The Portrayal of African Aesthetics in the Films of Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path*

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Abstract
This paper examines aesthetics from an African perspective, with a focus on selected films of Tunde Kelani, with the argument that African aesthetics in these films remain the valuable artistic ingredients that make Nigerian video films (Nollywood) acceptable and appreciated at home and abroad. This study adopts textual analysis as its research method and 'semioaesthetics' as its theory. It could be established that there are many African cultural elements which spread across Nigerian video films of English expression. These elements serve to generate what African culture represents. The study concludes that African cultural elements in the films go a long way to sustain African cultural heritage which many African scholars clamour for. The study therefore maintains that the cultural elements add to the originality of the Nollywood products.

1.0. Introduction

This research evaluates the portrayal of aesthetics which is a philosophical thought that connotes beauty, perception or feeling and has its essence in all climes and all fields of human endeavours. Therefore, we can have African aesthetics, Roman

aesthetics, Arabian aesthetics, Chinese aesthetics, Christian aesthetics, Islamic aesthetics, artistic aesthetics, scientific aesthetics, and of course architectural aesthetics, among others.

Guyer (2004, p. 15) explains that the term or name, 'aesthetics' as a branch of philosophy came into being in 1735 when it was introduced by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. In fact, Baumgarten sees aesthetics as "a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses" (1735, pp. 114 - 115). Baumgarten also in 1739 gives a more comprehensive definition of aesthetics as "the science of sensitive cognition" (533). He also gives a sort of prominence to it as he discusses the term in his lectures and treatises (Guyer, 2004, p. 15). Guyer (2004, p. 38) summarizes the position of Baumgarten as the modern founder of aesthetics when he says:

> In the Aesthetics, Baumgarten also stresses that there are three dimensions of complexity in a beautiful sensory representation - the three dimensions that were to found the division of the whole work into a "heuristic", a "methodology", and a "semiotic".

Interestingly, there are scholars and philosophers that have worked on aesthetics before Kant (1724 - 1804) and Baumgarten (1714 - 62). These are Anthony Ashley Cooper (1677 - 1713), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), Jean-Baptiste Du Bos (1670 - 1742) and Joseph Addison (1672-1719) who have made various pronouncements on aesthetics. These philosophers did ground work for modern aesthetics that flourished in the eighteenth century. They did not use the name "aesthetics" as it were, but it was later used by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. It was all these ground works of Baumgarten and other philosophers that

Immanuel Kant built upon and helped aesthetics to flourish in the eighteenth century. Guyer (2004, p. 15) corroborates this:

> In the beginning of the eighteenth century, there began a torrent of writing about the character and value of beauty and other properties, notably the sublime, both in art and in nature itself, a flood to which professional philosophers as well as other men of letters ... contributed and which has since hardly abated. In particular, the second and third decades of the eighteenth century have a real claim to be the moment of the origin of modern aesthetics.

Kofoworola (2015), sees aesthetics as perception that has a relationship with feeling. He maintains that aesthetics, going by its literal meaning, which is perception (*aesthetikos*) or feeling (*aisthesis*) cannot be neglected if one is in search of what aesthetics really means or connotes. Therefore, he is of the view that aesthetics is

> Perception ... concerned with the ability to acquire an insight in something, an object or a subject. That ability is not dependent mainly on the physical manifestation of the eyes-sight, the reflection that is transmitted into the eyes, the sense of sight. Perceptions are reflected into the inner eyes; they belong to the sense or the mind, and are capable of generating some feelings (Kofoworola, 2015, p. 130).

Aesthetics is an ideal enterprise in the arts which is used to evaluate, judge and interpret artistic consumptions. It is not alien to Africa as well as other climes of Europe, America and Asia. Aesthetics was also explored in the Greek and Roman arts as found in their art forms, be they, sculpture, artefacts, literature and performing arts, among others. African aesthetics has been dominated and influenced by the West which misjudge African

aesthetics. Barry (1998, p. 61) also argues in favour of African aesthetics in the arts, maintaining that African cultural aesthetics has been dominated and characterised by Euro-western tradition and culture because of the influx of colonialism. Hallen (1998, p. 61) comments further that:

> The study and analysis of African art and aesthetics have been dominated by Western culture. Initially the aesthetic sensitivities of African cultures were characterised as 'primitive' and of low intellectual calibre. Africans reacted to such negative stereotyping by articulating their own, deliberately by non-western aesthetic theories.

Therefore, African critics and writers have done a sort of re-writing or re-examination to the practice of Euro-western misconception of African cultural aesthetics in many instances, such as, in drama, poetry, music, novel, and film, among others, as it is evident in Tunde Kelani's films: *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path*. Sesan (2008, p. 10) further argues that:

> At the turn of twentieth century, African philosophers, anthropologists and literary historians began with frantic efforts to examine and revamp African art and aesthetics from the moribund state it was forced to be by the western critics. Their argument was that the aesthetic quality of any art cannot be appreciated without due consideration for the culture that produces it. Before full aesthetics of African art can be appreciated, there should be close consideration of African culture.

Aesthetics, thus, provides these feelings, and goes beyond beauty which our knowledge and understanding of semiotics (science of signs and symbols) will make us understand. Consequently, we are not only concerned with the cultural signs and symbols explored in

the two films selected to be studied and analysed (as African cultural symbols of aesthetics which eventually produce the desired taste and beauty), rather we are also concerned about the different meanings they (cultural symbols) project. Therefore, we are looking at cultural signs and symbols in Tunde Kelani's *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path* as African cultural aesthetic signs.

2.0 Literature Review

African cultural aesthetics constitutes the factors both tangible and intangible in form and ideas that represent African world-view. In recent times, African cultural aesthetics is at the core of Nigerian video films directly or indirectly, and intentionally or unintentionally. For two decades now, Nigerian filmmakers have explored semiotic approaches to the present and explore African aesthetics in the productions of their films. This has helped in great measures to achieve a presentation of African aesthetics through the filmic medium. The examples are: Tunde Kelani's *Brass Bell, (Saworoide)*, *Gong of Taboo* (*Agogo Eewo*), *The Offering Bearer* (*Arugba*) and Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine* (*Araromire*) among others. The influence that Nigerian video films have enjoyed over the years can never be over-emphasised. Consequently, literary critics have attempted to discuss this development to reveal the extent of the influence of semiotics and aesthetics on Nigerian video films of both the English language and indigenous language like Yoruba.

In *The Offering Bearer* (*Arugba*), a film produced in 2012 by Mainframe Productions to commemorate the progressivist inclination of the former governor of Lagos State, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu, while in office has been widely applauded across the country. It is also a satire to portray the enigmatic personality

of the former president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and his dictatorial tendency while in office as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The film, though in Yoruba language and subtitled in English language for wider audience, is apt to our focus in this work in its display of iconic, indexical and symbolic representations of present day Nigerian realities. Most importantly, the film situates and builds its story around cultural manifestation of Osun Osogbo, one of the major cultural festivals in Yoruba land which has attracted adequate attention across the world, beyond the shores of Nigeria.

The importance of virginity as a symbol of honour, respect, progress, strength and sacrifice is brought to bear in the film. The Offering Bearer (Arugba) is expected to bear and carry the sacrifice that will sustain the society to Osun Osogbo (the water goddess of strength, child-bearing, and all good things of life) to the next year. The bearer must be a virgin which makes it hard for the Oba's daughters to bear the task because it is for a young woman of dignity. So, virginity is a symbol on which the whole story centres.

This brings us to the importance of this sacred part of a woman's body in African society which we take very serious to observe certain aspects of our life, be they, sacrifice, marriage, or maintaining fidelity, among others. Therefore, based on the foregoing, womanhood can be seen as a symbol and not just a symbol, an important one for that matter, looking at the attributes and features of importance attached to it, such as, procreation and reservoir for new life, among others. Consequently, in Africa, womanhood is adored and celebrated. This is why young women are welcomed into adulthood in most African communities. Ododo (2014, p.153) illustrates:

> The cardinal focus of these various ceremonial practices is to ensure the sanctity, purity and chastity of womanhood; ethics and moral alertness, endurance, courage and thorough grounding in home management, philosophy and world view of the society before legal betrothal into marriage.

Alamu (2010) also makes appreciable efforts on the exploration of aesthetics in Yoruba films in his book under the title, *Aesthetics of Yoruba films*. In this work, Alamu interrogates a number of budding issues in Yoruba video films. Just like Olayiwola (2012), his scope is within Yoruba film tradition. In this book, he discusses issues like history of Nigerian video film, piracy and the role of the Nigerian Copyright Commission (NCC), celluloid and video eras, the Yoruba theatre and film, aesthetics and semiotics and their features, and narrative devices, among others. The only aspect that has affinity with our work in Alamu's (2010) work is its theoretical framework which is aesthetics and semiotics. Alamu strongly believes that aesthetics should be used to project beauty and greatness of art work. He posits that:

> In my opinion, the features of goodness in a work of art are also responsible for its greatness. Though the serious content is necessary for art, but it is necessary only because it affords a richer material for aesthetic use. The greatness of art also need not be in terms of the intrinsic value of serious content, but rather in terms of something resulting from its use aesthetically. There should be a meaningful distinction between serious content constituting great art and serious content making for great art. The presence of serious content in a work of art is not enough to adjudge it as great. Rather what should constitute its greatness is the

> device employed to make the serious content appealing (Alamu, 2010, p. 42).

In this paper, we investigate those cultural signs and symbols as elements of aesthetics that invoke not only aesthetics, but also meanings. It is quite different from Alamu's focus in assessing aesthetics in his work. This is the gap that the present work wants to fill. On the other hand, Alamu uses semiotics as it is used globally as a language (communication) tool to decode communication. He is of the view that:

> Every work of art has a communicative function. This is also true of the signification process. In the visual art, the film for instance, the communicative and signification processes are more complex because it employs multiplicity of signs for effects. In it, various systems of signs such as words, gestures, costumes, décor, lighting, sound etc. are exploited for communication (Alamu, 2010, p. 43).

The manner in which the present work explores semiotics in the identified cultural signs is not in any way different from Alamu's. But the difference between the explorations of semiotics in the two works is that while Alamu uses semiotics to interrogate cultural signs that are peculiar to Yoruba tradition alone like Olayiwola (2012), in our own case, we are determined to explore semiotics as a theoretical tool of communication beyond the boundary of Yoruba, in considering also the Igbo cultures as well. And our films of analysis are of English expression. Thus, this is one of the gaps our work fills.

Olayiwola's (2016) work, entitled "Filmic Adaptation in Nigeria: The Example of *Thunderbolt* and *Koseegbe*", centres on transposition of the two films from their original sources of novel to film. This type of adaptation is called novel-to-film adaptation.

Thunderbolt which is one of the films of focus of Olayiwola is examined in our work. Olayiwola does a close comparative study of the three genres involved that are novel (*Thunderbolt* in its original form), drama (*Koseegbe* in its original source) and *Thunderbolt* and *Koseegbe* in their latest filmic medium.

Olayiwola posits that the genres involved have a strong artistic relationship which made the adaptation possible. He does not deny their relative ideological praxis. His words capture it better that "they all commonly share logical order of narration, making use of stories or events that are either fictional or factual. The stage, for instance, shares with the cinema the use of characters, dialogue, music and other theatrical embellishments". (2016, p. 208). Olayiwola notes the artistic characteristics that made the filmic adaptation possible. He adds that modifications are necessary to address "the basic peculiarities of film art. As such the resulting film version obviously departs in some respect from its source primarily in style while at the same time expressing the thought and intents of the original writer". He concludes therefore that a new work must attempt to remain unique and original (Olayiwola, 2016, p. 208).

3.0 Theoretical Framework

The theory which this work adopts is 'semioaesthetics', coined by this researcher. It is an amalgamation of both semiotics and aesthetics. What we determine to do with the theory is to bring some strands of semiotics that are relevant in the interrogation of aesthetics in the selected films of study from the African positions. Semiotics is a language based theory which means the science of signs. Chandler (2007, p. 2) explains that

> Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else. In a semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gestures and objects.

Evidently, the study is based on culture and Claude Levi Strauss, one of the proponents of semiotics, has been reported to have built his work on semiotics on "the mythologies of various cultures to be different versions of the same narrative" (Dobie, 2009, p. 153). The study of sign is principally built on two models from the perspectives of its co-founders, Ferdinand De Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), an American philosopher and physicist (Chandler, 2007, p. 3).

Saussure's model of sign study is dyadic (two-part model). The dyadic model insists that two parts are involved to generate meaning and they are signifier (*significant* or sign vehicle) and signified (*signifier* or meaning). Chandlers (2007, p. 14) maintains that "Contemporary commentators tend to describe the signifier as the form that the sign takes and signified as the concept to which it refers". So, the *signifier* is an image or sound pattern that represents an idea or a concept while the concept that is being presented is the *signified*. To understand the relationship between the two, it requires psychological disposition of the perceiver. Chandlers (2007, p. 15) calls their relationship '*signification*'.

The message or meaning generated from the *signifier* (sign vehicle) is purely arbitrary. This is the argument put forth by the Saussurean semioticians. Their claim is that no direct relationship subsists between the *signifier* and the *signified*. Saussure argues that "the street and the train are real enough. "Their physical existence is essential to our understanding of what they are" (Cited in Chandler, 2007, p. 22). For instance, the hitting of one's left toes against stone (which means the likelihood of bad occurrence) does

not have any direct link to an occurrence of tragedy. It is just a cultural creation in Yoruba world-view.

Peircean model of sign, on the hand, is triadic (three-part model) which are: *representamen*, *interpretant* and *object*. To study semiotics or sign from Peircean model, the three parts are essential. Chandlers (2007, p. 29) opines that "The sign is a unity of what is represented (the *object*), how it is represented (the *representamen*) and how it is interpreted (the *interpretant*)". The relationship between the *representamen*, the *object* and the *interpretant* is called *semeiosis* or *semiosis* according to Peirce (Chandler, 2007, p. 30). Chandler (2007, p. 31) reiterates that:

> The three elements that make up a sign function like a label on an opaque box that contains an object. At first the mere fact that there is a box with a label on it suggests that it contains something, and then when we read the label we discover what that something is ... The first thing that is noticed (the *representamen*) is the box and label; this prompts the realization that something is inside the box (the *object*). This realization, as well as the knowledge of what the box contains, is provided by the *interpretant*. 'Reading the label' is actually just a metaphor for the process of decoding the sign. The important point to be aware of here is that the object of a sign is always hidden ... We only know about the object from noticing the label and the box and then 'reading the label' and forming a mental picture of the object in our mind. Therefore the hidden object of a sign is only brought to realization through the interaction of the representamen, the object and the interpretant.

From the foregoing it is obvious that mental picture of what a sign represents has to be done through the three essential elements of

the *representamen* (sign vehicle), the *object* (what a sign represents) and the *interpretant* (the sense made of a sign). In *The Narrow Path* for example, virginity is a *representamen*, a sign vehicle of what African cultural perspective of virginity represents. The object is the significance attached to this cultural ideology while the *interpretant* is the interpretations that surround the virginity in African cultural belief.

Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic model will be adopted alongside the philosophical thought of aesthetics for two reasons. First, Peirce's model is wider in scope than De Saussure's dyadic model. Second, it considers materiality and reality. Chandlers (2007, p. 33) corroborates this position in these words:

> Saussure's *signified* is not an external referent but an abstract mental representation. Although, Peirce's *object* is not confined to physical things and (like Saussure's *signified*) it can include abstract concepts and fictional entities, the Peircean model explicitly allocates a place for materiality and for reality outside the sign system which Saussure's model did not directly feature.

So, the identified African cultural signs and symbols, such as: virginity, ancestral spirit, spiritual messenger, hitting left toe(s) against stone, virginity stain, virginity mortal, the *Omoluabi* standard, and so on in *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path* will be interrogated based on Peircean model of semiotics and consequently establishing African cultural aesthetics inherent in them as they represent meanings in African sense. Therefore, semiotics and aesthetics (philosophical thought to judge, evaluate and interpret artistic consumptions) are explored to examine the identified cultural signs.

Thus, the combination of semiotics and aesthetics produces "semioaesthetics" as a theory for the study. And since aesthetics is "a science of how things are to be known by means of the senses" (Baumgarten, 1735, pp. 114 - 115), merging it with semiotics which has similar focus will help our work significantly. Consequently, "semioaesthetics" considers the tenets of both semiotics and aesthetics to establish meanings and significant positions of the identified cultural signs and symbols in the selected films of English expression for the study based on African world-view.

3.1. Synopsis of Thunderbolt

Ngozi and Yinka are a couple who meet each other at National Youth Service Corps. Ngozi is Igbo while Yinka is Yoruba. Ngozi is convinced by Yinka to accept his love proposal. Ngozi leaves her Igbo boyfriend for Yinka. Ngozi is on her National Youth Service primary assignment at Oleyo when Yinka begins to suspect her of infidelity based on rumours passed onto him by his friends. Consequently, Yinka confronts Ngozi on this allegation. Ngozi does not believe that Yinka could have thought or accepted such erroneous information about her from anybody. Ngozi becomes angry and Yinka apologises for what he has done.

Thereafter, Ngozi threatens to resign her appointment at Oleyo so that the rumours could stop henceforth but Yinka appeals to her not to do so. But Yinka still believes within him strongly that Ngozi is unfaithful. Yinka's friends advise him to place *Magun* smear for Ngozi so as to kill the man that shares his wife with him. And at the same time, if no one has any sexual intercourse with her within the incubation period, she will die and Yinka will inherit all her properties, after all she is a wealthy woman.

This is done by Yinka and death is hanging on Ngozi's head. When she goes to Oleyo market, an unknown man with the voice of her paternal grandmother comes to tell her that she has a deadly affliction on her. So, Ngozi informs Adetutu, her landlady of the strange occurrence and Adetutu leads her to a herbalist who confirms that she is having a deadly affliction called *Magun* on her. And it has to be removed quickly so as to save her life. Ngozi gets angry over the high charges of the herbalist and she decides to abandon the treatment. Adetutu therefore goes to Lagos to inform Ngozi's father so that something can be done to solve the problem. Consequently, Ngozi's father comes to Oleyo to intervene on the impending death of his daughter. They all go to the house of the herbalist and Ngozi's father accepts to pay the charges.

After the herbalist has done all the necessary treatments, there is a final treatment which requires Ngozi to have intercourse with a man in the presence of the herbalist and his (herbalists') associates to be assured that the deadly affliction is no more on her. So, Yinka is told to come and do it. But he refuses. This tells everybody that he is the one that afflicts his wife with *Magun*. Ngozi has some days to live if no man is ready to do it for her. At the end, Dr. Dimeji who has been on her neck to marry her is asked to do it. He accepts the offer but it must be in his hospital and in the presence of his medical colleagues. Finally, Ngozi and Dimeji are saved by the herbalists and they finally become husband and wife.

3.2. Synopsis of the Narrow Path

Awero is a young and beautiful lady that Odejimi from Agbede village, Lapade from Aku village and Dauda from Orita village (but now lives in a city) want to have as a wife. The rivalry between Odejimi and Lapade is so high to the extent that Odejimi

confronts Lapade over his parade at Orita village. But for the presence of his friend, Bogunde, Odejimi nearly engages Lapade in physical combat.

Dauda's pressure on Awero is at the background. This is because many are unaware of his interest in Awero except her friends. So, Awero and Dauda sometimes meet in secret. She also receives series of gifts from Dauda. Although, Dauda has not told her (Awero) his intention, but it is obvious that he is interested in Awero. Lapade is first to talk to Awero to have her hand in marriage at the Ogun festival. Odejimi later talks to her and it is Odejimi's proposal that Awero finally accepts.

Consequently, the intermediaries of the two meet with the Awero's family to know who they will accept. Uncle Korede, Odejimi's intermediary brings Odejimi good news of being the one whose proposal is accepted. But prior to this, Odejimi's bullet was mistakenly released and it hit Lapade on his left leg when he wanted to frighten him. Odejimi keeps the secret to himself but later reveals it to his friend, Bogunde. This is difficult to prove as Odejimi is not seen by anyone, including Lapade when it occurs. Lapade is only acting on suspicion of Odejimi being the one behind the action. It is on this ground that his father and elders of Aku village could do nothing. So, at the eve of Awero's wedding, she is raped by Dauda when she goes to meet him secretly at a distant and secret place from the village in the night to get Saturday Morning Powder.

This brings the tragedy on Awero as she must be a virgin till the night of her marriage. When she gets to her husband house, she thinks that she would apologise to him maybe he would forgive her. But Odejimi refuses the appeal and Awero is rejected and ejected from Odejimi's house. This leads to an impending war between Agbede village and Aku village as Agbede people believe

that it is Aku people that stole the value and dignity of their bride through Lapade.

Eventually, when they get to battle-ground, women of Orita village led by Awero march to the battlefield to stop the fight when Awero instructs the warriors to kill her first, after all, she is the cause of the war. This is where the warriors from the two sides stop the fight naturally. And Dauda, the rapist of Awero is caught in the city with Indian hemp and is convicted and jailed. He later sends his apology to Awero through the school teacher, Abigael and Awero becomes happy again.

3.3. The Exploration of African Aesthetics in *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path*

In Olayiwola's work (2013), "Yoruba Video Films and the Dilemmas of Identity Olayiwola interrogates whether Nigerian video film (also known as Nollywood) could project the African identity in this "McLuhan's global village". He examines whether Nigerian video film producers could make their films truly portray and represent "the relevance and meaning of the African authenticity, and tradition" (Olayiwola, 2013, p. 319). Olayiwola's argument is based on "truly authentic African cinema" that is free of all the vestiges of colonialism". This was consequent upon the various agitations of African scholars for true and authentic African films as film remains a cultural vehicle. The scholars include Akinwumi Isola, Hyginus Ekwuazi and Barclays Ayakoroma, among others. Nigerian video film is the most applauded art among all popular arts in Nigeria. According to Haynes (2014, p. xii) Nigerian video film is "Nigeria's most powerful art form".

Based on these claims, the two films selected for this study have to a large extent, explored African aesthetics to free Africa

from the colonial grips that many films in Africa have suffered from. Through these films, Africa can be given a place of pride for what the films project. They portray African identity in terms of demonstrating African morality as against promiscuity and infidelity; they also present the belief that binds the living and the dead together; and they unveil the great honour and respect Africans hold their gods, among others.

In *The Narrow Path*, virginity which is the major factor of womanhood becomes the central message. It is a semioaesthetic symbol or sign that brings peace and destruction. This African cultural sign or symbol has dual roles it plays in the African society. It can make and as well mar a society. This is a sort of binary opposition. That is to say that if the narrow path of a woman where virginity is attached does not make a society, it would definitely do otherwise. Virginity, in *The Narrow Path*, creates rivalry between Odejimi and Lapade. They spy on one another because of Awero (a woman).

This rancour does not just emerge; it unveils because of what the duo determine to gain or derive from the narrow path (virginity) of Awero. At the end, Odejimi emerges victorious to get Awero when unknown to him that Awero's narrow path has been tampered with. Despite Awero's appeal not to expose her, Odejimi does not accept her appeal in the night of their wedding. So, if the path is not very special, sacred and sacrosanct to the African mind, why Odejimi's objection? It is the distortion of Awero's narrow path that also leads to the war between Agbede village and Aku village. This is because Odejimi's people believe that it is the son of Aku village (Lapade) that stole or opened Awero's narrow path. It is this same womanhood represented by Awero that brings the war to an end. The path is, therefore, symbolic indexical that represents honour, respect, power and reproduction, among others.

Thus, we can see symbolic index of Awero or womanhood represented in the film. This is what African culture preaches about womanhood and its position in African society. This is the reason for its sacredness. It also maintains that without any doubt an environment that is devoid of a pure woman is believed to head to its doom. Womanhood represented by Awero, in *The Narrow Path*, is a symbolic portrayal of a peace-maker. She can still be seen as an object of crisis as demonstrated in the war between Agbede and Aku villages in the film. It is Awero that is the cause of the crisis (war); she is still the same person that brings the war to a stop.

Just as virginity is presented in *The Narrow Path*, it is also obvious that it is the subject-matter in *Thunderbolt*. Virginity is presented as a precious value and asset that a woman can possess in Yoruba and Igbo societies like any other African society. It is enshrined in African belief that a young virgin woman enjoys natural protection, favour, power and strength. This is responsible for the reason why Ngozi in *Thunderbolt* survives the death smear on her because of her innocence and sincerity. Her paternal grandmother has to come back to life to call her attention to the impending disaster because of her fidelity. This is why the grandmother insisted that Ngozi must remain a virgin before her marriage because of its significance to African life. The old woman says that "your husband must meet you at home". Virginity, in a clear term, in the films, is not only an indexical symbol, it as well serves as a cultural symbol that portrays African moral aesthetics to the rest of the world, maintaining the importance and significance attached to it in Africa.

In most African societies, there is a ceremony for this, if a bride is met a virgin at the night of her marriage by her husband as prepared to be done in *The Narrow Path*. Ododo (2013) calls it "Virgo Intacta". He explains that brides that break their virginity

are put to shame and ridicule; no ceremony for them, sometime they are even rejected from their new marital homes (Ododo, 2013, p. 153). This is what occurs to Awero in *The Narrow Path*, where she is rejected by Odejimi because she is not met at home.

In *The Narrow Path*, Abike explains the significance of this African cultural heritage to Abigael, a school teacher that just arrives at Orita village when the virginity mortars of Awero are taken to Odejimi's house, her husband-to-be. The discussion between the duo will shed light on the importance of virginity to Africa. It goes thus:

> Abike: Awero's Virginity mortars are ready!
> Abigael: Virginity mortals, what are they used for?
> Abike: What?
> Abigael: The Virginity mortars you said, what are they used for?
> Abike: When you married your husband, were you not a virgin? How did you celebrate your Virginity night?
> Abigael: Is that what the Virginity mortars are used for here?
> Abike: Yes, the Virginity mortars are taken to the husband's house, after the marriage-sleep the husband will take the wife's blood of Virginity to her people. Then, they'll use the mortars to pound yam for the people to eat to celebrate the virginity night.
> Abigael: Ok! But, what if the new wife is not a virgin?
> Abike: Ah! What? May God forbid! You've seen someone's Virginity mortars and you're asking such a question.

From the above discussion between Abike and Abigael, it is, therefore, obvious that virginity is not just symbolic; it is also

aesthetic to the African mind. This also stresses its importance in *Thunderbolt* as Ngozi's grandmother presents it to her grand-daughter (Ngozi) in these words: "I am not happy about this your marriage to a Yoruba man. But I know you love him. About the will, you will get your own share. But I insist on one thing, your husband must meet you at home". The old woman gives her the large chunk of the will because of her instruction of being met at home by her husband. It is a thing of pride in African society. One can also see jealousy in Adetutu, her landlady, when Ngozi talks about her being met at home. Adetutu, therefore, laments that "Daddy also met me at home", although, it sounds comic, but it has a lot to do with integrity and pride of a woman in African society.

The narrow path of a woman is also the central issue on which all the crises in *Thunderbolt* are built. This is because Ngozi enjoys natural protection from her ancestors to die a shameful death because of her innocence vis-à-vis virginity. The old man that meets her in Oleyo market is a recantation of her grandmother because Ngozi confirms it to Adetutu that his voice is like that of her grandmother. What the strange old man tells her goes thus:

> No, no, my daughter, stand up. You my daughter are in danger; you have a deadly affliction on your body that may bring your life to an abrupt end ... your innocence is your only saving grace. Take heal of your health, or else you will die a shameful death soon. Heed my words, or else death will hit you like a thunderbolt.

The herbalist also adds to this, maintaining that "you would have died but one of your ancestors has been following you about". There are other cultural signs and symbols in *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path* which contributed greatly to African aesthetics

beyond meaning-generation. For example, the ancestor's visit to Ngozi is a cultural sign of the strong ties that exist between the living and the dead in Africa. Horton (1981, p. 34) has described this as a major feature in African life in his essay, "The Gods as Guests: An Aspect of Kalabari Religious Life". Horton explains the presence of the gods during Kalabari religious festivals which have some relationships with what happens in *Thunderbolt* to some extent. This is what Wole Soyinka postulates in his 'fourth stage'. Soyinka opines that there is a connection that exists between the three worlds in Yoruba life which are: the world of the living, the world of the dead and the word of the unborn. The three worlds connect with one another. This is why it is possible for the ancestral spirit to visit Ngozi in *Thunderbolt*.

In *The Narrow Path*, the gods (ancestral fathers) are also consulted by Odejimi to know whether Awero will be his or not through the sprinkling of four divided kola-nuts on the ground. The three out of the four kola-nuts face the sky which means that the gods are silent on the matter; they do not want to talk. And the consequence of Awero's and Odejimi's relationship is catastrophic. Perhaps, this could be the reason why the gods are silent. This is symbolic and also establishing African aesthetics of strong tide or relationship between the dead and the living being demonstrated in the films.

The Narrow Path also presents "the standard of *Omoluabi*" as observed by Akinwumi Isola in 2010 as a Yoruba watchword. It talks about the person's integrity. This is obviously demonstrated by Bogunde who is against his bosom friend, Odejimi, for letting his bullets hit Lapade, his arch rival. Bogunde remains truthful by going against his friend, Odejimi despite the fact that the act is not intentional. It is a serious sign that in Yoruba / African society,

there is no hiding place for wrong doers. This is symbolic and also aesthetically relevant.

In *The Narrow Path*, Awero's left toes also hit a stone trice which is a sign of impending danger in Yoruba society. It is on that same day in the night that she is raped by Dauda which sets in the tragedy in the film. Awero's toes that hit the stone in the film portray the inclusion of African cultural aesthetics. The African cultural signs and symbols in *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path* are to generate meanings from African perspective (African semiotics) and also to demonstrate African aesthetics. All these African cultural signs and symbols both tangible (material) and intangible (immaterial) are the cultural factors that decolonise the films in great measure, going beyond their subject-matters and backgrounds.

4.0 Conclusion

Nigeria video film has served many functions in society in recent times. One of them is sacrosanct to the cultural existence in presenting African way of life to people through African aesthetics. So, this is the focus of this paper. It addresses virginity as a symbol of innocence and sincerity in African culture which does not only have certain meanings but also serves as African aesthetics. Consequently, it gives Africa a place of pride before the rest of the world. This is what *Thunderbolt* and *The Narrow Path* demonstrate.

The paper maintains that virginity is not just a symbol of strength and sincerity; it is also an African cultural aesthetic symbol which is the central message in the two films of focus. There are other signs and symbols that are at the background that have certain meanings in Yoruba society, such as, hitting one's left toes against a stone and using kola-nuts as messenger to the gods,

among others, are symbols that are meaningful and also aesthetically relevant and they lend credence to the success of the films and the African life that the films represent.

The paper, therefore, enjoins other African movie-makers to always portray and present in their films what will bring out the beauty of Africa to the world which can as well serve as tools against postcolonial domination in this global village. It will then address the worry of Akinwumi Isola of using films "to struggle against the economic, cultural and psychological exploitation of Africa by the West in conjunction with the oppressors at home" (2008, p. 12).

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