

# FILM REVIEW

**Tunde Kelani, director. *Akinwumi Isola and the Rest of Us*. 2017.** 18 minutes. English and Yoruba, with English Subtitles. Mainframe Film and Television Production. No Price Reported.

In *Akinwumi Isola and the Rest of Us*, director Tunde Kelani has produced a reflective documentary that captures his artistic and fascinating relationship with the cinematographer and playwright Akinwumi Isola. Though partly a tribute to the late Professor Akinwunmi Isola, the documentary chronicles Kelani's collaborative film projects with the Yoruba playwright Isola, whose plays were once adapted for the stage by the Isola Ogunsola Theatre Group. The result of this collaboration is a kind of neo-traditional cinema which seeks to emphasize the filmmaker's respect for and allegiance to the Yoruba culture. Some examples of these works include *Efunsetan Aniwura* (1982), *Kosegbe* (1995), *Saworoide* (1999), *Oleku* (1997), and *Agogo Eewo* (2002). Tunde Kelani has interspersed this short documentary with graphics, stills, and excerpts from the aforementioned films, including archival footage of theatrical performances.

The documentary begins with the sound of a talking drum from *Saworoide* (1999), a movie that remains one of the finest examples of Akinwunmi Isola's and Tunde Kelani's collaboration. The fading sound of the drum ushers in the voiceover and the subsequent appearance of Akinwunmi Isola himself, seated in a room and discussing the beginnings of his cultural and artistic relationship with Kelani, which began a few years after Isola's retirement from the University of Ife where he worked as a lecturer in the 1980s. The playwright gives an account of his determination to ensure the sustainability of the Yoruba culture, and how it encouraged his rapid productions of plays, mostly written in Yoruba.

One highlight of the documentary is Akinwumi's emphasis on African cultural development, a point reinforced through an excerpt from *Campus Queen*, revealing Akinwunmi Isola himself playing the role of a lecturer addressing a group of students. Akinwunmi evokes the dilemmas and the contradictions in the lives of the African elite after independence, including references to his own life. In this excerpt from *The Campus Queen*, he does offer one line that can be taken ambiguously as both "self-indicting" and "self-justifying." He is being questioned by a student for wearing a Western suit while also preaching indigenous cultural development. He responds to

the girl student thus: “This outfit which makes me a pitiable parody of the Western man is not a true reflection of the cultural state of my mind.” While Akinwumi seems to be revealing his wrongs in that statement, he is also defending his actions by presenting them as a convention of post-independence dilemma in Africa. That raises the disconcerting thought that perhaps the contradictions of the African elite are justifiable.

The documentary also draws attention to the neglect of the early childhood education that was once promoted in traditional communities through storytelling and role-playing by children often under the guidance of grandmothers. Excerpts of children playing games in *Agogo Eewo* are juxtaposed with Akinwunmi’s assessment of the importance of African culture in the formation of a child’s cultural and national identity, as well as being a mechanism to instill morals and values. The documentary ends with Akinwumi expressing admiration for Tunde Kelani’s uncanny skills as a film maker. Akinwumi, himself states, “I have stories that can be told in writing but he (Tunde Kelani) can translate them into riveting pictures.” Their collaboration has increased the visibility of Akinwumi Isola’s plays, while imparting to Kelani’s work a stamp of literariness, which is providential for the fortunes of Yoruba culture.

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