

Adébayò Fálétí, Icon on Screen

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Introduction

One of the main chords through which Yorùbá cinema connects with its core target audience – the Yorùbá people both at home and in the diasporas – is the penchant of Yorùbá filmmakers to present core traditional values, mores, philosophies and customs in their works. A significant part of this presentation lies in the deliberate choice of actors whose off-screen personas already enjoy public acclamation as knowledgeable ‘masters’ or practitioners of Yorùbá culture and traditions. For over two decades of contemporary Yorùbá cinema practice, Adébayò Fálétí remained one of the most prominent and culturally renowned actors that filmmakers have used in portraying, presenting and accentuating different cultural values of the Yorùbá. Long before he became a star film actor, Adébayò Fálétí’s impressive body of works as a poet, theatre artiste, journalist, translator, broadcaster, writer and culture administrator had firmly established his vast knowledge and mastery of Yorùbá language and philosophy. In many films therefore, the appearance of Adébayò Fálétí in any role, instantly and inevitably transforms that filmic character into a symbol of Yorùbá cultural authenticity, depth and authority. This, arguably, is the function of the veteran Yorùbá actor Fálétí in many notable and outstanding Yorùbá films from Túndé Kèláńí’s *Şaworoidẹ* (1999), *Agogo Èèwò* (2002), *Efúnşetán Aníwúra* (2005), *Thunderbolt* (2001), to Niji Àkàńńí’s *Àràńmòtù* (2010) and Muiyiwa Adẹmólá’s *Owó Òkúta* (2010). This, this paper examines the manipulation of iconic significations of Adébayò Fálétí in *Şaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwò*.

Iconic Representation of Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí

In most commercial mainstream Yorùbá films, Fálétí is cast as *babaláwo*, *àgbà-ilé*, *baba ilé*, *alàgbà*, and custodian of Yorùbá oral literature, customs and traditions. Thus, his character showcases the Yorùbá cultural and traditional values because of his high command of Yorùbá language. It is not surprising that Fálétí was a regular featured actor in many films from the Mainframe stable, given Tùndé Kèlání's self-proclaimed mission to uphold and propagate Yorùbá culture and traditions in his films. Hence, Kèlání uses Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí in his films to showcase different Yorùbá values because he has a wide, deep, conscious and organic relationship with his culture. It is therefore safe to say that preserving Yorùbá culture is always what Fálétí represents in Mainframe films and other notable Yorùbá films. This implies that different outstanding filmmakers depict him as a cultural icon.

In *Şaworoidẹ* and *Agogo Èèwọ̀* Fálétí plays the character of the palace sage. This character is depicted to be highly knowledgeable, and traditionally enlightened. The character gathers his intelligence through years of experience due to his age and position in the society, which have brought him into contact with secrets that are not even open to the kings and chiefs of the filmic community. Fálétí's character (Bàbá Ọ̀pálábà) confirms this when he says to one of the chiefs:

..Bẹẹ j'ólóyè jù bẹẹ lọ àwọn àşírí kan n bẹ tẹyin ọ le è rí, ọlá işẹ ẹ ti'wa àti ọjọ orí wa'iwọ náà ọ rí àti sisún m'ágbà táwa náà sún mọ àwọn àgbà náà ni àwa fi mọ...

There are certain mysteries of Jogbo unknown to even chiefs.. I unraveled them with age and interaction with the elders...

Hence, the filmmaker uses Adébáyọ̀ Fálétí as a custodian of Yorùbá philosophy and ideology to interpret the role of a palace sage. The character therefore explains how most of the knowledgeable Yorùbá elders gather different information and knowledge in relation to Yorùbá history, culture, philosophy, religion, and sociology when he says

bí n bá ti sùn kalẹ lojóri báyii ibẹ ni èmi tí fetí kọ ọpọlopọ àşiri...eye ọ dédédé bà lórùlé, ọrọ leyẹ n gbọ..

I gather a lot of information pretending to be asleep... When the bird perches on the roof it is collecting information...

As a self-avowed custodian and protector of Yorùbá language, culture and tradition, Kelani, the filmmaker, casts Fálétí to drive home important

historical, religious, political, social, and philosophical facts through Yorùbá songs, proverbs, riddles, folktales, illustrations and historical inferences. This is why in *Agogo Èèwò* and *Şaworoidẹ*, Fálétí renders symbolic songs, proverbs, folktales and various witticisms to reflect Yorùbá philosophy on diverse issues. This is evident in *Agogo Èèwò* where the filmmaker explains the semiotic implication of the Jogbo community through Fálétí's character:

Jogbo bí orógbó, jogbo bí orò, olójú méjì a şesè'odo, olójú méjì a şe Kàdúná, Bèyàn ò lójú mejidínlógún, kò le şèlúu Jogbo.ẹlenu méjì a şe'badàn, ẹlenu méjì a ş'èkò Bèyàn ò lenu mejidínlógún, kò le şèlúu Jogbo ọlọwọ méjì a ş'èkìtì, ọlọwọ méjì a ş'ẹgbá Bèyàn ò lọwọ m̀erinlélógún, kò le şèlúu Jogbo, Jogbo bí orógbó, jogbo r̀eé bí orò.

Jogbo bitter as bitter- kola, dangerous as oro cult. With two eyes, you can cope at the river side. With two eyes, you can survive in Kaduna But you need twelve eyes to survive in Jogbo With two mouths, you get by in Ìbadàn, with two mouths, you get by in Lagos. But you need eighteen mouths to survive in Jogbo. With two hands, you can handle Èkìtì, with two hands you can handle Ẹgbá. But you need twenty-four hands to manipulate Jogbo. Jogbo bitter as bitter- kola, this is as intimidating as the oro cult.

Also, the narration ends with Ọpálába (Fálétí's character), who the filmmaker uses to pass a concluding authorial comment as follows:

ọjọ gbogbo ni tolè, ọjọ kan ni tolóhun, şùgbón ó dàbíi ẹni wípé, ọjọ kan to lóhun, ó tí dé fún ilú Jogbo báyii...gbogbo àwọn ijòyè pátá ni wọn búra, kábìèsí pàápàá, wọn gbé adé idẹ lée lórtí, wọn sì lu ilù Şaworoidẹ...ẹẹ rójú ayé bí? Ìwàásù lásán ò ran olè ọwọ lile ló leè kápá àwọn asebi. A jókòó laláá, a fẹ̀yìn lélẹ̀, a sùn fàà, irú àlá kan náà lasi tún n lá. Àfìgbà táa bá dide nàró ni alá a ni tó lè şe. A foyin şenu, à n ròyìn èbúté. Afi ká fọpa wà ká fàjèwà ló leè gbé wa dé èbúté ògo. Nítorí náà, ẹyin ọdọ tí ẹ pawọ pọ tí ẹ pa egbìn-rin ọtẹ ẹ má tìi sọ adá yin nù o. Bí ewé ibi m̀i bá tí n rú ni kí ẹ máa gée...

The Day of Judgment is a single faithful day for Jogbo, it seems the Day of Judgment has come all the chiefs took the oath, and the king wears the crown while Ayànagalú beats the Şaworoidẹ drum. There you are mere sermon will not stop robbers only force can curb their activities. We sit down and dream, we lie down, yet no change only when we get up on our feet that our dream can be realized we are preoccupied with sweet description of the promise land it is strenuous rowing and paddling that can get

us there hence, the youths that have just pruned the new shoot of conspiracy; do not throw your machete away yet. As soon as new evil sprout, cut them off promptly...

The above authorial comment is the most important aspect of the film because it is designed to convey the concluding message of the filmmaker to the audience. Due to the importance, it takes a respected authority, one who is endowed with the language skills, historical knowledge and culture of the people to deliver the role; hence the use of Fálétí in the role of Narrator. In addition to using his character to introduce and conclude the narration, the filmmaker also uses him, as the narrative unfolds, to enhance the cultural values and showcase the beauty of Yorùbá language through his intense use of Yorùbá proverbs in all his conversations. This is also evident in his satirical songs to the corruptible chiefs and king for seeking the intervention of the loggers to restore the crown:

Alákisà n jó lóru, bópé, ilẹ̀ á mọ̀ lọ̀la... Olẹ̀ ní òun ó bá ọ̀ tún lẹ̀kùn ilẹ̀ rẹ̀ ẹ̀ o ò sì funra... Àsá n bẹ̀yẹ̀lé ẹ̀rẹ̀ ẹ̀yẹ̀lé n yọ̀ ẹ̀yẹ̀lé n fíkú ẹ̀rẹ̀... Kò i yé wọn, yóò yé wọn lọ̀la

He wears the ragged pampers and dances at night, but soon it will be daylight. A burglar offers to fix your doors and you are not vigilant... the hawk plays with the dove, the dove dances the dance of death... They do not understand yet, tomorrow, it will be clear to them.

Through Fálétí's character, the filmmaker successfully emphasizes the prominent position of Yorùbá oral traditional materials in Yorùbá narratives. Hence emphasis is on the elders, because they are custodians of these oral traditional materials and also capable of implementing its accurate usage. In this regard Fálétí as a poet, writer, actor, journalist, translator and a Yorùbá ambassador is used to depict, represent, portray and showcase the beauty of Yorùbá culture, tradition and language.

To compliment the different cultural roles given to Fálétí is cast in films is his costume. His different costumes in all the films speak volumes about the characters and personalities he is meant to showcase. For example, Yorùbá traditional doctor (*oníṣẹ̀gùn ìbí lẹ̀*) in *Thunderbolt*, palace sage who is deliberately positioned in a situation that he can convey different Yorùbá culture and philosophy through his conversation with old and young in *Şaworoide* and *Agogo Èèwo*, an elderly Gẹ̀lẹ̀dẹ̀ mask carver in *Àramọ̀tu*, an old warrior (*Ààrẹ̀ ọ̀nà kakanfò*) in *Başòrun Gáà* and other important elderly Yorùbá roles in other notable films. Since costuming is a semiotic process

associated with presenting and representing the human body to oneself and others, it is therefore one of the most important aspects of film narration. Hence, Fálétí's costumes in these films are always fitting for his character. The concept of right costume in traditional Yorùbá films, is specially connected to the value of dressing in the followship Yorùbá community, which is evident in Yorùbá proverbs *ìrínisí ni ìṣenilójò* and *bí a ṣe rìn là n'ko ni*. This implies that the Yorùbá society attaches a lot of importance to dressing and identity. Specific dress patterns and modes therefore give characters of Fálétí a unique identity that depicts the actual Yorùbá personality he is meant to project to the audience. Hence Fálétí wears *gbáriyè* and *kẹ̀nbẹ̀, búbá, ṣòkòtò* and *ag-báda, búbá* and *ṣòṣòrò* and compliments his dressing with his uniquely styled and customized *filà*, that iconic trope associated with his real-life persona as Yorùbá cultural icon.

Conclusion

This essay has been able to analyse the iconic representation of Adébáyò Fálétí's personality in the filmic world of Jogbo. Hence the filmmaker uses him in portraying, presenting and accentuating different cultural values of the Yorùbá due to his personality and artistry. Fálétí's proficiency as a poet, theatre artiste, journalist, translator, broadcaster, writer and culture administrator, makes him suitable for the roles while his skillfulness, adequacy and his firmly established vast knowledge and mastery of Yorùbá language and philosophy transform his filmic character into an icon of Yorùbá cultural authenticity, depth and authority.

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