eégún[4] is to reveal our unbecoming moral attitudes to ourselves. It goes without the Yorùbá saying that tójú *bá sepin amá nyọ́ han ojú ni* – when the eyes oozed mucus, we will remove the discharge to show it to the eyes." Suffice it to say, it is possible for the eyes not to feel the effects of their own discharge, but it might be difficult for them to see and know the nature of what oozes from within itself without removing and showing it to the eyes. The Yorùbá aesthetic-ethical concept of showing the eyes their 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 that psychoanalytic concept which becomes the major discovery in Freud's psychoanalysis is based on the Yorùbá saying, "*ojọ́ tí wèrè bámọ̀ pé wèrè lòun, ojọ́ nà lara ẹ̀ yá* – An insane person becomes sane the moment or the day they realize they were insane."

To Ọ̀rúnmìliàn film-philosophers, the aesthetic-ethical problems are not unconnected with the fact that human beings are naturally selfish; and to Iris Murdock, "how can we make ourselves better? is the question moral philosophers should attempt to answer." (Murdock 1985: 78). Meanwhile, the critical tradition that can make us better is what Ọ̀rúnmìliàn film-philosophers met. In the Yorùbá world, the critical tradition is part and parcel of Egúngún performative expression and experience. Thus, when people ask: who steals your clothes? 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 Yorùbá 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 stealing within the context of what Linsey McGoey conceives as "ignorance as emancipation" (McGoey 2012). This idea of ignorance as emancipation allows Eégún to freely criticize prominent characters without being penalized.

But unlike Eégún, Orò is a patriarch deity whose ritual performance is done in secret. It is believed that Orò doesn't steal. In fact, a 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 sufficiented that Orò does not engage in the public business of dramatization in the interest of morality. However, it is based on moral reasons that Eégún exposes unbecoming moral behaviors; and that is the reason why people pray to Ọ̀rúnmìlà to avert the shame that comes with such moral plays. It is believed that shame is more tragic than death. The morality in the artistic expression of Eégún formed the basis for the manifestations of Ọ̀rúnmìlà moral philosophy.

In Túndé Kèlání's *Saworoidẹ*, it is evident that 'Lápitẹ́ is the archetype of a twins' mother whose garments of shame are stolen and displayed in the film. As the name implies, – 'Lápitẹ́ means – Ọlá – royalty – tó – that – pi-tẹ́ – 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 desecrates the very foundation upon which his kingship and kingdom were

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[4] Eégún is the short form for Egúngún as they can be used interchangeably. But Eégún is often used for performer while Egúngún is the festival.

built. It is important to stress here that adé idẹ (a brass crown) represents the kingship and the king; ìlù saworoidẹ (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 ìlù saworoidẹ 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 èèyàn ni ohùn ọlọ́run – 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 'Lápitẹ́'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 èjìgbèdè èkú that facilitates the dialogue between the dead and the living, 'Lápitẹ́'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 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.

4 Conclusion

The limitlessness of human reflections on our world as well as the recreations of symbolic realities is critically echoed by Derrida that "it is necessary to recast the concept of text by generalizing it almost without limit, in any case without present or perceptible limit, without any limit that is" (Derrida 1986: 165). But the philosophical condition that gives presence to non-presence so that the living can dialogue with the dead and knowledge to the unknown in order to heal, decolonize, and to re-moralize the public is central to the Ọ̀rúnmìlà oral philosophy of art. It is important to stress that the conditions of philosophy in the parable of Eégún can be described as the problems of the unknown whose interpretations are limitless and fundamental to the metaphysical symbolism of African cinematic storytelling which I call the "Ọ̀rúnmìlìàn Film-Philosophy."

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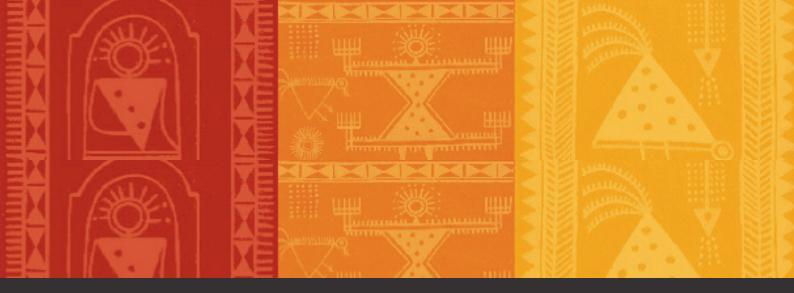
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