

An Exploration of Sage Motif in Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*

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Abstract

In all cultures, there are people of profound character that embody wisdom, knowledge and spiritual power. These kinds of people are called sages. Among the Yoruba, they are known as *Amoye/Agba* (wise one/elder), and they are invaluable to the development and growth of the society. Thus, the saying *agba ki i wa l'oja kori omo tuntun wo* (literally, “a newly born baby’s head should not go askew in the presence of an elder”). This maxim is used to underscore the social significance of sages. However, habitually, there is a misplaced value on sages in human societies. This study explores the status of sage in Tunde Kelani’s *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*, highlighting the implications of undervaluing sages to social development. Kelani adopted sage motif to comment on post-colonial Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative content analysis approach, this study evaluates two purposively selected films, paying close attention to the scenes featuring Baba Opalaba in which he offers cultural and philosophical admonitions to individuals and the community for social evolution. The study concludes that films function as powerful tools for social commentary and are a vital conduit for social change.

Keywords: Tunde Kelani, *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*, sages, social change

Introduction

Traditional African societies place much significance on the contributions of sages to cultural, psychological, and sociological structuring of their communities. Although, Western tradition often denied African philosophy because it is not written yet, scholarship has proven that African critically “reflect on situation...” (Odera, 1990; pp 23). Sages in Africa are community guide, moral custodian, a wise elder who thinks “critically and articulates communal wisdom” (pp. 24). On the other hand, in the Classical Western Idea; a wise man like Socrates are individuals who thinks academically. However, sages, irrespective of spatial locations, are regarded as encyclopedias of experience and knowledge that have the capacity to shape people’s worldviews. They are reputed for profound intellectualism that places them above ordinary men, “knowing what others do not know and feeling what others do not feel” (Masolo, 1999; pp. 116). With their special gift, sages are capable of interpreting situations aptly. Therefore, they are acknowledged as the masters of the legends and history of their societies. They function as societal scruples. Among Yorùbá, such individuals are referred to as *amoye/agba* (wise one/elder), and their importance is reflective and emblematic in the Yorùbá epigram “*agba ki wa loja kori omo tuntun o wo*”, literally interpreted as “a newly born baby’s head should not be askew in the presence of an elder.” Put lucidly, it means that a community blessed with sages should not suffer any kind of leadership attrition. Thus, the Yoruba prayer, *agba o ni tan lorile* (elders shall not [be] expunge[d] from the community/land).

At this point, it is crucial to clarify the meaning of an elder in the Yoruba cultural setting. An elder among the Yorùbá is also called an *amoye* (wise one/sagacious person), irrespective of age or gender. Hence, when a young person displays an uncommon insight, such a young child is metaphorically referred to as *agba/omo-agba* (elder). This is graphically rooted in the wisdom, the sagacity an elder embodies and deploys in managing situations. This implies that an elder is gifted with good judgment. Good judgment helps in the management of people and the environment (Jimoh, 2017; pp. 33). Ordinarily, wisdom is the preserve of the elders, since they are expected to have garnered enough experience over the years. However, it is not always the case; it has been observed that some people are aged but lack the matching insight. This is why Yorùbá clarifies the difference between age and wisdom in the saying *agba o k'ogbon* (age is not synonymous with wisdom). Therefore, someone who displays awesome sagacity is called an *agba* (elder), while the one who acts otherwise is reprimanded as *adagbamodanu* (mediocre). Essentially, not all aged people pass for an elder. Rather, it is the amount of wisdom at someone's disposal that qualifies one to be identified as a sage.

In view of the clarification above, an elder is considered expressly significant in human societies. Hence, filmmakers deploy sage models to drive the thematic concerns in their films. Tunde Kelani is a Nigerian film director and producer, known for his fondness for thought-provoking and culturally rich films that explore themes of tradition, culture and socio-political commentary (Atanda, 2024; pp. 10). From the very beginning, Kelani's vision is clear; he sets out to impact his environment, having realised the power of cinema. Thus, his film connects seamlessly to his cultural context and aims at social change. In the selected film in this study, Kelani engages the sage motif in society. The films *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo* offer a window into the complexities of the post-colonial state of Nigeria, challenging dominant narratives, promoting cultural identity, and fostering social change. Kelani, in this film, deploys sage imagery, exploring how sages comment on the socio-political structures of their societies.

This article explores the roles of the sage in human cultural spaces; focusing on Baba Opalaba, who is a sage archetype within the context of his transcendental significance in the matrix of activities and events narrated in the selected film texts. The paper also evaluates the reflexivity of sage archetypes in understanding Yoruba sociological and cultural development, especially in this age of modern mores and values, with the attendant moral crises at the micro and macro levels of human relations. Consequently, the sage motif is used as a social commentary, creating societal awareness and establishing the importance of such sages.

Conceptualising a sage

The sage archetype is associated with wisdom, knowledge, and insight. Thus, in African belief, to be a sage is to “possess a deeper insight, a connection with purpose, and socio-personal growth” (Odera, 1990; pp. 56). Sagacity is often regarded as the ability to navigate complex and abstract questions with wisdom, insight, and intellectual acumen. It plays a pivotal role in shaping human understanding of existence, morality, and knowledge (Nari, 2001; pp. 219). Sages' contributions lie in offering solutions to dilemmas that challenge conventional thinking, guiding ethical conduct, and fostering critical reflection on the nature of reality. To this end, sages are trusted to reflect on their surroundings and subject the folk viewpoint of their communities to critical interrogation, making human society habitable. They are known as “*Japoro* (professional adviser)” in Kenya (Odera, 1990: 58). In the same manner, the Yorùbá, for instance, conceptualise a sage as *amoye ati af'ogbon ologbon s'ogbon* (wise one/one who forms thoughts/opinions from other people's experiences). In this sense, sages

make use of both personal experience and knowledge of others to understand human limitations and strengths. The term sagacity crystallises the thoughts of persons acknowledged as wise by their respective communities as showing insight and good judgment over socio-political issues. In another sense, sagacity is a body of basic principles and tenets that underlie and justify the beliefs, customs and practices of a given culture. It is important to note that sage and philosopher are at times used synonymously because sage philosophy “constitutes of the expressed thoughts of wise men and women in any given community and it is a way of thinking and explaining the world that fluctuates between popular wisdom, communal maxims, aphorisms and general common truths and didactic wisdom –an expounded wisdom and rational thought of some given individuals within community” (Odera, 1990: pp. 104).

Sages tell the history of their society, offering guidance that “mystically influence their audience, reminding them of who they are and who they might become” (Gbadegesin, 2011; pp. 107). Sages are often viewed as mentors or teachers, but then, it is common knowledge that people seek a sage's counsel even if they do not make use of it (this is typical in the films in this study). Sages usually adopt conversational strategies that clarify the ambivalence of lives, and they are candid in their views; hence, people tend not to patronise them. Sages deploy “discursive strategies that are elastic with multiple meanings and interpretations” (Barber, 1990: pp.199). Barber’s argument is premised on an Ifa text, which provides background information on text, context, and the intertext of various discourses. The context of oral performance of sages is often elastic and mutable – a situation that makes the messages of the sage’s verbal texts align with the cultural episteme and social meanings of the generality of the people. As someone with unbiased judgment and great mental aptitude, sages are natural teachers who utilise fun in their methodology, and philosophy –gifted with good memory (Presbey, 1997; pp. 57).

Fundamentally, sages are people of eminence; they are known to be wise beyond the ordinary, and they place themselves within the immutability of nature, which is independent of time. A sage is a virtuous person, a character typically depicted as kind and wise, often older, not necessarily in age but experiences. They are profound philosophers, distinguished for wisdom, honesty, and intellectual erudition (Jimoh, 2017; pp. 27).

Importance of sages in human societies

Recognising the sage’s personality, most cultures adopt the sage model in running their societies. This explains why the educational and entertainment institutions deploy the sage motif in conveying their thematic concerns. For instance, in the 1980s and 1990s, the Nigerian Radio and Television industries deployed the character of a wise sage in their drama series to educate people. Radio *Oyo*, for instance, presents a radio drama every Thursday evening, 6 pm to 7 pm, featuring *Alagba* Supo Kosemani as a sage who provides ontological and epistemological interpretations to a series of questions and interrogations presented to him. The *Alagba* that Supo Kosemani is called in the radio drama series is not only because of his age, but because of the sagacity he deploys in solving social issues whenever he is consulted.

Similarly, Ogun State Broadcasting Corporation (OGBC) Nigeria, also presented TV drama series that features veteran Nollywood actor, Tunbosun Odunsi, in a soap opera titled *Baba Amoye* (the sage) in the 1980s. In the series, *Baba Amoye* guides people and counsels them on how to live a worthwhile life and how to make their communities livable. The *amoye* (sage) motif is also deployed in a recent Nollywood film, *Jagunjagun* (2023), produced by Femi

Adebayo, to place importance on elders as frontrunners in the enterprise of social growth. Elsewhere, fictional stories, especially in medieval romance and modern fantasy literature of the Europeans, for instance, British folklore, also present old men as wizards/magicians who have solutions to all social problems. Notable examples include Gandalf in the film, *The Lord of the Rings* (2001- 2003) and Albus Dumbledore in the *Harry Potter* series (2001-2011).

Inimitability of sages

Sages, in fictional stories or life trajectories, usually display certain personality traits that set them apart from others. This position is consistent with Allport (1897- 1967), who describes personality traits as “a habitual pattern of behaviour, thought, and emotion that manifests in a wide range of situations. Allport, in his theory, states that personality is a disposition, and he distinguishes three such dispositions: cardinal dispositions –main traits that are dominant in some individuals; central dispositions – not as salient as the cardinal traits but also significant and found in most people; and lastly, secondary dispositions – less visible, less stable individual traits, seen in specific situations. People with a cardinal disposition are certainly endowed with superior reasoning ability; they are the kind of people the Yoruba called *amoye*. In this sense, *amoye* (sage) is a person who demonstrates a lofty sense in interpreting situations and social issues, all of which makes the person a significant character in a community.

The synopsis: *Saworoide and Agogo Eewo*:

The selected films, *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*, written by Akinwumi Isola and produced by Tunde Kelani, are classified as socio-political drama. *Agogo Eewo* (2001) is a sequel to *Saworoide* (1999), and both are set in the rustic fictional town of *Jogbo*, against the backdrop of a community seeking high-quality leadership (a philosopher-king). *Saworoide* opens with a dying king explaining the pact between the land (*Jogbo*) and any king that rules over it. In the last moments of his life, the dying king instructs that a king-elect must take an oath as the final rite, and that the oath must be sealed with incisions that connect the new king with the brass crown and the brass-bellied drum. The concoction kept inside the brass bell must be applied to the incisions to fortify a pact that must be guided by the king-elect. In *Jogbo*'s tradition, this is the final rite that gives the king dominion over the land.

However, the king-elect, Lapite (Kola Oyewo), refuse to take the oath and the incisions. He jettisons the rite that gives authority as the *Oni Jogbo* of the *Jogbo* kingdom. According to the tradition and practice of the *Jogbo* kingdom, this act is of grave consequences. Should any king-elect refuse to perform the ritual, a great calamity shall befall the land. Lapite avoids the ritual by threatening the Babalawo Amawomaro (Peter Fatomilola) with a gun. Lapite also orders the death of his challenger to the throne (Adebomi); an act that spells calamity for the land. Obviously, Lapite's rule is full of turbulence as he fails to seek the counsel of the elders/sages in *Jogbo*. He follows the advice of sycophants who, like himself, lack sound judgment. In the long run, the sycophants mislead him, carrying out unpopular actions, and ultimately, topple in an in-house coup d'état hatched by his army general, Lagata (Kunle Bantefa). The seizure of power by a military leader, Lagata, supposed to present a relief opportunity to correct the anomaly in *Jogbo* land. However, to the contrary, people's expectations falter as Lagata makes bitter promises at his crowning. Just like Lapite, Lagata comes to power through guns, thus, he did not perform the rite of ascension to power. His reign is cut short as Ayanniyi (Segun Oni), the son of Ayangaalu (Ayan Amoo) who has been in exile returns and joins the drummers during the self-crowning of Lagata. Ayanniyi, who knows that Lagata did not undergo the rite to the throne takes lead position at the ceremony to beat

Saworoide. Lagata knows nothing about the ritual behind the drum, neither does he know that someone who can beat *Saworoide* is around. So, as Ayaniyi drums, Lagata exhibits some strange act; he then slumps and dies.

In *Agogoeewo*, the search for a good leader continues, and *Jogbo*, eventually finds a philosopher king/sage in Adebosipo (Dejumo Lewis), who is ready to give the land quality leadership. But then, as the film unfolds, it is apparent that the economic cum socio-political structure inherited by the new king is unusable things have damaged beyond imagination. The corrupt leadership of Lapite, and the short reign of Lagata, overawe *Jogbo* and its environment beyond restoration, a corollary that poses enormous impairment to the new king's stature. For instance, during the reign of Lapite, education was in a state of oblivion, the economy had nose-dived, and all social amenities had putrefied. Consequently, saving the land seems a herculean task; from all indices *Jogbo* is cursed. The saddest thing is that even the new king, Adebosipo surrounds himself with sycophantic and selfish chiefs and advisors. Surely, a society that experiences all the negativities in *Jogbo* cannot help but collapse.

Baba Opalaba: The elder statesman as the conscience of the land

At different levels and scenes in the selected films, a unique character that emphasises the significance of sages to both personal and community growth is embodied in Baba Opalaba. To limn the theme of the film as a socio-political drama, the minor character, often derided, overlooked, and ignored, but often consulted when it is time to make important decisions, is seen in Baba Opalaba's character. The personality of Baba Opalaba stands out, articulating the disposition of *amoye/agba* (wise one/elder) in the Yorùbá cultural settings. Baba Opalaba exhibits the character traits of a sage. His personality in the films connects with the idea of a thinker and philosopher—an elder who detaches himself from prevailing social frivolities to see to the well-being of his nation. This is eloquent at different levels in the actions and plots that feature Baba Opalaba in the films. He exemplifies the superintendent of individuals and the community. At different times, he makes social comments and offers advice to help in the smooth running of the community. These character traits portray him as enacting positive statecraft; he is an elder statesman, a custodian of wisdom and tradition, an interpreter of challenging social concerns, a mentor, and a nation builder.

As the plot and actions of the films unfold, Baba Opalaba's personality connects with the Yorùbá insight of an *amoye*. He meets the parameters of a sage in the Yoruba social setting. His conduct towards critical issues of the state and interpretations of verbal and non-verbal actions in the film text distinguishes him as an elder. At no time did he place a premium on worthless things, nor is he biased in his judgment. Although Baba Opalaba is lowly branded in the films, he is the social commentator who speaks truth to the consciousness of the chiefs and the king of *Jogbo* land.

In *Saworoide*, Baba Opalaba does not come into view until the third scene. Viewers may pay little attention to him, believing that he is an insignificant person. However, this is one of the characteristics of a sage. Sages are always out of public sight; they are usually unseen until there is a need (Odera, 1999; pp. 89). Another peculiarity of sages is that they do not live flamboyantly. In all of Baba Opalaba's appearances in the two selected films, he is modest in appearance. The condition of his habitat and his placement on the set (stairway to the palace) further illustrate how sages are treated in reality. Often, sages are only seen by people who seek their counsel in real life, and they are very scarce in public. The picture below depicts the scenario contested here.



Plate one: Chief Otun meets with Baba Opalaba on the stairways. Baba Opalaba is seated while Otun stands. The picture is cropped from the film *Saworoide*.

The picture above, taken from the third scene in the film *Saworoide*, opens with Chief Otun (Lere Paimo) and Baba Opalaba (Adebayo Faleti). Chief Otun is ascending the staircase while Baba Opalaba sits on the upper part of the same staircase. This arrangement shows that Chief Otun belongs to the group of people who are always in need, never fulfilled, while Baba Opalaba belongs to the category of people who are content with their lot. This is always the case in reality. Chief Otun, who is the second in rank to the king of Jogbo, is a rich man. This is evident in his flamboyant appearance –he is dressed in *Sanyan* (one of the best Yorùbá traditional fabrics), an indication that he is a member of the bourgeoisie. The striking dress and the beads that adorn his neck and wrists distinguish him as a rich man. On the other hand, the elderly man, Baba Opalaba, seated on the stairway, exemplifies a commoner. His positioning on the set and his dressing testify to this lowly status. Additionally, as a sage, he offers guidance. The excerpt below from the third scene in *Saworoide* between Baba Opalaba and Chief Otun lends credence to this assertion:

Otun: *Epele baba, o re yin ni*

Baba Opalaba: *Ee, ko re mi mo n sinmi*

Otun: *Se e gbagbe oro ti mo ba yin so ni joo si*

Baba Opalaba: *Se ni pa ti oye. Sebi mo wi fun yin. Ani ba fe j'aye k'omo j'onijogbo...*

Otun: Hello, Baba, are you tired out?

Baba Opalaba: Tired! No, I am resting.

Otun: I hope you remember what we discussed some time ago

Baba Opalaba: Is it on the kingship matter? I thought I warned you, whoever wants to become the king of Jogbo must not think of material comfort... (My translation)

This exchange between Chief Otun and Baba Opalaba indicates that the matter in question had been discussed before this meeting. So, the question is, why bring up the matter again? The most plausible answer could be that, perhaps, the response of Baba Opalaba during the first meeting was not satisfactory, hence the bringing up of the matter a second time. The meeting between the two did not end well because Chief Otun, who finds the frankness of Oba Opalaba very nauseating, left his presence exasperatedly. Chief Otun's brashness validates the

common saying that ‘truth is bitter.’ Furthermore, the role of Baba Opalaba as the sage further explains the meaning of the name of the land, *Jogbo*. In the Yoruba cultural episteme, there are different connotations for *Jogbo* –bitter, serious, and complicated. The truth is similar to *Jogbo*, and most people find truth unsettling and repulsive. When the sage, like Baba Opalaba, gives frank advice to someone, truth sparks bitterness. Chief Otun, as well as the other chiefs, find Baba Opalaba’s comment toxic.

Baba Opalaba, who is the lowest character in the films, is similar in appearance to a sage in real life. Sages are disparagingly treated in the same treatment is meted out on Baba Opalaba. For instance, his placement on the set in the plate one above (he is seated on the stairway). But then, taking a critical look at this placement, it is very symbolic. The stairway is metaphorically deployed to evoke the difficulties that go with success –the difficulties in climbing the stairway to reach the top. Sages are always strategically placed; their positioning in reality makes them accessible for community service and social development. Baba Opalaba, like the sage who does not give material comfort any consideration, is also positioned in an open space (stairways) to guide people aright. This strategic position allows accessibility, attending to everyone who needs counsel. Baba Opalaba’s placement on the stairway readily makes him available to all. Similarly, sages position themselves in the right place to give guidance (community service) to those who request it. Thus, they are like community mentors and counsellors (Odera, 1990; pp. 67).

The stairway, the path that leads to the top, is a route that must be taken if one’s aim is to get to the upper part of an edifice. However, making the stairways a permanent sitting position like Baba Opalaba does is strategic because it is a good position also for eavesdropping. The one who sits on the stairway may not be given serious attention, and this may give such a person the opportunity to pick on both the conversation at the lower level, as well as the inner space. Eavesdropping is one of the attributes of a sage; hence, sages place themselves in strategic positions to have contact with people without being noticed. Strategically positioning themselves, they eavesdrop on people, gathering information that they use in forming their own reflections. The following excerpt from *Saworoide* lends credence to this assertion:

Baba Opalaba: *Oro l’eye n gbo*
Eye ko dede ba l’orule

Baba Opalaba: *Birds eavesdrop on voices in conversation*
Birds do not perch on a rooftop without a purpose.

The above, a metaphorical conduct of sages in reality, is also crystal clear in the character of Baba Opalaba. The depth of the intention is found in its orienting values towards appropriate and normative actions within the context of the people’s traditions and customs. Baba Opalaba, like sages, usually pretends to be tired and sleeping at all times. This is the situation in the fifth scene in *Saworoide*. Chief Otun believes that Baba Opalaba is sleeping; he (Otun), therefore, makes an aside talk, reprimanding Baba Opalaba. The situation is presented in the following excerpt from the film:

Otun: Bo ba ti re baba yi se bi yi si fehinti, yoo lo ku sile

Baba Opalaba: Hmmm, ise ti ba l’owo osu ko le ni a n fehinti, k’Olorun sa fiku re pawa

Otun: Eforiji mi o baba, orokan lo kami lara, mo se be ti sun ni

Baba Opalaba: Rara o, n'sun o, ti n ba se lori ba i, ibe lemi ti f'eti ko opolopo asiiri. Eye o de de ba l'ole e, oro leye n gbo.

Otun: If this man is tired, can he not retire and go home and die

Baba Opalaba: Hmmm, a job that has no salary cannot attract retirement benefits, and may God let us all die a peaceful death.

Otun: Please forgive me, Baba Opalaba. I came to see you for an urgent matter, and I thought that you were asleep.

Baba Opalaba: No, this is how I gather information as I pretend to be asleep. You should know that when a bird perches on the roof, the bird is listening to voices in conversation.

Baba Opalaba's position on the set is like a bird eavesdropping on people's conversation, seeking information. Baba Opalaba is the elder/sage, who understands the intricacy of the land's customs and traditions due to the strategic position he occupies. Owing to his passive attitude to life and his environment, as shown in the above dialogue, chiefs and visitors to the palace do not pay close attention to his presence anytime they discuss sensitive issues concerning *Jogbo* land and its environment. This gives him the opportunity to extract valuable information that he uses in making social commentary and advising people. Since he has access to critical information about the land, Baba Opalaba is the hero of the film. This article, therefore, aligns with Sekoni's (1983) and Dasyuva's (1999) classification of heroes in Yoruba oral arts. These critics identify amelioration/heroic, anti-heroic/degradation, non-heroic/stagnation, and heroic. These classifications are based on the roles of the main character in initiating and resolving conflicts in the narratives. Dasyuva (1999:34) avers thus:

... the heroic is neither necessarily determined by "goodness" nor by some "rare virtues" as we have in the western literature, but by the uniqueness of action (good or bad) and the capability of its prime mover to determine the syntax of action and situations in the fictive world. In this lies the "greatness of such a character. To the traditional African, it is the "heroic."

Dasyuva's submission underlines the centrality of Baba Opalaba's role as a hero who possesses vital information that could save the king and the kingdom. Information such as that anybody interested in becoming the king of the *Jogbo* should take measures to connect the king with the crown guards against despotism and corruption. As the custodian of this valuable information in *Jogbo*, Baba Opalaba becomes the scribe of the land. The following plate shows Baba Opalaba and Chief Otun in a conversation on the subject matter of authority.



Plate two: Baba Opalaba explains the consequence of avoiding the rite to the throne to Otun (taken from Saworoide)

Baba Opalaba is also projected as a sage in *Agogo Ewo*, a sequel to *Saworoide*. In the film, *Agogo Ewo*, the condition of Baba Opalaba's house conveys an unmistakable impression of poverty. The inference from the situation of his 'new' house in *Agogo Ewo* is that he is ejected from the palace after the military takeover and the whole communal tragedy preceding and following the death of Lagata, the military usurper of the throne. The treatment meted on Baba Opalaba indicates the general attitude of the powers-that-be and the generality of people to philosophers. From a cultural perspective, sages are philosophers who have the epistemology and ontological proficiency in handling issues with convincing discursive strategies. This observation is consistent with Gianan's (2009: pp. 118) view that:

Philosophy and culture are interdependent entities. The latter is ... the cradle of the former; the former analyses, refines, and appreciates the latter. Culture, in this view, needs to cultivate and nurture philosophy, and philosophy functions as an evaluator and studies culture to further develop and enrich it.

Gianan's submission offers an insight into the critical discourses on the philosophy of culture as well as the interplay between culture and philosophy as displayed in the verbal and non-verbal actions of sages. The characterisation of Baba Opalaba in *Agogo Ewo* justifies the cultural ideal and philosophical orientation of a society where sages are indispensable for the humanistic structuring of such a society. The following plate shows the house of Baba Opalaba as copied from the film *Agogo Ewo*.



Plate three: Baba Opalaba's modest house (crop from the film, *Agogo Eewo*)

As philosophers who aim at the humanistic structuration of their respective societies, sages do not answer beyond what is asked of them. Therefore, whoever seeks their opinion on an issue must be willing to open up, ask questions, and relate methodically. This philosophical attitude of sages is in line with Oladipo's (1999: 20-21) view that:

Philosophy has a crucial role to play in the production, clarification, and propagation of the ideas and values that guide the thought and life of people's established views of themselves and their condition as a precondition for defining or redefining who they are and what they can be.

In line with Oladipo's observation of the philosophical attitude of sages, they are not in the habit of offering solutions beyond what is made open to them. Besides, they always stick to the truth and do not give in to material and social distractions.

The intertextual reference to the dictum, *oro leye ngbo, eye o dede ba lorule* (birds listen/eavesdrop to the voices in conversation, birds do not perch on a rooftop without a purpose) as we have in *Saworoide* is in tandem with the positioning of Baba Opalaba in *Agogo Eewo* on the rooftop of an old building in the picture below. This positioning manifests his personality as a sage. The rooftop, which is the apex of a building, allows a clear view of the surroundings. It is like taking an aerial shot in a film production; an aerial shot allows a clear view of the focused object and the surroundings. It is, therefore, believed that from a higher height, Baba Opalaba, as a sage, can see what others do not see and hear what others do not hear. The rooftop, therefore, becomes a metaphor for superior knowledge and a nuanced understanding of the sociology and philosophy of *Jogbo* land.



Plate four: Baba Opalaba on top of the situation (taken from *Agogo Eewo*)



Plate five: Baba Opalaba commenting on the situation in Jogbo (taken from *Agogo Eewo*)

The placement of Baba Opalaba in the above pictures symbolises a superior personality. His eminence is observable in the opening scene of *Agogoeewo* as he makes a statement, commenting on the devastating condition in *Jogbo*. In his conclusion, whoever wants to rule *Jogbo* must be well prepared because *Jogbo* has become like a cult. In this sense, sages serve as the conscience of the community. While their presence is to prevent chaos and ensure orderliness, they are bold enough to speak truth even if the consequence is damning. Just like sages, Baba Opalaba condemns social ills. In another scene in *Agogo Eewo*, Baba Opalaba recounts the current social and political situation in *Jogbo* lucidly as he dictates to one of his grandsons, Eyeba. The message, intended for his son (Bangbola) who lives outside of *Jogbo* land, paints the situation when a despotic leader, who surrounds himself with sycophants, is in power. This is articulated in Baba Opalaba's dialogue below:

Baba Opalaba: *Eyeba Bangbola la o kowe si loni. So fun pe Oro iluwa ti di a sese jade akan. E'e hin, asese jade akan ti se gata gata gata ti a mo ibi ti d'ori ko. So fun komo f'owo ranse o, owo Jogbo o niyi mo, ati pe awon ole o je a gbadun, ... Eyeba, oya ka nkan to ko jade.*

Baba Opalaba: *Eyeba, it is Bangbola that we are writing today. Tell him that Jogbo's case is like an early-morning crab. Yes, it is like the proverbial early-morning crab that wobbles and fumbles out of its hole and knows nowhere to head. Tell him not to send money, for Jogbo's money is valueless, and thieves are everywhere robbing people of their valuables. Eyeba, now read out what you have written.*

In the scene where the above is taken, Baba Opalaba asks his grandson, Eyeba, a student, to help in writing to Bangbola (perhaps his son who lives abroad). The content of the message dictated by Baba Opalaba to Eyeba (the grandson) are indices of the economy that is in disintegration. When a country's economy fails, it affects all facets of life. Eyeba, who is unable to take anything down from his grandfather's dictation, testifies to the fall in the standard of education; a marker of an economy that has declined sharply. Sadly, this is what happens in modern African societies, especially in Nigeria, where systemic failure has become endemic.

As the person who initiates awareness in his society, sages become thorns to the consciousness of leaders. This is clarified in the scene where King Adebosipo (the new King) encounters Baba Opalaba in his dream. In this scene, Baba Opalaba relates the parable of *Areku* (the masquerade performer) to illustrate why a leader should be surrounded by positive minds.



Plate Six: Baba Opalaba relates Areku's story to awaken Adebosipo to his responsibility (cropped from *Agogo Eewo*)

From the ongoing, it is clear that intelligence is desirable for personal development, and sound judgment is a universal remedy for both social and personal growth. Earlier, Plato (428-347 B.C) had categorised human beings into two, "the worthy and the worthless." For Plato, the worthy are people of high mental capacity: trustworthy people, mentors who offer guidance and do not place a premium on ephemeral things. The worthless are self-centered people who lack interpretative minds. For this reason, the philosophers advise that worthless people should not be given the mandate to rule since they do not have what it takes (Plato, *The Republic*). This idea is also corroborated in the work of Gordon Allport (1897-1967) titled "Value Scale."

Allport identifies three types of personality traits to establish the fact that some human beings are more sagaciously endowed than others. Lack of sound judgment is “responsible for underdevelopment” (Isumonah, 2007; pp. 47). He argues further that “negative statecraft resulted in the underdevelopment of the modern African state” (pp. 49). The major characteristic of worthlessness is a lack of sound judgment, pursuit of ephemerality, repression of opposition, and God-fatherism. Unfortunately, all these negative attitudes are entrenched in the modern African states.

The above is well captured in Abubakar (2014)’s declaration that “rather than use the wealth of the state to improve the life of the people, leaders in African and most underdeveloped states have not only personalised power; they have also privatised the state for primitive accumulation, clientelism, and repression of all forms of opposition” (pp.154). It is unfortunate that such a trend persists in contemporary times in most African states. Unfortunately, the worthless people are at the vanguard of government enterprises in most underdeveloped cultures, especially in modern African states. These people’s lack of administrative shrewdness continuously breeds corruption, clientelism, and mismanagement of both human and natural resources. Abubakar’s remark above is well articulated as the present political dispensation in Nigeria shows unparalleled injustices, God-fatherism, favouritism, and disregards to the plight of the downtrodden. Like a foolish leader, many African leaders surround themselves with sycophants, and since one good turn deserves another, the sycophants become “yes boss” to continue to enjoy patronage. The underdeveloped countries continue to give leadership mandate to the worthless and they continue to suffer socially, economically, and psychologically.

Conclusion and recommendations

This paper examined Tunde Kelani’s ingenuity as he deploys the sage motif in his impactful films *Saworoide* and *Agogoeewo*. The selected films are socio-political dramas, with a thematic concern that engages post-colonial African states, especially Nigeria. A critical analysis of the films in the study ascertains the meaning of a sage and determines the similarity in the sage’s character (in real life) and that of Baba Opalaba (the sage in the films). While the paper attempts to identify the qualities of a sage, it maintains that there are two categories of people in reality: the wise and the foolish. This is profound in all cultures of the world as insinuated in Odera’s avowals that “some people mentor and guide with a high sense of responsibility” (1990; pp. 97). Moreover, for the Yoruba to have recognised some people as *amoye* (wise one) and others as *adagbamodanu* (mediocre), means that there is a general approval of the recognition of the sage.

Confronted by this reality and recognising the power of cinema to foster social change, Tunde Kelani deploys sage characterisation in the performance of his artistic contribution to humanity. Thus, the study emphasises that leaders need statesmanship –leadership exemplified in wisdom, breadth of vision, and regard for general welfare rather than partisan interests (Webster 1986). Statecraft approves of a philosopher-king/a leader who reasons critically –a sage who is guided by wisdom, hence, administering the resources of the state in the interest and welfare of all. Wisdom empowers, promotes sound judgment, elevates human status, and transforms society (Jimoh, 2017; pp. 12). Reading the two selected films critically, *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*, Baba Opalaba’s characterisation depicts that of a sage, someone who contemplates systematically; one who will not talk unless consulted.

The thesis of this study is that sages are important to human social growth. Sages are expected to use their “rare attributes to develop their societies” (Odera, 1990; pp. 99). In a society that

has become a junkyard of social ills, where heinous social complications reign supreme, it is only a sage that can rescue the society from danger. Sages are available in all cultures of the world, but they are often disregarded. What remains is for the electorate to identify, consult, and engage sages for societal growth. Therefore, sages should be consulted to address the myriad of ever-increasing environmental, social, economic, and political challenges faced daily in the human environment.

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