Film Review: Kunle Afolayan’s *October 1*

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Introduction

Recent studies in Nollywood films have taken a new dimension and have concentrated more on specific films made by filmmakers, who have taken Nollywood seriously, with a sense of high-handedness. Connor Ryan in his recent investigations on the Nigerian cinema opined that for more than two twenty two years of astronomical rise Nollywood, which essential refers to the Nigerian film industry “has garnered significant scholarly attention” Ryan (2012, p.180). Although, it is important to note here quickly that the emergence of Nollywood studies is indebted to many seminal surveys, which include Jonathan Haynes’s *Nigerian Video Films* (2000), Foluke Ogunleye’s *African Video Film Today* (2003) Onokome Okome’s *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (2013)and Mahir Saul and Ralph Austen’s *Viewing African Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Art Films and the Nollywood Video revolution* (2010). What is urgently required in today’s scholarship are more researches that are focused on the great diversity among the various titles, which appear on movie stands for sale across Nigeria and indeed West Africa every year.

This research patterns and strategies have started, and painstaking efforts have concentrated on works that have distinguished themselves as extremely different from conventional Nollywood works, that lack that professional knack and proficiency. Moradewun Adejumobi, has consciously described the conventional Nollywood films as “old Nollywood” (2015, p.32), and different from the neo Nollywood paradigm due to largely to its profile which is “reckoned more in terms of crass commercialism and unimaginative aesthetics than for its deep contribution ether to the enlightening of the human condition or its interrogation of the African predicament.” Afolayan (2014, p.xiii)

The recent endeavour *October 1* by the Nigerian filmmaker Kunle Afolayan is an exceptional instance of cinematographic expertise and creative forte, unlikely to be found among typical (conventional) Nollywood cineastes. He is gradually registering his presence among some of the fine stand serious minded movie directors in Nigeria and indeed Africa. With the successful productions of *The Figurine* (2009) and *Phone Swap* (2013) his recent films have inscribed and enforced a paradigmatic shift from the norm, gradually transforming the status quo into what Jonathan Haynes has authoritatively theorized as, the “Neo-Nollywood”, Haynes (2014, 55/56) that
is, an emerging movement by Nigerian film makers who are determined to involve themselves in producing highly technical and professionally made films. Neo Nollywood, more specifically have come to mean, “a new brand of films” that “satisfies, the anticipation that the industry will gradually rise to achieve so-called international standards as its films travel along broader regional and diaspora cultural flows, extending their reach to wider audiences and propelling even more growth and improvement” Ryan (2015, 56).

The notion of the neo Nollywood paradigm draws our attention to the significant direction for better quality and improved storylines which approximates a new dimension to filmmaking in Nigeria-the requirement of sophistication and creativity in the cinematography of Nollywood. It is something, of “a move away from the cinematic ebullience and mushrooming tendency of Nollywood towards qualitative and aesthetic transformation of the industry” Afolayan (2014, 26). Incidentally, it was actually Kunle Afolayan’s magical realist film The Figurine, that popularised the notion of Neo-Nollywood, when it was produced in 2009. With the recent production of yet another inspiring display of cinematographic talent, it seems that Kunle Afolayan is set to make a mark as an emerging filmmaker of lasting substance.

**October 1: A Synopsis**

*October 1* is set when Nigeria was at the threshold of her independence. Inspector Danladi Wasiri is summoned by the District Officer Mr. Robert Winterbottom, and saddled with the task of unravelling the mystery behind the murder, of two women in Akote Town in Ibadan, before Independence Day. The inspector and his assistant Sergeant Sunday Afonja hit a lot of dead ends. As the murder plague rises it dawns on them that they are dealing with a hardened serial killer. Investigation intensifies, and the challenges become complex. The story reaches a climax as the search becomes frustrating, with the total killed rising to five people. In the course of the events that follow innocent lives are lost. A British bound Corporal Omolodun is killed when faced with the killer. A Hausa traveller (a suspect) who finds himself in the middle of the quagmire is wrongly murdered. The murderer gives himself away when unlikely clues point to an unsuspected person: Prince Aderopo, Oba Akote’s only son. In an attempt to rape and kill his last victim, Miss. Bisi Tawa (a school teacher and old classmate) his tracks reveal his potential hideout. In the process of making an escape and trying to kill Koya (a farmer and old time colleague), he is finally shot by the inspector, as he refuses to surrender.

**Film Technique, Style and Aesthetics**

The film qualifies as well made, with respect to the sophistry of good camera work and post production editing high-handedness. The story follows the narrative which is in form of a flashback. Inspector Waziri, submits his final report on Independence Day, on the outcome of his investigations to the D.O and his colleagues. From there, the story begins to unfold. The flash back technique employed is very rare even among Nollywood film makers who are
used to linear style, but is crucial to Afolayan as it enhances the heightened suspense, leading to the killer’s motives.

We gather that, Aderopo and Koya, are (un)fortunately taken to Lagos to receive high school education by a certain Reverend Dowling, a colonial clergyman who unashamedly molest them. His actions lead Koya (who eventually murders him) to escape and return to the village after five months, without any form of Western education, as he becomes a farmer (and influences his son to do same). On the other hand, Aderopo’s traumatic experiences instigate him to rape and murder innocent virgins; after which he lacerates their chests with a sign of the crucifix. Acts informed by his resentment for Reverend Dowling.

Aderopo’s evil acts partly bring back memories of an historical-political past. For instance, his view about the recurring ethnic antipathy, and his dispassionate prediction of an imminent war ‘in seven years’, albeit political independence fast approaching, remind us of the civil war of 1967. The scriptwriter deliberately puts the prediction in Aderopo’s speech perhaps to implicate him. His singular act of murdering an Igbo girl puts Usman Dangari, a Hausa man in trouble. The fact that Inspector Waziri who is Hausa interrogates and detains Usman Dangiri (and also having been the same inspector that solved an earlier case in Enugu involving the execution of an Igbo man, a few years back) is enough to elicit some feeling of animosity among the Igbo settlers in Akote, who nursed the belief that the inspector might be protecting Usman Dangari based on ethnic sentiments.

While October 1 is not exclusively about the history of Nigeria there is a sense in which it aspires to such. Instances of a purely historical nature include the independence ceremony, Inspector Wasiri’s anti-colonial posture towards the D.O about concealing the truth (which convincingly historicizes corruption in Nigeria), the inclusion of a realistic television address of Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo leader of the opposition party during the first republic, the radio speech by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, first Prime Minister, references made to Chief Akintola, the brief appearance of Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the image of the Queen’s picture including that of Nnamdi Azikwe all of which add, to the exemplary artistry and reality embedded in Afolayan’s work.

Cultural, and signifying tropes of Yoruba tradition permeate the film. The occasional renderings of the Ewi (praise poetry), proverbs, idioms and wise sayings by key figures in the palace such as: the guards, the Oba, symbols of the Ija, (mystery of divinity) and the custodians, exceedingly relate to the story. The custodians are very crucial to the story as they, among other functions instruct the king, and the entire community on how to tackle the mysteries behind the killing. The director is greatly influenced, by Tunde Kelaniasn auteur of long standing whose major works are not starved of rich Yoruba heritage and cosmology. Kunle Afolayan’s film making, in contrast to mainstream Nollywood videographers inspires him to produce a good work. This is not surprising after all as October 1 resonates that nuanced representation of the real, and the imagined.
There seem to be a lot more improvement from his earlier films. The acting style is almost true to life with little errors. Aderopo was true to the character of the blood thirsty. Koya kept his calm in spite of his personal trauma. Inspector Waziri maintained a matured debonair but, still encountered challenges of role interpretation, and the clownish Sergeant Afonja helped in sustaining the comic relief. Apart from the main story which relied on flashback, only sub-flashback scenes were made in black and white enhancing audiences’ understanding about past events. Very typical of the director’s techniques noticed also in other works like Irapada and The Figurine. Music was significantly used with the theme song permeating well enough. This contributed relatively to core events where and when necessary, to heighten the tension and sustain emotion. The sound effects were not too impressive as they were fraught with avoidable errors. For instance, the gun shots at the burial scene, and that of the final scene where Inspector Waziri kills Aderopo were not realistically achieved. Editing challenges no doubt. It is not surprising that resolution, and picture quality were excellent as it was shot on 35mm.

Conclusion
It is important to note that Kunle Afolayan has established himself as one of the finest and most dynamic of contemporary Nigerian film makers. He has inaugurated a master piece in the popular detective genre, a recent entry into mainstream Nollywood, that will for a long time occupy the minds of film critics and Nollywood scholars. October1 will be constantly discussed, at various and future academic gatherings as one of the major attempts that has contributed, not only to the evolution of the Neo-Nollywood movement, but also the growth and reputation of Nollywood industry.

References