

# Colour Symbolism as Cultural Element in Selected Tunde Kelani's Video Films

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## Abstract

*Culture sums up a people's way of life. Remove culture from a group of people and they become shells of themselves. It is the repository and the putting together of the peculiar actions of the totality of a people living in the same geographical location and entity over generations. Symbols, signs and signification as elements of semiotics are also tied to culture as a system of representing things by attributing symbolic meanings, significance to objects, events or relationships, using elements like colour. Adejumo (2002) opines that colour could function as a form of identification, beautification and as a carrier of human feelings in form of communication through signals, graphs and uniforms. Are colours in their representation and symbolic manifestations the same across cultures? How are representations of colours differing from one cultural milieu to another? Why is white a colour of mourning in China while in some cultures in Africa it is black? These are the sets of crucial questions this paper sets out to answer. The paper takes a closer look at the symbolism of crosscultural cluster of colours from across geographical cultural locations within Nigeria and its diverse cultural identities, with particular reference to the conceptual underpinnings of colour categorization, and interpretations. The paper argues that a crosscultural perspective of colour investigation is crucial to understanding a people and fostering unity and peace in a crosscultural milieu, and promoting cultural values. Finally, the paper interrogates the use of colour symbolism in a cultural form—film—using some movies as samples.*

*Keywords:* colour, symbolism, culture, and video-film,

## Introduction

Nigeria is the country with the largest black population in the world with one out of four black men being a Nigerian. The country has 520 living languages, 87% of which are minority tongues, some with less than 10 speakers (Adeniyi, 2017, p.2). In discussing language, there are two main types, namely verbal and nonverbal language. There are many forms in which nonverbal communication exists. These forms include body language, facial expressions, gestures, postures, symbols, signs, colours, proxemics, chronemics, haptics, and spatial arrangements to mention a few. All these are forms that enhance effective communication. However, whatever form or a signal that is employed by the communicator must be common, acceptable or shared by the communicator to the "communicatee" of that environment (Makinde & Oduneye, 2008, p.395).

Colours among the Yoruba show the functions they perform which could be reflected through the mood and tonal makers used in situations without the

use of utterances within the culture. Colour, used within the social constituencies of its operation, makes communication clearer as a result of situations reflected. In order words, the situation at hand determines appropriate colour at the point of use. This paper is concerned with how colour is used as a form of identification and communication among the Yoruba in Southwestern Nigeria. The aim is to examine the meanings of colour symbolism usages among the Yoruba and how this is reflected in their literary arts and cultural forms, like stories, folktales, written literatures, and movies. This paper, however, because of the exigency of space and time, will focus on colour symbolism in Yoruba films, using selected films of Tunde Kelani's: *Şaworoide*, *Arugbá* and *Agogo Èwò*.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### Colour

Colours surround us. The hue we select reflects our inner being and personality. Organizations and individuals to depict or symbolize what they feel also use colours, which at times represent the image they want people to have of them. Colour is culture-bound. Some colours convey different meanings in different cultures. Take white as an example. In some societies, white signifies peace, harmony and purity; in some however, it is the colour for funerals and mourning. Some colours, however, are universally representative. Red represents danger and love. Blue also represents love; green represents a restrained person, while brown denotes earthy individuals with common touch. Purple signifies royalty while orange depicts an awakening power like that of the sun. Gray depicts a sign of maturity, age and wisdom while cream is taken to mean even-handed nature and a sign of openness. The colour the individual chooses reflects his mind and sometimes philosophy of life. It can also tell us whether he is bossy, humble or commanding in his activities or beliefs.

Colour is essential in depiction of meanings and its use as symbols. Colour entails different meanings and interpretations from society to society and since it is culture-bound, each culture ascribes specific meanings or interpretations to specific colours. These then convey the psychological and cultural values of the specific culture to those they communicate with. We can trace the evolution of colour to the experiment performed by Isaac Newton (1642-1726) in 1666. In the experiment, Newton threw a tiny ray of light coming from a dark room through the hole of a window shutter when he set up a prism and projected a beautiful spectrum 22 feet on the wall. He observed that the prism was colouring the light, then he refracted the light back together, thereby making the discovery that sunlight is not white as it appears, but a mixture of seven different shades of colours. As proven, whenever light passes through a substance which bends the wavelengths combined in the rays or through the glass of a prism, a drop of water, a raindrop in the sky or bubbles from soap, these

colours always appear in the same order: violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange and red. He referred to these collections of colours as “spectrum” (*Newton and the Colour Spectrum*, 1642-1726; Adejumo, 2002). Furthermore, Adejumo (2002) states that colour could function as a form of identification, beautification and as a carrier of human feelings in form of communication through signals, graphs and uniforms. Caivano and Lopez (2007, in Adesanya, 2010: 40) accentuate the significance of colour as related to symbols with high level of influence on institutional communication due to the fact that it can be identified and recognized more speedily than other institutional symbols.

### **Culture**

Culture has been defined, though it is “a notoriously difficult term to define” (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). Culture as the summation of a people’s life and state of being has some characteristics (Spencer-Oatey 2012, p.3). These include being manifested at different layers of depth, affecting behaviours and interpretation of behaviour, because certain aspects of culture are physically visible while their meanings are invisible, that “their cultural meaning . . . lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders’ (Hofstede, 1991, p.8).

Culture could also be differentiated from both universal human nature and unique individual personality and it influences biological processes while it is associated with social groups. As a social and individual construct, culture is always socially and psychologically distributed in a group and the delineation of its feature will always be fuzzy (Spencer-Oatey, 2012: 9-10). It has universal and distinctive element, can be learned, is subject to gradual change and its various parts are to some degree interrelated. Above all, it is a descriptive and not an evaluative concept. Culture is part and parcel of every individual and people in the world. Sewell (2005, p. 80) sees culture from social life perspective as a learned behaviour. In essence, it is the whole body of practices, beliefs, institutions, customs, habits, myths, and so on, built up by humans and passed on from generation to generation. A fact Lewis (2012, p.34) supports when he opines that culture is the total way of a particular group of people that distinguishes them from other groups. To an extent, culture constitutes the dressing, language, traditions, beliefs, ethics, value system and philosophy of the society where it exists. It is a way of sharing knowledge and schemes designed by a group of folks for interpreting, preserving, expressing and responding to the realities that emanated with their society. Dyslva (2006:4, citing Hofstede, 1997), describes culture as the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the member of an organization or country from another.

## Film

Film is one of the means of communicating cultural images and messages to the people of a community and is an agent of socialization and information (Okuna, 2002). Film, as a modern form of communication, is used by an individual to express feelings, thoughts and intentions that are based on portrayals of cultural images with symbolic meanings. Films are cultural artefacts created by specific cultures “in the transmissive and ritualistic possesses of communication . . .” (Aromona & Waters, 2017, p.150). Film also portrays and reflects the abstract feelings and imaginative work of art as a medium of communication to the entire world pertaining to the events or happenings in the society.

Yoruba film producers therefore reflect cultural imagery, particularly, colour symbolism which is a form of language as an element of culture in movies. The functionality of such cultural element is that it enables people of the Yoruba society and other audiences to enjoy and understand the films from Yoruba cultural perspectives. It further helps viewer derive fulfilment or certain gratification from seeing the films presented in their local language and “to hear their own language on the screen and see their familiar scenes’ (Adeiza, 1999). Cultural images can take the form of sacrifices, oaths, libations, rituals, prayers, allegiance, objects, artefacts, and colours among others. These forms of cultural images could further be exemplified through objects, musical instruments, body adornment, props, symbols, cultural lights, and costumes (Taiwo, 2020). Portrayals of these cultural art-crafts in films are in consonance with the Yoruba means of communicating ideas and perceptions. Therefore culture and cultural images are crucial visual ingredients in films and their importance in movie productions cannot be discounted. This study investigates the portrayal of colour symbolism as cultural element in Yoruba films, with focus on Tunde Kelani’s films. Kelani’s unique style stands as his works are embedded within the intrinsic part of the sociopolitical and economic life of the Yoruba people, of which he is one.

## Methodology

This paper employs qualitative research that uses descriptive, content and semiotic analysis, since it is aimed at eliciting information/data from video-film media. The information meant to be gleaned from this method is colour as used as a symbol within the selected movies. The specific colour symbols used in each film is analyzed and their meanings and interpretations are assessed and analyzed.

Qualitative descriptive analytical method was adopted and used in analyzing the content and issues in films, in relation to the Yoruba use of colour as symbols. The use of colour as communication code in Kelani’s films is attempted, while some basic elements of semiotics are equally adopted in analyzing the

data in this paper. Three of his movies constitute the population for this paper, with focus on Yoruba colours: *funfun* (white), *dudu* (black), and *pupa* (red).

### **Theoretical Framework**

Semiotics is the fulcrum on which this paper is premised. It is the study of signs in relation to the way messages are passed and the code usage to signify sign-meaning. Semiotics is related to the use of signs, symbols, process, and signification used in communication, in accordance with the elements of communication. It includes how meaning is constructed within the sign by encoding which is then transmitted and understood by decoding of the sign. Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce are the founders of modern semiotics. De Saussure, as founding father of linguistics, uses the expression “semiology” and proposes a two-way model or dyadic approaches: *signifier* (the form of the sign) and *signified* (the mental concept of the idea or picture the sign represents). Also, Charles Sanders Peirce, an American logician, mathematician and philosopher, devised his system and generalized theory of sign relations as “semiotics.” He describes it as an action or an influence, thereby using a triadic model of the sign to explain his points, making reference to the form which the sign appears in as *representamen* which he argues may not certainly be the material (or physical form of the sign); rather, *interpretant* (not interpreter) as the perception or feelings about the sign, and *object* is referred to as what the sign stands for. In the context of this paper, semiotic theory becomes relevant in analyzing the significance of colour symbolism to the Yoruba.

### **Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Synopsis of selected movies**

##### ***Saworoide* (Brass Bells, 1999)**

*Saworoide* is a tragic movie, reflecting sociopolitical happenings within the Nigerian political space as the nation migrated from military governance to a democratic dispensation. However, the film replicates the political shenanigans prevalent in the polity. The film's setting is the town of Jogbo, which connotes “bitterness” in Yoruba, in addition to symbolizing the state of prebendal politics. *Saworoide* is a blend of the Yoruba philosophy of political and public-office holders' responsibilities, the traditional expectations of political holders and the realities of the disappointment by modern office holders. The film also examines the sudden invasion of the military (Lagata and the military boys) into politics signifying that they would not have had to foray into politics if politics was properly handled by the politicians. Equally, *Saworoide* points at the struggle of the oppressed and their level of ability and strength to strive harder to tackle the repressive reigns that trampled upon their individual rights and threaten their livelihood. Aside this, *Saworoide* also examines the negative

roles played by lickspittle elements in society, and how they help ensconce the military dictatorship (Balogun and Seriki) due to the gains they intend getting from the regimes.

**Agogo Èèwo (2001)**

*Agogo Èèwo*, the cinematic sequel to *Saworoide*, depicts the national quest for a trustworthy, dependable and reliable Onijogbo, with great expectations and aspirations that when Adebomi emerges and mounts the exalted throne, whose ruling season will bring in new positive dimensions like economic prosperity and political stability. Moving swiftly, however, the cabal of the old council of chiefs—Balogun, Seriki, and Bada—thwarts the ideal ritual procedures of choosing a king, plotting to promote the candidature of Adebosipo, a retired police boss and farmer. Adebosipo turns down the offer at first, due to his decision to stay off politics after his retirement from the police. As a result of concerted pressure from the high chiefs Balogun and Seriki, Adebosipo changes his mind, and agrees to be king, but on his conviction not to be corrupted or influenced by any factor or circumstances as he serves the land. Having undergone the ritual of oath of office, and ritual of initiation with incision treatment, he (Adebosipo) becomes difficult by not compromising with the corrupt officers (chiefs) in his cabinet. For the fact that the king would not satisfy the disgruntled chiefs by allowing them control the land because of their corrupt and self-serving nefarious ends, Balogun, Seriki, Bada and Iyalaje begin to swindle fellow their citizens and work against the king’s interests.

**Arugbá (Votary Maid, 2008)**

*Arugba* is a cultural film, with mixed settings (rural and urban), sociocultural, sociopolitical, socioeconomic and socioreligious sequences. It revolves around the prominent festival in Òṣun-Òṣogbo, in the Southwest, concerning the ritual of sacrifice before the festival. Adetutu, a young undergraduate-turn-priestess after her initiation through her dream as the Yoruba cultural belief that through dream the ancestors and deities transmit messages. She carries the calabash of ritual as the titular Arugba during the procession to the river. The essence of this act annually is to propitiate the ancestor for peace to reign and tranquility to prevail in the land. Expectedly, politics creeps in to override the traditional philosophy of ritual by discrediting the sincerity of Adetutu concerning her pureness (virginity) as a credential to re-qualify her for the exercise again. On this note, the king who refuses to toe the counsel of ritual of *ifa* divination that he should create a nexus between himself and his chiefs, makes sound noise against corruption with harsh way of clamouring for economic reform, but negates foreign investors, shows amorous interest in Adetutu (priestess), being his weakness for women to compromise his principles.

## Colours as Signs and Symbols in Yoruba Culture: Discussion

Colour is so significant in depicting meanings as a form of nonverbal communication. It is among the forms of language that is exclusive without spoken words. Colour could be contextualized on its usages and interpretations universally or locally, and the meanings could be different from one society to another, one culture to another and with different situations. Varieties of colours exist in human social environment like red, white, black, yellow, green, blue, gray, orange, and purple, among others. Identifying and giving meaning to colours is a continuous a crosscultural exercise. As Adeleke (2009) opines, the functions of colours as serving a means of identification, beautification and communication is not arguable. In Yoruba sociocultural context, varieties of colours have several meanings based on the Yoruba philosophies, beliefs, social values and norms. The essence of Yoruba colour usages is to convey messages, transmit ideas, pass information, identification, beautification and a conveyor of feelings which translates to communication as used in signals, graphs, uniforms, houses, dressing and even foods (Adejumo, 2002, p.28).

Colour has a high influence on institutional communication because it is perceived more quickly than other institutional symbols such as iconography or verbal texts (Caivano & Lopez, 2007, p.4). Among the Yoruba people and society, the traditional spectrum is made of three main colours as identified by Fadipe (1970:62-63). These include *pupa* (red), *dúdú* (black) and *funfun* (white) as primary colours, whilst the secondary colours are *topolá* (yellow), *àyinrin* (blue), and the generated colours—pink, scarlet and green magenta. Fadipe underscores the justification of colour in Yoruba society or community for cooperation, the creation and maintenance of kinship and social solidarity, conflict, the acquiring and profiting by knowledge of the physical world, and the imparting of that knowledge to others, and to a limited extent, the cultivation of some of the higher interests of life, and notably religion. We shall focus on the three main selected colours because they belong to the group of primary colours—red, white, and black.

### Red (*pupa*)

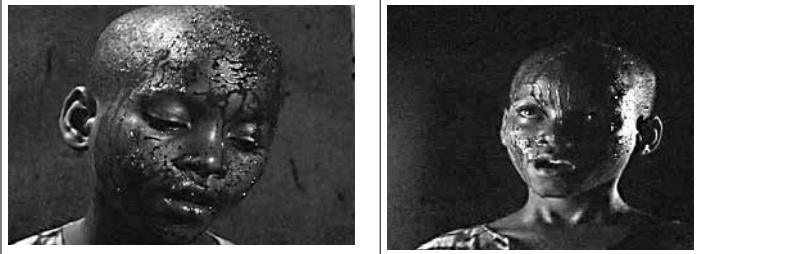
Red is the long wavelength end of the spectrum of visual light, with predominant wavelength of roughly 620-740 nanometers. It is one of the addictive colours of visible light and subtractive secondary colours due to the combination of yellow and magenta hues. It can be referred to traditionally as the primary subtractive colour with, a blend of yellow and blue (Wiki, 2017). Red colour varies in shape and ranges from light pink, bright orange-red, and scarlet to bluish-red. Besides, red varies from one cultural milieu to the other. Some cultural beliefs uphold the fact that red serves as the colour of blood and fire, connected with war, danger, energy, power, strength, passion, love, desires and of course determination in its signification. Nigeria, with diverse cultures, embraces

the significations of red colour concerning its cultural symbolism. Red arouses emotional feelings and heightens and inflates the pressure of blood and the rate of respiration in the context of its occurrences and usages. It accentuates human aggression as a symbol and representation of Sango, the Yoruba god of thunder, reputed to be hot-tempered in his lifetime.

In other climes like South Africa, the cultural symbolism of red is associated to mourning and some part of their national flag with a touch of red, symbolizes violence and sacrifice made during struggle for political independence, (Kapoor, 2016). The issue of mourning associated with red makes it quite unique compared to conventional beliefs, while in Egypt it is taken to mean lucky charm as the cultural symbolism; so also in China (Wang, 2015). Among the Yoruba, the cultural symbolism of red could indicate holiness, calmness and quietude (Adesanyan, 2014). However, Adejumo (2007) refers to red (*pupa*) as the colour of aggression, blood, fire, and emotion attached to Ogún (Yoruba god of iron), Sango (Yoruba god of thunder) and Oya (deity of storm and river Niger), (Alade, 1998). The Igbo ethnic group in Southeast Nigeria also associate red with Amadioha, the Igbo god of thunder and lightning. Cultural symbolism of colour red among the Yoruba is reflected in their belief concerning ritual of virginity (*orò ìbálé*). It used to be the chief event of the “bridal night” where the bride does prove her esteem of being found *virgo intacta* (Fadipe, 1970, p.83). A bride found *virgo intacta* (her virginity still intact) is usually proved by the bloodstain on the piece of sheet underneath the bridal bed to indicate the loss of virginity to the groom after their marriage. This calls for celebration by the husband, herself, and the relatives of both families, especially the bride’s parents. The cultural symbolism here shows that the bride had self-control and discipline. At the same time it shows the fact that the bride’s parents have trained her well and she has followed the precepts of her parents. The white sheet smeared with blood used to be sent in a covered calabash to the parents of the bride that night or the following morning.

In filmic context, red serves as the colour of blood and fire, connected as it is with war, danger, energy, power, strength, passion, love, and desires. In *Saworoidé*, image of red is displayed when the blood of Adebomi and his wife (Arésèjabata’s parents) are splashed as an expression of murder; as the hired killers enter into their home. Instantly, Adebomi hides his son behind him, and he and his wife shot to death, as their blood splashes on Arsejabata’s face and body. Arésèjabata, splattered with blood, goes to his grandfather to announce the incident (*Şaworoidé*, 2002).





*Plate 1: Images of red: usage of blood splash of Aresejabata's parents on his face as expression of ritual in Saworoide.*

In the images above, red is an expression of his parents' blood splashed on Aresejabata. This symbolically signifies that Arésèjàbàtá's parents sacrifices themselves for the survival of their son with their blood splashed on him. The parents' sacrifice helps him later to claim his patrimony. The splashing of blood also saves and fortifies him against plans to take his life.

### **White (*funfun*)**

White is one of the vital and most common colour in nature, with the belief that white is the summary of all colours. It is ascribed to the creator in Yoruba belief; hence the assertion that “*Ọba tó ẹ̀ ọjú ọ̀run funfun nẹ̀nẹ̀*” (The king who painted the sky white). It is indelibly colour linked with holiness, light, purity, innocence, virginity, safety, heaven, illumination, cleanliness, brilliance, perfection, faith, new starting, spirituality, protection, sincerity, humility, goodness, and possibility. White influences the mind and body through creating clarity when it concerns man's mental and spiritual pictures. It aids the premonition concerning new beginnings and renewal, assisting in cleansing, clearing obstacles and clutter, and encouraging the purification of thoughts and actions (Bourn, 2010). Universally, the cultural symbolism of white is purity, reflects and stimulates openness, growth and creativity. In some other cultures white could be associated with death and mourning as the tradition demands. In such culture, however, not taken as the end, it is perceived as a new beginning and the start of a new existence.

In the Nigerian context, white equally symbolizes joy, purity and holiness. Beyond that, white is believed to possess the power to expel the supposed unclean spirit or person at any point or place or forbids unacceptable things. The Hausa believe that white is a symbol of positive and desirable things, and the word white in their language (*fari*) is used as a word for good things: to have a white heart is to be equable, happy, and rejoicing; to have white blood is to be popular; to have a white stomach is to be happy, (Jess, 2008). Adejumo (2002) ascertains the significance of white in Yoruba cultural milieu that *funfun* signifies light and the transparent nature of the spiritual world. It is also the colour that

is associated and represents Ọbàtálá (creation deity) that assists Olódùmarè in shaping man's physical features (Adesanya, 2014).

White clothing has cultural symbolism in Africa. It is usually used at funerals, particularly to wrap the deceased remains. The essence is to indicate that the deceased is embarking on a journey to heaven, which is believed to be a holy place. In African belief it is customary to wear white clothing at the burial of an aged person. The essence is to mourn the dead, contrary to mourning rituals of an underaged, which is tantamount to a loss for the family of the bereaved. However, the differences in colours of cloth at funeral services convey different messages though funeral situations are similar, the depth of loss may differ and this makes it possible for these various funeral situations not to be taken as the same culturally (Dzobo, 2011).

It is not only clothing that the white colour is used for. Some clothing accessories are white: beads, fly-whisks, earrings of beads, bags, white chalk and shoes are items of signification in Yoruba culture. White beads are of important cultural symbolism in Yoruba culture. Though beads for body adornment and art-crafts, their codes and symbolism differ with cultural groups. Adeoye (1972) identifies the Yoruba beads with functions and purposes as used by devotees and for aesthetics, such as *ilèkẹ ọbà* (used by Ọbà worshippers), *otutu-opon* (used by *Ifa* priests or *babalawo*), *ebolò* (used by Ọṣun worshippers) while *ṣésé ẹfun* is used by adherents of Ogiyan, Orisaala, Orisa Ijehun, Oriṣa Adaatan, Ọbalùfòṅ, Oriṣa Ifè and Orisa Irowu. The various religious cohorts mentioned above adorn themselves with the white colour beads as symbols that represent their faiths.

The Benin people in Nigeria share similar philosophy with the Yoruba concerning the cultural symbolism of white beads used by the religious devotees and for beautification of human bodies. White horse whisks, for example connote nobility, wealth and royalty. An all-white couture and accessories represents the religious beliefs of the wearer as a worshipper of Ọbàtálá, or an adherent of Ifá, Aílála, or in some cases a member of an Awo cult. The white chalk when used in making marks on the body may represent their marks on a votary of Olúwẹri, Yemoja or at times the Awo novitiate or the marks of a medicine man.

In *Arugbá* and *Agogo Èwò*, white colour code is utilized as expression of purity, gentleness of the wearers of clothes and accessories. In *Arugba*, Adetutu is depicted as she appears in her white ritual paraphernalia and the *ifa* diviner places his divination tray on white apparel to conduct a search concerning the outcome of the festival. *Arugba* wraps herself in a white woven cloth, with white beads around her neck, wrists, ankles, hair, and as earrings.



*Plate 2: Images of white by Adetutu and ifa divination tray, placed on white apparel, depicting purity in Arugba.*

The white dress signifies her purity since the Òṣun or Arugbá is expected to be a virgin and also a maiden whose character complements her virginity.

In *Agogo Eewo*, a colour code is utilized when Bada, a chief in Jogbo community is shown in search of godliness to escape the oath-taking exercise in order to prevent his nefarious activities being revealed, Bada visits a white-garment church. He wears white praying garment, same as the priest, with seven white candlesticks for prayers that last seven days:



*Plate 3: Bada in white prayer garment, seven white candlesticks in depiction of purity in Arugba.*

In the images above, white is used to express godliness, purity and gentleness as Adetutu, the carrier, a ritual agent, appears in white, while Chief Bada wears white prayer garment with seven white adornments and dressing candle sticks. This signifies holiness in conformity with Yoruba sociocultural and religio-cultural practices in churches and at the shrines. Since white is ascribed to heaven and its inhabitants, this colour is therefore used to signify purity. People who have experienced out-of-body experiences talk of pure white light and beings all dressed in white welcoming them to heaven and also of angels in white. This symbolism exists in the imported religions and traditional religions as depicted in *Arugbá* and *Agogo Èwò*.

### **Black (dúdú)**

Conventionally, black is the symbolic opposite of white. It is the darkest colour that evolves from the absence or complete absorption of light. Black is an

achromatic colour with tint, shade, nuance, and nature, belonging to one of the primary colours. It is associated with power, strength, authority, mysterious happenings and some unknown or negative vices. However, black signifies prestige, seriousness and style in appearance or manner. It could also summon strong emotions, serves as the courier of grief, and also represent darkness (Bourn, 2010; Swallow, 2010).

The cultural symbolism of black in African context varies. In Yoruba sociocultural and socioreligious contexts, *dúdú* represents the power of darkness which opposes those of light. Black represents defilement, mourning and destruction and it is used to signify Èṣù, believed to be a mischief-maker and promoter of malice and confusion and at the same time a trickster and Olódùmarè's policeman (Adesanya, 2014). Black could also serve as the colour of death, separation and slavery or submission. The Igbo and Hausa ethnic groups in Nigeria along with their counterparts in other African countries like Ghana, Sudan, Cameroon, Chad and Ivory Coast share the notion that black signifies negative and socially undesirable qualities and things that cause harm (Jess, 2008).

In contextualizing black colour, the use of black cloth denotes mourning in the African context, compared to the belief of the Indians who use white clothes to depict mourning during funerals. Tying of black band around the arm, wrist or head symbolizes mourning among Africans. The use of the black in negative connotations is attached to mourning by progressive people. Their grouse is that the relations of black to things negative is racist in orientation and perception. The belief is that this attachment of the black to things negative and in language use such as "blacklist," "black sheep," etc, are tools of racial subjugation. Although this is debatable but the reality of the treatment of black people in the world tend to confirm this. White is positive and black is negative. This simple axiom has become entrenched in people's minds over the ages and has become an instrument of suppression and oppression of human beings whose only fault is the possession of melamine in their bodies. This discussion is reflected in advertising, music, film and cultural items.

A film, being a work of imagination, reflects and depicts culture. In film, black costume is often worn by villains and the nefarious. In *Saworoide*, black images depict mourning, power, destruction and beauty as expression of rituals. Ritual of mourning is displayed when the Oníjogbo joins his ancestors, the Jogbo people engage in ritual mourning of the king. They appear in black clothes, carrying the black coffin bearing the remains of the king all around Jogbo (*Saworoide*, 2002).



*Plate 4: The people of Jogbo mourning the old king.*

In the same *Saworoide*, black is utilized for death and trouble situations when Làgàtà invades the process of incision and oath-taking as parts of kingship procedures, which he takes part in as necessary for the coronation ceremony (*Saworoide*, 2002).



*Plate 5: Lapité riding a black horse during his coronation ceremony.*

Lápité, refusing to observe the process of incision and oath-taking rituals during the kingship process, eventually emerges king and decides to observe the ritual of coronation. On the day of his coronation, he rides in on a black horse with a touch of white on its forehead downward its nose, and loses his life. However, the symbolic signification of the colour black is power, authority and mysterious happenings which later result in death for Lápité, while white on the horse's nose being holiness, sincerity, symbolizes the mixture of good and bad happenings during his reign which culminate in his downfall due to lack of sincerity. These form part of Yoruba beliefs as ritual signals associated with the sociocultural beliefs of Yoruba society.

## Conclusion

This paper takes a look at colour symbolism prevalent in Yoruba cultural context. It explores the existing primary colours—red, white and black—in traditional belief and philosophy of the people. It also examines the use of colour as signs of emotion, depiction of various aspects of life, power, authority, rituals and everyday living. The paper places a premium on the nature of Yoruba cul-

ture and communication (verbal and nonverbal), concepts of colour, culture, communication, health and signification of colour. The paper also examines the significance of the specified colours and their uses, functions, aesthetic value, and cultural promotion in Yoruba setting. The kernel of the paper is that colour form important part of Yoruba existence and life patterns. This ubiquity and importance of colour to the Yoruba people are also reflected in their arts, including films, literary works, verbal art and other aspects of their lives and existence. The paper then interrogates the use of colour as tools of signification and symbolism in the films of a well-known and outstanding Yoruba cinematographer and filmmaker, Tunde Kelani. The movies used as examples include *Saworoide*, *Arugba* and *Agogo Ewo*.

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