

**SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSIDERATION OF KUNLE
AFOLAYAN'S DIRECTORIAL EXPERIMENT
IN OCTOBER 1**

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Abstract

This article posits that Kunle Afolayan's directorial experimentation in October 1 had socio-political underpinnings. Among others, it X-rays the directorial style of Kunle Afolayan and initiates a syncretism of Afolayan's directorial experimentation in October 1 and the sole objective of galvanizing the masses towards a radical socio-political change. The paper brings to the fore that Kunle Afolayan's directing is hinged on the via-media theory which allows the director to negotiate freely; this in turn made his film a huge success. The paper submits that Kunle Afolayan as a director roots his directorial experiments in October 1 on the socio-political rejuvenation of Nigeria and his penchant for the projection of African cultural aesthetics was not left out.

Keywords: Film, Directing, Directorial experiment, Socio-political consideration, *October 1*.

Introduction

Functionally, film is a social art that plays the triple roles of education, elucidation and entertainment. It is an art like drama, according to Bakary Traore', it draws people together (6). It is a cohesive force that makes human beings conscious of themselves and one another. It enhances the life of humans, providing entertainment and invoking a sense of order. Film like drama expresses the feelings, emotions and experiences of mankind in society. It is the content of theatre, and the most direct of all artistic forms. It confronts living beings with other

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living beings and it is in this immediate correspondence between its practitioners and its recipients lay its superiority over all other art forms (Osanyin 1).

Film confronts the public with the day-to-day activities of human beings. Although an art form, it is a strong social pillar. Ill-informed about the nature and purpose of film many people think that it deals with mere trivialities and fun. However, this is wrong, for as Oyin Ogunba rightly observes that too often one is tempted to think that it is a matter of laughter and uproarious jest, whereas it is a medium admirably suited for making deep and psychological probes into the consciousness of a community (Ogunba 100). Film, like drama creates and recreates experience; it generates a firm socio-political awareness in the people. The art of filmmaking and script interpretation helps to forge a social vision for the people via a replay of history. This touches the nerve-centre of all the social, political and religious activities in the community. For instance, the film, *October 1* "indulges the people in the mainstream of contemporary political debate" (Asagba 46). Artistically, film communicates ideologies to the people through appropriate socio-political, culture, moral and economic themes, music, dance, song and dramatic action. In fact, the nature of film at once recommends it for effective deployment for the creation of social consciousness in the society. Socio-political consciousness could be raised to great heights in filmmaking, especially with the utilization of the dramatic travesty of history.

Directing is the art of controlling the development of a performance from inception to the final stage. There are several theories of directing for stage and for film, ranging from Gordon Craig's theory, the auteur theory for film, laissez-faire author theory for stage, the theory of the director's theatre, etc. Craig's theory attaches total authority to the director in the praxis of the art; it implies that all units of the production must be seen only from the director's point of view. Craig's theory shares affinity with the director's theatre and the author theories. David Sievers asserts that; the second theory pertaining to contemporary theatre directing is the via-media theory. This is anchored on liberation of the director to mediate between the actors and other phenomena in a stage or screen play. It is a co-operative, methodical exploratory approach by both actors and directors of the given circumstances of the play. Ejeke posits that it is the most appropriate directorial theory for an educational theatre establishment (23). The via-media theory is one of the most creative approaches in contemporary theatre or screen directing since creativity flows from all the artists involved in the production, with the director providing the "inspiration and artistic unity for the play. He or she is the person that is responsible for making sure the whole production happens in a

timely and successful fashion” (Ferer 4). Furthermore, observation shows that directors vary as much as actors in their orientation and training. There have been famous directors who were autocrats; others use passive laissez-faire methods. Sievers noted that every director yearns, as Gordon Craig, for actors who would be “super-marionettes”, responsive to every string pulled by the sole and supreme creative force, the director. Both the laissez-faire and the via-media theory of theatre directing and by extension film directing presuppose that an idea is more easily learned if it seems to come from the actor rather than the director (Sievers 80). This theory has been experimented by Konstantin Stanislavski, Vsevlod Meyerhold, Dapo Adelugba, Bayo Oduneye, Ayo Akinwale, Kemi Adetiba, among others. It is this theory which we can conveniently label as directorial democracy that constitutes the basis of this article’s consideration of Kunle Afolayan’s directorial experiment in *October 1*.

Kunle Afolayan sees film, as the most crucial and most viable medium to galvanize the masses towards radical socio-political changes. Looking critically at the movie, *October 1*, Kunle Afolayan’s penchant for Nigerian society is relayed via the dramatic struggle for independence projected in the scenes. Film in national development has been a subject of discourse in film studies. In fact, film scholars such as Barclays Ayakoroma, Hyginus Ekwuazi, Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome attest that the medium is one that is committed to societal development (Okome “Cinema and Social Change” 34). Tekpetey claims that cinema could “serve as an effective means of awakening consciousness, and be used as a formidable weapon in the struggle against underdevelopment as well as post-colonial oppression and injustice” (2). This is exemplified in the role it played in decolonising the mind of the colonized African. At the attainment of independence, postcolonial African societies saw cinema as a potent medium in rewriting the histories of Africa-their own annals that had been subjectively misappropriated by the colonial masters. Hence, the Senegalese, Ousmane Sembene, who had been “justifiably nicknamed, ‘pope of African cinema’ (Tekpetey 3), produced films that were critical of colonialism and the colonialists. These films include *Black Girl*, *Ceddo*, *Xala* and others. Furthermore, with this medium of film, Ousmane Sembene was able to portray the rich tradition of his people-the culture of the Wolof, and so on. The justification for the success of film in this commitment is because of its accessibility to the urban and rural populace. Film is a medium of communication that breaks all cultural barriers because it is visual appeal-Its language is universal. Film in Nigeria, is a colonial heritage. At the attainment of independence, one of the goals of the Federal Film Unit, of the Nigerian government, was to “explore the nation’s resources and enhance national growth” (Okome “The Context of Film” 78). Although films

such as *Kongi's Harvest* (1970) were produced, this objective was not fully or never achieved. However, with the birth of the Nigerian video film culture otherwise known as Nollywood, this paper argues that Kunle Afolayan's experimentation in *October 1* was propelled by his socio-political consideration of the state of the country – Nigeria.

Kunle Afolayan



Kunle Afolayan (born 30 September 1974) is a Nigerian actor, film producer and director. He is of Igbomina-Yoruba descent, from Kwara State. He is the son of the famous theatre and film director and producer Ade Love. He majored in Economics and started out working in a bank while doing some casual acting, before deciding to move into full-time filmmaking and taking a course at the New York Film Academy. Since 2005 he has been active in the Nigerian film industry. He has made several popular titles including *The Figurine: Araromire*, which was in the Yoruba and English Languages and *Phone Swap* that featured Wale Ojo, Joke Silva, Nse Ikpe Etim and the legendary Chika Okpala. *The Figurine* won five major awards in the African Film Academy and experienced tremendous success in the Nigerian movie theatres.

Kunle Afolayan appeared at the Subversive Film Festival in 2011 where he represented Nigerian film industry, said, in 2009, to be the world's second largest, with his colleague Zeb Ejiro. In May 2013, *Phone Swap* premiered in France at the first edition of Nollywood

Week Paris and won the Public Choice Award. Afolayan's father Adeyemi Josiah Afolayan (Ade Love) was a Nigerian artist of the second half of the 20th century who worked in traveling theatre, then turned to the filmmaking industry. Kunle Afolayan is married to Tolu and they have three children. He identifies as a free thinker.

October 1

The film opens with images of a young lady being raped by a seemingly unknown man. Inspector Danladi Waziri (Sadiq Daba) is summoned by the British colonial military to present a draft of his findings on the series of virgin killings that has occurred in Akote. The film flashes back as Inspector Waziri narrates his story on his observations and experience from his arrival in the town of Akote (Omoera 239). He is warmly received by Sergeant Afonja (Kayode Aderupoko). On getting the village square, Danladi notices the villagers celebrating a horse-rider, who is later noted by Afonja to be Prince Aderopo (Demola Adedoyin). He just returned from the city, as the first university graduate in the community. Danladi observes physical and circumstantial similarities in the deceased virgins, and deduces it must be serial killing. Danladi and Afonja continue in their investigations; the officers interrogate Agbekoya (Kunle Afolayan), who is the owner of the farm where the last lady was killed. Agbekoya denies any knowledge of the events that led to the killings and is subsequently freed by the inspector Waziri due to a perceived language barrier between them. After being cautioned by the Oba about his late night movements, Prince Aderopo visits the village bar, where he meets his childhood friends, Banji (Femi Adebayo) and Tawa (Kehinde Bankole); the trio discuss the coming independence and their pasts. One of the guards assigned to protect the prince deserts his post to spend some time with his lover, close to a stream. Afonja and Danladi question the traditional priest, Baba Ifa (Ifayemi Elebuibon) on their way out of the bar; he responds to their questions proverbially and says that the killer will continue to kill until he is satisfied.

The next day, the dead body of the lover of the guard who fled his post is discovered. Danladi orders the arrest of Baba Ifa, which Afonja refuses outright to carry out; he is thus suspended from his job and replaced by his deputy, Corporal Omolodun (Fabian Adeoye Lojede). Corporal Omolodun, however, is eventually killed by the serial killer after trailing him along the bush-path, following the discovery of another body, this time of an Igbo girl. The girl's father, a farmer Okafor (Kanayo O. Kanayo), along with his ethnic men, captures a travelling Northerner, claiming that he is responsible for the death of his daughter. The accused man is taken into custody by the police, but still maintains his innocence. Danladi informs his superiors that he will

be closing the case, since he has found the killer. As he is about to transfer the Northerner away from Akote, Okafor throws a machete at him, piercing his heart. Even with his dying breath, the man insists he didn't kill the girl. Okafor, who repeatedly affirms his actions as doing what a real man would do, is taken into custody. At night, the officers gather to celebrate the Inspector's impending departure following the presumed victory over the killer. Dandali is persuaded into drinking against his will. On his way out he hears someone whistle a tune he was earlier told by the Northerner to be from the killer. The killer approaches him but he is too drunk to identify the face, and is assaulted by the killer.

Afonja sees him lying on the road and takes him to his residence. Afonja and his wife gave him herbs for relief of his constant catarrh. During the process of his recovery from his fever, he recollects the face of the killer. The next morning, he goes to the market square to observe the body language of Prince Aderopo, who suspiciously stares at him in confidence and even winks at him that there is no evidence to prove he indeed killed the girls. Danladi visits Tawa in the school she works as a teacher, in order to question her about the relationship she has with the Prince. Danladi discovers that Aderopo and Agbekoya are both recipients of a scholarship from a Reverend Father in the town, Father Dowling (Colin David Reese). Danladi visits Agbekoya, who reveals to him that they were constantly molested by the Reverend Father in Lagos city. At a celebration on the eve of Independence, Prince Aderopo invites Tawa to their childhood hideout, which has been renovated. Danladi and Afonja try to trail them, but are unsuccessful; Agbekoya, the only other person who knows the location of the hideout, leads them to it. On getting there, Aderopo is about to make Tawa his sixth victim, representing the end of the six years of violation he received from the Reverend Father. Tawa is saved. The film shifts back to the present day, as Danladi concludes his account to the British officers. The officers are against his desire to speak the truth on the identity of the real killer and they instruct him not to tell anyone about it. He reluctantly succumbs to the pressure for the sake of a peaceful independence.

Kunle Afolayan's Directorial Experiment in *October 1*

It has been noted that Kunle Afolayan is one of the major figures in new Nollywood film making. He does not only produce, but also direct his films with special skills. He is also a very skillful film director. The achievement of Kunle Afolayan in new Nollywood film making can be seen from three perspectives, viz: Producing, directing, and Film education. In the sphere of Film education as a Director, his output is unique. This supposition is anchored on his mastery of the art of Film directing. He is a film director of considerable dimensions despite being an

economist, his penchant for film making drives him to achieve certain heights in the film industry hence his quest for more knowledge at the New York film academy. Afolayan is adequately informed on directorial principles and techniques. In this regard, he readily experiments with the diverse tools of his actors as a juxtaposition of his actor's emotions, body and psychological gestures, this inturn culminate into what Kunle refers to as a superb combo. In an interview with Stephen Odenta Kunle affirmed thus:

There are certain directorial techniques which cut across genres of films whether Historical, Action, scary, Ritual, comedy, etcetera. The first thing to recognize is that in most films you are working on special dimension different from the special dimension of real life. There is a kind of magnification of life in film making and those who act in films and those who participate in it, such as production managers, props man, dop, costumiers and others members of other departments of the production crew must recognize the techniques are quintessential to the art of film making not just the art of directing. Therefore, a good director would ensure the full mastery of the directorial techniques; Of course directorial techniques also grow with experience. Let us now go on to directorial concepts. Directorial concepts are the ideas of the director. Here again, they should not be non-negotiable with the director. The director must have concepts, views. The initial directorial concepts should be discussed especially with the production cast and crew. I as a person do not have any rigid directorial concept. My directorial concept for each film will depend on such variables as the political environment, the social consciousness of the would-be consumers, the prevailing circumstances in terms of the sheer hopes and aspirations of the community where i am taking the shots. These are the things that tend to guide my directorial concepts. As I say, they do not remain rigid and inflexible; they keep changing. (Afolayan, 8 March 2016)

Afolayan's primary emphasis is on aesthetics. His penchant for a unique film tradition has clearly driven him to study the relevance of

diverse parts that culminates in an ensemble before applying them in his films. His directorial art is a kin to the Duke's in many respects. Thus, in the composition and production of his Films, Kunle exhibits a "set economy that corresponds to dramatic economy, a performing style engendered by a literary style" (Chinoy 48). In this way, he creates a film of all the arts – total theatre.

His visual imagination is active in his movie experiments. This assertion springs from a creative or directorial observation of his films. His actors expression, it seems to me, is always an "immensely important means of dramatic expression for him". For "even when he has been able to test his ideas he could see in his mind's eye with remarkable vividness how the visual elements might be made to function as part of the dramatic rhythm. The whole picture as it were moves together – sky and sea and cloud are as it were actors" (Worth 24-25). Kunle Afolayan wanted a story set in a small community; he had writers submit scripts before he got to meet Tunde Babalola who eventually wrote the script for the film. The script was initially submitted with the title *Dust*, mainly because the story is set in a very dusty town. Even though Afolayan didn't want to do big budget projects at the time, he knew he had no choice, as he wanted to interpret the writer's vision adequately because it is a "national film with a universal appeal". He expressed that he liked the story of *October 1* because it is a period piece, which he had never done before and "it is also significant to the present state of Nigeria". As a result, he decided to explore the film by adding his own ideas to the subsequent drafts of the script. In an interview, Afolayan pointed out that *October 1* is not just an entertainment film, but also informative: "For the older generation, especially those who were part of independence, they will be able to see themselves in this film. For the younger generation it's a platform for many of them who don't know the story of Nigeria." He also stated that: "We want the younger generation to know where we are coming from and the older generation to see if we are moving in the right direction".

Kunle Afolayan's directorial experimentation began from his quest for a story with a national appeal and dovetailed into his choice for characters to best interpret these roles. According to Afolayan, care had to be taken during casting as it is one of the key areas that could make or break a film like *October 1*. The audition for the film which took place on 6 June 2013 at Golden Effects Studios in Ikeja recorded over 1000 people in attendance. The lead character of Dan Waziri posed a challenge; a Northerner is needed to play the role, and Afolayan stated that there is a particular "look" that has been associated with people of the sixties. He also pointed out that he needed an actor who could not only speak Hausa, but would represent the ethnic group

as well. No one seemed to tick these essential boxes, until Sadiq Daba came to mind. However, his whereabouts were not known at the time as the last time he had been seen was in the 1998 Mahmood Ali-Balogun's short film *A Place Called Home*, produced by Mnet. Eventually, Afolayan was able to find a recent interview he granted, thereby getting connected to Daba through the interviewer. Sadiq Daba was prepared for Waziri's character for a period of 8 months before filming commenced. On a day of shoot, a serious disagreement occurred between Daba and Afolayan that Daba walked out on set; the dispute, however, was eventually settled and shooting was resumed. Daba in an interview expressed enthusiastically that Kunle Afolayan is a filmmaker and director he was glad to be associated with (13 July 2013).

The character of Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti was another challenging aspect of casting; Afolayan had to research on the Kutis for some time in order to learn about some dominant physical features that might be common with the family. He also announced it on *Twitter* that he was looking for an actress with close resemblance to the late Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti, but to no avail. When the director met designer, Deola Sagoe for the costume design of the film, he would always "see this round face like the Kutis" and he eventually asked her out on the role. She agreed to the role after three weeks of Afolayan's persistence and convincing. Kunle Afolayan like in his previous films featured in *October 1* as a farmer with the name Agbekoya. For his role, he had to leave his hair for some time to let it grow. He also stated in an interview with Toni Kan and Peju Akande on *Africa Magic* that some other actors were also asked to leave their hair and beard for about a year for the film. In the words of Onyeka Nwelu: "Mr. Afolayan incorporates facts into fiction to create an everlasting joy in this work. He is not one who is scared of exploring, and he does so beautifully. He takes his time to create. He takes his time to understand the people he is making films for. No matter how intellectually stimulating *October 1* is it can be enjoyed by anybody. At the end, one can easily say, Mr. Afolayan's *October 1* is for everyone who loves great films" (7 October 2014). from Nwelu's assertion Kunle Afolayan as a director is very concerned about his audience when making his films, and this drives him to do an excellent job. Augustine Ogwo of *News Wire* gives credence to Nwelu when he asserts that *October 1* is brilliant, thought-provoking and timeless.

October 1 preaches the truth and it does so from an artistic point of view. Kudos must be given to Tunde Babalola for writing such an amazing script and also to the producer/director of this movie for breathing life into the story. *October 1* is such a good movie that it has the power to plunge every well-meaning Nigerian into a reflective mood

and possibly positive action”(14 October 2014). It suffices that the socio-political underpinnings of the movie can emancipate Nigerians for a positive action to revitalize our democracy. From the directorial point of view, Sodas and Popcorn, applauded the production design, the performances from the actors, use of costumes, and also described the cinematography as “the best work of art in Nigerian cinematic history”. It commended the film for its attention to detail and concluded: “Afolayan obviously had clear vision of what he set out to achieve and pushed his cast to give the best possible performance you could expect from them(8 October 2014). This is the number one requirement of an experimental director: he/she must have a vision and concept, and this vision can only come alive through a skillful management of the cast and crew to achieve the desired objective. The glory of the film, however, is in the fact that the story is not afraid to go there: explore the timeless themes of religion, ethnic rifts, corruption, abuse, pain and privilege. The film plays for 2 hours but there is enough suspense and laugh-till-your-sides-hurt humour to keep you at the edge of your seat. In realizing the visions of aesthetics in *October 1*, Afolayan and the costumier Deola Sagoe of Haute Couture had to cross-fertilize ideas to design the primordial costumes used in the film. Costume designer, Susan Akalazu, noted that she had to watch many of documentaries and read documentations on events from the 1960s in order to understand the kind of style prevalent during that era in Nigeria and this was the director’s instructions. Kunle Afolayan as a director is aware of the fact that costume helps in accentuating the believability of a character in performance, hence, he instructed the costume designer to do a detailed research on costumes that best suit his vision for *October 1*.

Conclusion

The socio-political consideration of Kunle Afolayan in the making of *October 1* is made palpable through the various arts that culminate in an ensemble. Looking at the choice of the script, Kunle’s quest for a script with national appeal drove him to experimenting with the movie *October 1*. In achieving great heights in this movie, Kunle went out of his way to get the very best of actors who fit into his directorial vision and concept, this single act of his, characterizes him as a director with an eye for quality. Afolayan is a director who has a listening ear, in the making of the movie *October 1* kunle opened his doors for ideas to make the production better, Kunle can be likened to the Daudu of Nigerian theatre (Dapo Adelugba) who until his death was regarded as one of the finest directors in the history of Nigeria Theatre practice, He always welcomed ideas from others. This paper concludes that Kunle Afolayan as a director roots his directorial experiments in *October 1* on the

socio-political rejuvenation of Nigeria and also his penchant for the projection of African cultural aesthetics was brought to the fore.

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