

# THE IMPLICATION OF TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CULTURAL RITES IN YORUBA RULERSHIP: A CONTEXTUAL REVIEW OF “SAWOROIDE FILM”

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## Abstract

The rate at which films multiply in Nigeria is extraordinary and that has caused an unprecedented influx of more filmmakers. As a result, the quantity of films produced in the Yorùbá linguistic and cultural area increases alarmingly. However, this does not translate to the quality of contents as most filmmakers poorly represent Yorùbá religion, culture and tradition. Consequently, this has called for the attention of scholars and critics. This paper analyses this problem and proffers solution using the film, “*Saworoide*” as a template. This study traces the cause of the problem to the effects of colonialism and educated elites who are “*uncomfortable to promote the traditional norms of integrity, morality, hardwork [good governance] and the extended family feeling*” and wish to continue to benefit from the savorous incentives allotted to foreign ideas, making most contemporary Yorùbá people to fashion their lives after the examples of the ruling aristocrats who show unrepentant stance of downgrading African Culture and Yoruba Culture to be specific.

**Keywords:** “Saworoide Film”, an epitomy of Yorùbá tradition and culture.

## Introduction

It has been observed that many films have been historical or means to satirize an existing or past events that make people wonder. This study is based on film that satirized bad governance, cultural and religious misplacement among the ruling elites. The-method adopted in this research was based on the primary data sourced from the film-*Saworoide*. This film was directed and produced by the ace cinematographer and filmmaker, Tunde Kelani. The film is a template-do-it-right-for culture and tradition. It has ample examples of tangible and intangible cultural elements. Then, the film through this research shows that the Yorùbá people can salvage their culture through the correct use of cultural elements in films. The Cultural elements identified are classified into two broad categories; Tangible and Intangible cultural elements are highlighted. This research employs Didactics as the core theoretical framework and uses Generic and Contextualistic approaches to investigate how specific, systematic instructions are passed in *Saworoide film*. The film is thoroughly examined. Library and archival resources, published articles in reputable journals, text books and reliable internet materials are consulted.

It is revealed that efforts had been taken by the Nigerian Film Industry to feature elements of African Culture in their film but more often; their efforts exemplify the common cultural decadence of the society by featuring Yoruba culture the wrong way thereby making the outside world adopt their limitations as what the culture truly is. It is also identified that while films can project the culture, the cultural alienation of most people in today’s society which includes filmmakers, leaves many questions unanswered. Such as who will take-up the responsibility of teaching cultural values accurately? Who will take Yorùbá back on track to trace their way to the sustaining values of Yorùbá cultural heritage? Who will project to the world that Yorùbá culture encompasses “honesty, integrity, diligence, dignity of labour, morality and care for neighbour-(and visitors) ? How can Yorùbá get out of the mould of Colonial Masters and start developing Yorùbá land based on Yorùbá cultural ideals? The study aimed at a far-reaching investigation of cultural didacticism of *Saworoide* to answer the questions and shed light on other grey areas.

This paper establishes the structure of cultural education in the selected film, *Şaworoide* owing to the film's feat as an ambassador of (Yorùbá culture) and a representative of a genre. Also, method of learning Yorùbá culture in the film as-obtainable in other media for teaching people's culture. From the foregoing therefore, it was established that-cultural education in films is attained through several media such as-propaganda, and featured films. Producers use their work in all phases-of-film production as a watchdog and-mouthpiece of the people and their way of life.

Despite the fact that many research works had been carried out on the Mainframes movies/film, *Şaworoide*, resonates the concerns of the people and how it affected governance and that makes it a production through-the technical approach-employed. The contribution of the film to academic research and the contemporary society at large is not a subject of doubt. The film- *Şaworoide*, like many other films-from the stable of Tùndé Kèlání's Mainframe makes a case for the role of culture and tradition in-Yorùbá society. Therefore, in this study, the role and implication-of cultural beliefs in Yorùbá society are spelt out and-brought to the front burner for all and sundry that care. To buttress the importance of culture, Akinwumi Isola (2010) quoted United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2002) to define culture as the set of the distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group, encompassing in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value system, traditions and beliefs (pg 23).

Ìşòlá (2010) posits further that-for every culture however, literature in its own language constitutes the flesh and blood that keeps it alive, theatre and film-making should make up the storehouse and showroom through which cultural elements can be stored, preserved, re-enacted, rebranded and projected. In *Şaworoide film*, literature is adequately employed in both diction-and-written forms as a sub-region of culture which dominates the didactic structure of the film. Considering these-points, the aspects to which this-*Şaworoide* film have-is to concern itself- with the impartation of the cultural details and make the-clarion call for all to pay more attention to culture that has not been researched into. The film documents Yorùbá culture and offers itself as a source to which people can go back to learn about the past and true identity of the Yorùbá race.

Therefore, the need to work on method of application and effects of cultural elements in the film- *Şaworoide* beckons. Additionally, Akinwunmí İşòlá (2010) maintains that this power of overwhelmingly familiar phenomena to benumb the perception and compromise the recognition provides dangerous environment for careless or criminal tolerance that allows atrophy, decay and stagnation to set in. Perhaps, this is why most otherwise intelligent and patriotic Nigerians do not, in at least, feel disturbed today that all aspects of Yorùbá cultural heritage continue to suffer neglect, corruption, bastardisation and demonization to such an extent that they are now in danger of extinction.

*Şaworoide* film expresses the producer's knowledge of indigenous way of life and allegiance to Yorùbá Culture. An attempt-in listing the cultural elements that featured in *Şaworoide* would be herculean because the list-seems endless. *Şaworoide* film can be broadly classified into two cultural elements according to İşòlá (2010) as tangible (culture) which may be seen and touched like carvings and sculptures, patterns body marks and other visible cultural elements, while the intangible cultures referred were not physical but abstracted in nature and could be felt in sight-able rendition. Examples include, languages, oral traditions, customs, music, dance, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine practice, food preparation and presentation, handicrafts and architectural skills, knowledge, creative skills and to mention but few.

To fully project the aforementioned cultural elements, the filmmaker-of *Şaworoide* employed rich use of Yorùbá language as a vehicle to drive home his points on culture. Little

wonder, then, when Ìṣòlá (2010) posits that “Language is the hub of the wheel of culture, while all other aspects like administrative, judicial, religious, educational and other systems are the spokes. When a language dies, the culture dies”. Ostensibly, the need to feature cultural elements in films always arise prima facie with many Yorùbá films. Therefore this research work is aimed at exploring the extent to which movies can preserve Yorùbá culture or in the opposite bastardize it by looking into how cultural contents are used in *Şaworoide* film. It goes further to investigate the degree at which the cultural contents that were featured actually influence the general perception of the Yorùbá culture and the-locale identified with it.

Data on cultural phenomena were collected from the film, interpreted and analysed while the cultural representations and techniques used in featuring them-were to furnish the reader with better understanding of what Túndé Kèlání is presenting, the prevalent bastardisation of Yorùbá culture.

In this paper, the author has unravelled the effects of cultural representation as it affects-the economic value of the people’s culture occasioned by method and manner of representation of its cultural elements in films with special reference to the content and displays in-*Şaworoide* film. It has been observed that-culture is faced with imminent danger of total extinction whereas there are several Yoruba films that should have served as means of emancipation of her cultural heritages. However, bad representation and poor method of-devolving the Yorùbá culture-in most the films genre-featured adulterated Yorùbá cultural elements that did not go through thorough research in their works. Because of this reason, this paper analysed the use of cultural elements in *Şaworoide* film, the methodology adopted-and the effects of that content carrier on the Yorùbá culture. Therefore, in studying the use of Yorùbá culture and tradition in *Şaworoide*, the film-serves-as a template for referencing proper-representation-of cultural elements in films.

### **Synopsis of *Şaworoide* Film**

On the death of *Onijogbo*, Lápité the unconstitutional king designate by clicks was to ascend the throne. However, the condition of the ascendancy of the throne of *Onijogbo*-involves ritual practice that exemplifies-oaths taking and incision. This binds the king, his subjects and other institutions in the town together in a bond signalling sincerity, loyalty and integrity, be that as it may, in contrary to the traditional alliance the new king-elect, Lapite refused oath taking and detested the making of incision on him-as a ritual that makes one eligible for the throne of *Onijogbo*. His action is based on adulterated-information fed to him by-Balógun as one of the custodian of Jogbo cultural beliefs and this made him to refuse the rituals necessary for the ascension of-the throne. His plan was-to unconstitutionally enrich himself on the throne by looting the treasury and using the rich economy of the land through natural resources for his personal selfish reasons. Unknown to Lápité and his allies there is more to the issue of refusing the rituals than they know – a calamitous end was in the offing.

Lápité without going through the cultural process ascended the throne, showed himself to be a corrupt and despotic ruler. He launched a reign of terror, and aimed at all his rivals. He singled out Adébòmí who has constitutional right to be king instead of Lapite, he however, assassinated him, the wife and they mistakenly left the son. Ayángalú the traditional drummer escaped death from Lapite by air’s gap and went into-exile. The common people were not spared, they directly or indirectly felt the heat. The king took his subjects wife, engaged in massive exploitation of the enormous resources of the forest and ordered the arrest of anyone who went against his government.

This led to an uprising and the king on seeing the power of the people, sought the help of a retired army officer Làgàta, who later usurped the throne, killed Lápité and imposed himself on the people. With a blatant disregard for the people's culture, he decided to wear the sacred *adé idé* (bronzed crown) but met his waterloo when the corresponding symbol that bound the crown with the traditional drum, *Şaworoidé* was beaten into his ears. He died on the spot.

### **History of Saworoidé**

Incidentally, *Şaworoidé* was written by Akinwunmi Ìşòlá. It is not surprising then, that the writer and the cinematographer, Túndé Kèláńí “demonstrated greater awareness of their responsibility to people in playwrighting and filmmaking because the content accurately present African thoughts, ideas and values within their own socio-cultural contexts (Ìşòlá 2010)

Consequently, cultural lesson in *Şaworoidé* marks the film distinctively as a good representative of a film genre while it also serves as a veritable tool for accurate knowledge in Yorùbá cultural elements. Of course, trying to lay bare all angles to the generic nature of *Şaworoidé* would result in a book-length study, which the scope of this study will not allow. The need to know also the application of-contextualised approach to the film, *Şaworoidé* is important.

The approach sees a film as part of two distinctive contexts; first, a broad Yorùbá society with a well-organized communal arrangement filled with human qualities of interpersonal relationship and a well-defined leadership structure where the leader uses his authority on behalf of the led in collaboration with other institutions in the society. The film features Yorùbá values as it was in the pre-colonial period or during colonial system devoid of western interference of any kind. Secondly, it mirrors the contemporary society grossly with debased and full of colonial or western impurities that have poisoned Yorùbá society with insatiable way of life and systems.

The opinion of colonial master and the values are thereby validated erroneously by film makers who make films according to patterns closely related or tantamount to selling western values-therby bastardizing Yorùbá cultural philosophies. The colonial film units produced only films that only propounded and ratified imperialist ideas. That Africans were considered as lower race that needed civilization-to a higher standard of international cultural acceptance that goes beyond witch-crafting and superstition (Ìşòlá 2010). So, if all that a filmmaker knows about Yorùbá culture is the social vices that are in the real sense-alien to the true Yorùbá cultural setting, then it can be concluded that the knowledge-is deficient. The film production shunned out from such unsubstantiated stable lacks credibility because it is not representational.

### **The Yorùbá People's-Religion and Culture**

There are several ways to answer this question. The Yoruba race are predominantly found around the south-western region in Nigeria. One can use geographical location, origin or emergence, linguistic identification, climatic make up and cultural evidences to determine different ethnic groups among Yoruba. For this study, Yorùbá people and their culture were limited to western geographical location and linguistic identification. Adébòwálé (1996) emphasises that Yorùbá people were in the South-Western part of Nigeria as an entity ethnic group. Specifically, they effectively occupy the whole of Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti and Lagos States with substantial part of Kwara and Kogi States of the Country. A substantial number of the Yorùbá people also inhabit the South Eastern part of the Republic of Benin (i.e former Dahomey) and part of Togo. All these areas earmarked-in Nigeria and in-Republic of

Benin-formed what was known as the Yorùbá Country before the Europeans partitioned Africa into different colonized country.

The Yorùbá people occupy a wide range of geographical location and if we add those at the Edo land in Benin City of Nigeria to it, the population keeps increasing. What is so important to the Yorùbá people is their linguistic evidence. Though linguistic evidence has bearing on the location or place of origin of the Yorùbá people, in the perspective of this paper, only the emergence of the Yorùbá people as a distinct language group was considered. As we look at the position of Adebowale (1996) on the matter as through the use of glutto-chronogy, linguists have established that the Yorùbá language separated as a distinct one from the Kwa group at least about three or four thousand years ago, that is from 2,000 or 1,000 B.C.-

There are regional dialects of the Yorùbá Language which are variations of the original language such as Ègbá, Òyó Òndó, Ànàgò, ònkò Èkiti, Ilàjẹ, Àkókó. These dialects could still have further variations. But there is also a standard Yorùbá which is taught in schools, used in publishing books and used on the mass media. The standard Yorùbá is close to the Oyo-Ibadan dialect and is developed from the idiolect of Bishop Ajayi Crowther who was from Osoogun in Lànlátẹ̀, near Ìséyìn and Òyó. This standardized or written Yorùbá was developed from the book, *grammar and vocabulary of Yorùbá* produced by Samuel Àjàyí Crowther in 1852 in Freetown Sierra Leone. (Oyètádé 2014)

### **Yoruba religious Rites, Ceremonies and Festivals**

The film, *Şaworoide* expresses Yorùbá traditional rites as applicable and where necessary in the film. Examples of rite, which could be described as a ceremonial or religious act or action can be seen in the funeral ceremony of Oníjogbo with elaborate display of theatrical performance filled with different songs, drums and dance steps.

Another example is the *ìpèbí* scene where the king in waiting, Lápitẹ̀ needs to undergo some rites as part of the elaborate process of installing a king and culminate in the ceremony's happy ending. Sadly, Lápitẹ̀ busted the process for his selfish leaning. Below is how Lapite thwarted due process.

“... Ìbúra ló kàn, kóo máa wí bí n bá ti ñ wí” It’s the oath-taking, just say after me

“Èẹn ẹ dúó diẹ ná bàbá... Wait a minute baba,  
èwo ni ti gbogbo ilù, àdà, omi, ẹfun tẹẹ kó kalẹ wònyí?” why the drum, knife, sword,  
water, white chalk?

“Gbogbo rẹ ló so mọ àdéhùn ìpilẹ̀ tó so Jogbo ró, taa fi tẹ̀lúu  
Jogbo dó. It is all that has to do with the origin of Jogbo.

Hà! Okùn tó yi tí ñ be nínú àdó ide yìí, òhun ló so adéide pọ̀ mọ şaworoide  
The strong link in this brass gourd binds the crown with drum

Ohun ló sì so Àyángalú pọ̀ mọ gbogbo wọ̀n. and also with Àyángalú.

Okùn kan yìí náà ni yóò sì sò ‘wo ọba titun tóo fée jẹ mọ gbogbo wọ̀n, The  
same link binds you as the new king all of them.

tóo bá ti búra tí mo sí sín o ní gbéré. on oath taking and the incision.

Èmi gégé bí ẹlẹ̀rìí láàrin gbogbo yín, ó yá” I being the witness, let’s do it.

“hún hún, bàbá Amawo, ẹ má yọ raa yín lẹ̀nu rará. Don’t bother yourself,

Èmi ò ní búra kankan, n ò sì ní sín gbẹ̀rẹ̀”. no oath-taking and incision  
for me

“Èwò!” “Abomination!”

“*Aà gbó ‘rú è rî, èwò nî!, ó léwuù!*” “It’s unheard of; an abomination!  
It has dire consequence”

“*Orò tí sọ ‘nî dọba gan-an nî!*” “It is the very ritual that makes one  
king..”

“*Mo lémi ò şe!, n ò búra, n ò sì sín gbéré...*” “I said I’m not  
interested in oath taking and incision!

“*Haà! ó léwuù*” “It is dangerous!”

“*È wá o, èyin lọba ni àbémi*” Are you the king or me?

Further examples are seen at the installation ceremony of Lápité, though an outward appearance of due process accompanied ceremony but in the corners of the land, the right order had been brushed aside. Installation ceremony is a must, as no king is installed in private, the people must witness it and be involved.

Furthermore, the fifteenth coronation anniversary of Lápité offers another example of ceremony and was observed as usual with drum, songs and dancing. Another example of ceremonious activity is seen during festival cum celebration of the return of stolen *Adé Idẹ* which is also celebrated with the *Ògódó* performance. Accompanied with detailed features of what the performance will look like in real life occurrence and the film concludes with a festival which goes along with putting on the *Adé Idẹ* by the king and this traditional impunity brought about the end of Làgàta the usurper.

### **Oral tradition and literature**

Furthermore, oral tradition also come into play in cultural elements that enriches the film and this was employed to pass and exhibit cultural aesthetic to the audience. These are taken one after the other because oral traditional is vast and is of different types. In fact, the oral tradition is as old as the existence of the Yorúbás as a people considering its content, purpose, style and pattern. This aspect of cultural heritage identifies the Yorúbás more as it is employed to make other aspects memorable and work for their preservation. The Yorúbá language being natural and tonal shows evidence of high poetic awareness even in casual uses of the language. This point to the unassailable fact that the Yorúbás are poetically conscious from the time a child learns to use the language.

### **The Use of Yoruba Song as Element of Culture**

Yorúbá songs are arrangement of words lyrics which is meant to be sang. It comes in lines and stanzas, just as it is in poetry. Songs are voiced with “distinct and fixed pitches and patterns” (Adésányà, 2014). Yorúbá songs can be sung-by an individual or-in group, it can also be with or without accompaniment of musical instruments. Yorúbá songs are used for specific purposes and there are lots of it-in *Şaworoidẹ* and some of these would be-highlighted by application.

### **Funerals Song (Orin-ìsìnkú)**

This song in particular (funeral song) featured in the film during the funeral process-of the first Oníjogbo. The lyrics showed he would-be missed by the people. As mentioned earlier, this time also marks the end of decorum in Jogbo community, not just the demise of the Oníjogbo.

<i>Ká to rerin, ó digbó</i>	To see the elephant, away to the forest.
<i>Ká tó rẹfòn, ó dọdàn</i>	To see the buffalo, away to the bush.
<i>Ká tó rerin, ó digbó o</i>	To see the elephant, away to the forest.

*Ká tó rẹ̀fọ̀n, ó dọ̀dàn.*  
*Ká tó rẹ̀ni bí i tìrẹ̀*  
*Ó dì b'Ọ̀lọ̀un fẹ́.*  
*Bàbá àwa lọ*  
*Olóore lọ.*  
*Bàbá àwa lọ*  
*Olóore lọ.*  
*Kò mà pọ̀n 'mi òkè rú t'odò*  
*Olóore lọ.*

To see the buffalo, away to the bush.  
 To see a person like him,  
 It takes the grace of God.  
 Our father is gone,  
 The good one is gone.  
 Our father is gone,  
 The good one is gone.  
 He is not nepotistic.  
 The good one is gone.

### **Rebellion's Song (orin ọ̀tẹ̀)**

A Yoruba adage says it is the song that launches a rebellion-(Orin ní síwájú ọ̀tẹ̀). This example is seen during Lápitẹ̀' s coronation and it effectively mirrors what normally happens when two camps contest the kingship throne.

<i>Lápitẹ̀ jù wọ̀n lọ.</i>	Lápitẹ̀ is the greatest
<i>Lápitẹ̀ jù wọ̀n lọ.</i>	Lápitẹ̀ is the greatest
<i>Áwa ò jọba,</i>	We will emerge king
<i>Àwọ̀n ó jonígbesè.</i>	They will run into debt
<i>Lápitẹ̀ jù wọ̀n lọ.</i>	Lápitẹ̀ is the greatest.

The analytical evaluation of *Saworoidẹ* exposes the duty of filmmakers to the Yorùbá society. No doubt, we are in the era of science and technology and this trend is gradually putting an end to cultural diversity while pushing Yoruba into a global cultural integration. Therefore, a society of people with no knowledge of technology and whose entire life is controlled by traditional culture may suffer. They voraciously consume foreign culture which has proved useless to their make-up as humans. Against this backdrop, this paper highlights the fundamental problems of lack of cultural awareness which the film proffers-while drawing-viewers' attention to solving it.

This paper also reflects the power of the-Yorùbá people and how to sustain their cultural heritage. This can only be done when they integrate globalisation and cultural development the concern for all especially the upcoming generation. Since culture is dynamic, its development should not be placed on the template of foreign civilisation but is operable locally and nationally as a unique entity. Though it might be beneficial to use foreign skills, science and technology advancement to develop Yorùbá culture, it is necessary to abide with functional and ready-made language in human endeavours which make development a non-negotiable trend. This is the more reason why the use of language in *Saworoidẹ* is so original-with high quality of Yorùbá features.

People in modern Yoruba society in general are unaware of the inherent danger in their conduct to their culture. They are so unconscious and almost as under spell to take any foreign ideas thrown at them often in exchange for their own. Similarly, filmmakers who are compliant to foreign ideas and are oblivious of responsibilities to their culture and viewers-because of- little or no knowledge of the culture of the people they represent, see the art of filmmaking like every other commodity for money making venture because they-do not see it as art, a responsibility and a means for advocacy. -The play write of *Saworoidẹ*, the filmmaker, and the producer display the right attitude to their culture and audience. They show people how to perform the role filmmakers should perform in the issue of globalising Yorùbá culture, ideas and philosophy by their deliberate and dexterous use of didactic method of featuring culture in the film.

In the film, those who infringe on the cultural tenets fare badly. For example, Lápité, Làgàta, Kangídi, Tinúolá, Balógun and Šeríkí reap the consequence of their action against the tenet of what society beliefs are. Whereas, those who uphold and promote the cultural values, ideas and philosophy of Jogbo end well. They are people like Badà, Amawomaro, Àyàngàlú, Àyànníyì and Adébolá. It is needless to contest what the filmmaker is preaching. There is repercussion for social infraction against the culturally acceptable way of life-and this is also like stating the obvious. So, the filmmaker suggests we go back to solving our modern-day problems the traditional way or better put, going back to our culture, develop it and make progress with it.

*Saworoide* also, depict the fact that Yorùbá culture is struggling to survive. The beguiling western education and the educated elites are choking the traditional values in the name of enlightenment. How does the film show this? Lápité portrays himself as an educated and enlightened person who will not subscribe to what he termed retrogressive ideas. In many homes of educated or so-called elites of Yorùbá extraction-today on the pretext of elitism, education, religion and civilisation, have-relegated or discarded totally the simple cultural tenets which resulted to marring the society of honour and this is the underlining message that the film points out that need to imbibed.

### **Conclusion**

This paper proved to be a useful resource material to those who will work on cultural didacticism of films and cultural study of films in general. Undisputedly, the paper touched many aspects of Yorùbá religion, tradition and culture in the tangible and intangible categories. It is desired that this paper will encourage further works. More than ever, there is need to probe deeper into the cultural usefulness of Yorùbá films for didactic reasons and also to investigate aspects of Yorùbá culture as highlighted in this work. One more area calling for further investigation is the regular use of Yoruba language in conveying the cultural heritage of the people as exemplified in *Saworoide*. Since it has been discovered that to make a tribe to go into extinction the attack on the relevance of their language makes it easier, therefore, the most powerful tool for Yorùbá cultural education emancipation is regular use of the language-as this was-unreservedly used throughout in the film because the power of a people is the language.

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