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Sound, Story and Screen: The Role of Music in Enhancing Narrative Meaning in Nigerian Film Adaptation

Oreoluwa Adeboye[1], Olabisi Mogbafoluwa Adeosun[2], Iyanuoluwa Olaniyi Ajayi[3*]

[1,2,3]*Department of Performing Arts, School of Humanities, Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology (BOUESTI), Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria*

*Corresponding author: ajayiiyanu16@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Music in Nigerian cinema is still discussed mainly as accompaniment, although African performance traditions treat sound, speech and movement as one storytelling system. This study examines how music produces narrative meaning in two Nigerian films that carry Yoruba oral, ritual and theatrical material onto the screen: Tunde Kelani's Saworoide (1999) and Kunle Afolayan's The Figurine (2009). Using a qualitative, interpretive design, it applies scene-based close viewing and listening, a structured cue log and a two-stage procedure that separates the description of sound events from their interpretation. The reading draws on film-music theory (Gorbman, Chion, Audissino), African musicology (Euba, Nzewi, Omojola) and adaptation theory (Hutcheon). In Saworoide, the talking drum and sung proverbs signal political authority, carry communal memory and pass moral judgement. In The Figurine, the placement of sound around the figurine's appearances sustains suspense and holds the viewer between belief in fate and the possibility of coincidence. In both films, music shapes pacing and prepares the viewer's response before image or dialogue confirms it. The study concludes that music in these films works as a co-author of meaning, and that scholarship and production practice should plan for music from the scripting stage.

KEYWORDS: sound; narrative meaning; Nigerian cinema; film adaptation; film music; Yoruba aesthetics.

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1. Introduction

Film tells its stories through several channels at once: moving images, speech, noise and music. Of these, music is the one most often treated as optional. In writing about Nigerian cinema in particular, a score or a set of songs is usually mentioned as part of a film's atmosphere or as a sign of its cultural setting, and then set aside while the discussion turns to plot, performance and production history. Music is described as something added to a film and not as something that helps to make it.

That habit sits uneasily with the artistic traditions from which Nigerian filmmakers draw. Accounts of Yoruba performance repeatedly present music, dance, speech and drama as one event and not as separate arts (Adedeji & Ekwuazi, 1998; Euba, 1990). In such a setting music does more than decorate. It signals emotional states, builds dramatic tension and passes on cultural ideas that words and pictures may not carry as well. Omojola (2012) shows how Yoruba musical practice has long served to record history, shape

identity and express communal values, and Nzewi (1997) argues that African music cannot be understood apart from the performance and social situations in which it takes place.

The same view runs through modern Nigerian theatre. Hubert Ogunde built his travelling theatre around song and drumming, and playwrights such as Wole Soyinka (1975) and Ola Rotimi (1971) wrote music into the structure of their plays instead of treating it as background. Nollywood inherited these habits, though not always knowingly. Okome (2007), Ekwuazi (1991) and Haynes (2016) have written about the cultural and industrial character of Nigerian film and have noted the place of sound in it. In their work, however, music appears as a feature to be mentioned and not as a narrative agent to be analysed. A gap therefore remains between what is understood about music in African performance and what is said about it in film studies.

The gap is wider where adaptation is concerned. Hutcheon (2006) describes adaptation as a process of re-encoding, in which a story has to find new means of expression in a new medium. Nigerian films often move stories, forms and beliefs out of oral performance, ritual and the stage and into cinema. The two films examined here, Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide* (1999) and Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine* (2009), are not screen versions of a single named literary source. They are adaptations in the wider sense that Hutcheon allows: each transposes Yoruba oral, ritual and theatrical resources, and the belief systems attached to them, into the language of film. When this happens, music becomes a bridge between the older form and the new one. It supplies continuity, repeats a story's concerns and calls up cultural settings that the camera cannot show directly.

Production practice adds to the problem. Music is often commissioned or chosen late, after a film has been shot and cut, so that it is applied to a story instead of being built into it. A medium with a long record of narrative power is then reduced to a finishing layer, and its capacity to carry meaning is only partly used.

This study looks at how music works in Nigerian film adaptation to produce narrative meaning. It pursues three questions. First, how does music organise narrative in *Saworoide* and *The Figurine*? Second, what cultural and emotional meanings does it carry, and how does it direct the viewer's response? Third, what do these two cases suggest about the distance between the importance of music in practice and the attention it receives in scholarship and production? The central argument is that music in these films is a source of narrative meaning in its own right, and that Nigerian film studies needs concepts that can describe this.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on film music, African musicology and Nigerian film studies. Section 3 sets out the theoretical framework and the method. Section 4 presents the analysis of the two films, compares them and discusses what the findings mean for scholarship and practice. Sections 5 and 6 give the conclusion and the limitations of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Film music and narrative

International film scholarship has long treated music as part of how films tell stories. Gorbman (1987) set out the principles by which classical film music works, among them narrative cueing, emotional connotation and continuity. She also observed that such music is designed to go unnoticed: its working principle is what she calls inaudibility, guiding the viewer's perception without drawing attention to itself. Chion (1994) approached the question from the side of the image. His idea of "added value" describes how sound, and music especially, enriches what is seen, so that viewers take from the picture an expression and an amount of information that the sound has in fact supplied. He also drew attention to the way sound shapes the perceived pace and duration of what is on screen.

Audissino (2017) develops these debates in *Film/Music Analysis: A Film Studies Approach*. He proposes that film music should be studied as part of cinematic form, using the methods of film studies alongside those of musicology, so that a score is examined for what it does within a film's style and narrative and not as a free-standing piece of music or a servant of the image. The present study adopts this position. It treats the narrative work of music as something that can be described and argued for through close analysis.

2.2 African musicology and performance aesthetics

Most of the foundational film-music theories were developed from Hollywood and European examples.

They help to explain how music works on a viewer, but they do not account for traditions in which music has never been separate from storytelling. African musicology begins from a different premise. Omojola (2012) shows how, in twentieth-century Yoruba life, musical performance served as a means of voicing identity, history and social values. Euba (1990), in his study of the dùndún tradition, examines the capacity of the talking drum to imitate the tones and patterns of Yoruba speech and so to carry messages and praise. This supports the view that music in this setting is semantically active and not merely decorative. Nzewi (1997) describes African music as a system of human action in which sound is bound up with ritual, storytelling and social interaction, and he questions the Western idea of music as an independent art object.

Theatre practice shows these ideas at work. In Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975) and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), music helps to build character, shape dramatic action and reinforce theme, and it is also a vehicle for cultural expression. Both plays assume that an audience will read meaning from drumming and song as readily as from dialogue.

2.3 Music in Nigerian film scholarship

Nigerian film studies grew largely around questions of industry, audience and cultural identity. Haynes (2016) traces the formation of Nollywood's genres and their appeal to audiences, and Okome (2007) examines spectatorship and the sites where films are consumed. Both acknowledge music, but neither makes its structural role in narrative a main concern. Ekwuazi (1991) gives more attention to sound and music in his account of Nigerian cinema, although his treatment is mainly descriptive. The result is that music is recognised as part of Nigerian film without being theorised.

Two recent studies address music in Nollywood more directly. Joseph and Hosea (2020) treat music as an indispensable part of the film production process, with cinematic and communicative functions. They found that music remains highly relevant in Nollywood productions but is often poorly integrated into narrative structure, and they observed that it can foreshadow plot developments and strengthen theme and message. They recommended that filmmakers use music in a more deliberate, inventive and context-aware way. Akinsola (2025), working within Yoruba indigenous culture, found that indigenous music raises students' cultural awareness and understanding, and pointed to the value of music in indigenous languages as a tool of cultural education in secondary schools. The study recommended that students engage regularly with Yorùbá films on different media platforms and that teachers bring such films into their lessons. Akinsola's concern is educational, but the finding supports the view that music in film carries cultural meaning and shapes how a story is received.

2.4 Adaptation and music

Adaptation brings the question into sharper focus. Hutcheon (2006) describes adaptation as "repetition without replication", a process in which a story is retold in a new form and must change in order to work there. A story carried from oral performance, ritual or the stage to the screen loses some of its original means of expression, such as live drumming, the physical presence of a performing community and the habit of call and response, and has to find others. Music is one of the main ways in which Nigerian filmmakers do this. It allows them to bring the cultural and emotional detail of source material that is often rooted in oral or theatrical tradition into cinematic form.

2.5 The research gap

The literature leaves a clear gap. Film studies recognises that music influences how audiences perceive a story. African musicology and theatre studies show that music is central to storytelling. These two lines of work have not been brought together in the study of Nigerian film, and the systematic examination of music as a narrative agent in Nigerian film adaptation is still thin. This study addresses the gap by combining the two perspectives in an analysis of music as an active part of story development.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical framework

The study rests on an interdisciplinary framework with four strands. The first is film-music theory, drawn mainly from Gorbman (1987) and Chion (1994), which treats music as a narrative and meaning-making component of film, together with Audissino's (2017) insistence that music be analysed as part of film form. The second is African musicology, represented by Euba (1990), Nzewi (1997) and Omojola (2012), which

sees African music as a communicative and culturally embedded system of expression. The third is the body of African performance aesthetics found in Yoruba theatre, in which sound, movement and speech are not separated. The fourth is Hutcheon's (2006) theory of adaptation, which sees adaptation as a process of change across media.

Taken together, these strands allow a musical cue to be read in two ways at once: as a device within film form, and as an inherited cultural sign. The analysis focuses on the role of music in relation to three categories. *Narrative structure* covers the way music marks transitions, links scenes, repeats earlier material and anticipates events. *Emotional expression* covers the way music shapes mood and tension and positions the viewer affectively toward what is shown. *Cultural representation* covers the way music brings in Yoruba belief, history, ritual and social values.

3.2 Research design and selection of films

The study follows a qualitative, interpretive design based on textual analysis. The films themselves are the primary data, and the secondary literature supplies the concepts used to interpret them. Two films were selected purposively. Both are Nigerian feature films that transpose Yoruba cultural resources into cinema. Music is prominent in the way both tell their stories. They were released a decade apart (1999 and 2009), and they differ in genre, with *Saworoide* a political drama rooted in kingship and ritual and *The Figurine* a psychological thriller built around belief in fate. This contrast makes it possible to ask whether the narrative role of music holds across different uses, and not only within one style. The two films are also widely available in commercially released versions (Kelani, 1999; Afolayan, 2009). The selection does not claim to be representative of Nigerian cinema as a whole.

3.3 Analytical procedure

The analysis employed scene-based close viewing and listening to examine the relationship between musical and other sound events, visual action, dialogue, and narrative development in *Saworoide* (Kelani, 1999) and *The Figurine* (Afolayan, 2009). The analytical procedure distinguished between the description of audible events and their subsequent interpretation. This distinction was necessary because the occurrence of a sound before a significant narrative event does not, in itself, establish that the sound functions as musical foreshadowing or communicates a supernatural cause.

A structured cue log was designed to organise the analysis. Each entry identifies the film, the relevant scene, the sound event to be examined, its relationship to the image and dialogue, its narrative context, and its interpretive category. The coding framework follows the three analytical dimensions established in Section 3.1: narrative structure, emotional expression, and cultural representation. A cue may receive more than one code where its observable features support multiple interpretations. Where a sequence contains music, dialogue, environmental sound, and sound effects, these elements are distinguished wherever possible rather than treated as a single undifferentiated soundtrack.

For *Saworoide*, the analysis focuses on the opening and closing drum phrase, ritual and coronation sequences, Baba Opalanba's sung proverb, the protest songs associated with the youths of Jogbo, and the final drumming associated with Lagata's attempted coronation. These sequences provide a basis for examining how sound participates in the representation of political authority, collective memory, ritual obligation, and public judgement.

For *The Figurine*, the focal sequences comprise the opening narration of the Araromire legend, the forest encounter preceding the discovery of the figurine, the figurine's subsequent appearances and returns, and the shrine sequence. These scenes provide a basis for examining the relationship between sound, expectation, suspense, and the viewer's interpretation of apparently inexplicable events. Particular attention is given to whether identifiable musical material recurs across these scenes and whether its placement precedes, accompanies, or follows a significant visual or narrative development.

The interpretive process proceeds in two stages. First, the sequence is described in terms of the identifiable sound event, its relationship to the image, and its position within the action. Second, the event is interpreted using the theoretical framework of film-music analysis, African musicology, and adaptation theory. Interpretations such as musical foreshadowing, cultural memory, or the suggestion of fate are retained only

where the relationship between the sound and the narrative provides a defensible basis for the claim.

Scene-based descriptions are used to identify the analytical passages, and each passage is named in the discussion so that readers can locate it in the commercially released versions of the films (Kelani, 1999; Afolayan, 2009). The analysis does not rest on a frequency count of cues. It rests on the focal sequences listed above, and the cue log is treated as a record of observations and not as evidence in itself. A recurring musical theme is claimed only where the relevant material has been compared directly across the scenes concerned.

Published descriptions and festival records were consulted to check film credits and relevant narrative details. These sources provide contextual support but do not replace direct examination of the audiovisual material. The analysis is interpretive, and no independent second-coder procedure or inter-coder reliability statistic is claimed. The conclusions are consequently presented as theoretically informed readings of the selected sequences rather than as measurements of audience response or proof of authorial intention.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 *Saworoide* (1999): music as authority, memory and moral judgement

Saworoide is a political drama set in a Yoruba kingdom. Its title names the sacred brass bells that stand for the covenant between a king and his people, and the story can be read as an account of legitimacy, abuse of power and accountability. The film is grounded in Yoruba political thought and cosmology, and within that framework sound, and percussion above all, acts as a guiding narrative force. Music in *Saworoide* is one of the structures through which power, legitimacy and tradition are expressed, and not an addition to the story.

The most significant musical element is the talking drum (dùndún), which functions in the film as a kind of legal instrument as well as a source of mood. Euba (1990) describes the drum's ability to speak, and the film builds on that ability. In the story world, kingship is tied to ceremonial sound, and sacred drumming helps to confirm that a ruler is legitimate. Political authority is therefore recognised by ear as well as by sight and speech. The viewer learns who holds power by hearing what the community hears. In this sense the film lets music act as law.

Two identifiable sequences show how the drum establishes authority and passes judgement. The first is the film's frame. The film opens and closes with the same proverbial phrase, "Aso funfun lo sunkun aro, ipinle oro ni sunkun ekeji tantantan", which comes from an Ifá verse and is roughly to the effect that white cloth longs for indigo dye, as the first half of a saying calls for its second half (Kolawole, 2023). It is not spoken by an Ifá priest. A master drummer plays it on the talking drum, so the first thing the viewer receives is an authoritative utterance delivered by an instrument, and its return at the end places the closing events under the same voice. This is the capacity that Euba (1990) describes in the dùndún tradition, put to work as narrative framing.

The drum also serves as a memory system. At several points where corruption, illegitimate rule or political betrayal occurs, the soundscape recalls the original covenant between the land and its rulers. The drum does not simply accompany these moments. It judges them, and by doing so it becomes the film's moral narrator. This use of sound fits Omojola's (2012) account of Yoruba music as a vehicle for historical memory and social values, here carried into a medium in which no performing community is physically present. The film has to produce the effect of communal memory by other means, and it does so through the placement and recurrence of sound.

The second sequence is the exchange between the elder Baba Opalanba and one of the chiefs. The chief, believing the old man asleep, insults him; Baba Opalanba opens his eyes, laughs and answers in song with a proverb about a bird on a rooftop that is gathering information and not resting. The chief then explains that the new king never swore the oath or underwent the ritual incisions, and the elder replies that the king will die of a mysterious headache when he wears the crown and the drummer Ayangalu plays the drum (Kolawole, 2023). Here a sung proverb does the work that a spoken warning would do in a conventional political drama, but it does so in a form the community can hear as judgement, and the drum, the crown and the drummer are bound into a single rule that the plot later enforces. The same judgement is voiced collectively by the youths of Jogbo, whose protest songs call the king a renegade (Kolawole, 2023). In the final sequence the rule is carried out: the drum is played after the military ruler Lagata has taken the crown, and he is brought down (Kelani, 1999; Kolawole, 2023). In each case the evidence for the claims about

authority, memory and moral judgement is what is sung or drummed at an identifiable point in the story, and not the general atmosphere of the soundtrack.

Repetition is the main technique. Certain rhythmic patterns return at moments of political unrest and link past events to present ones. This works in the way Gorbman (1987) calls narrative cueing, since the pattern tells the viewer what kind of moment is under way before it is spelled out. It also builds a musical record of history in which sound acts as messenger between earlier and later events. The viewer can grasp the political stakes that the music already carries without long stretches of expository dialogue.

Music also acts as a language of ritual transition. Movement between the sacred and political spheres is marked by changes in the intensity, tempo and tone of drumming, and not only by editing. When the film moves from communal order to political corruption, the soundtrack often shifts first, preparing the viewer emotionally and symbolically before the full visual change arrives. Kolawole (2023) likewise notes that the musical landscape becomes more urgent and distorted as the military regime in the film grows more violent. In narrative communication, then, sound can come before the image here. This runs against the more familiar order described in much film-music writing, in which music follows and intensifies what the picture has already established.

Saworoide shows music working as a system of administration within the story. The rules that govern who hears the drum, who responds to it and who breaks its codes form the framework of the story world. For this reason plot and music are hard to separate, and without the musical framework the political logic of the film would be much weaker. Music operates on four connected levels: as political authority, as cultural memory, as moral judgement and as a structural storytelling code. It is part of the structure of the narrative itself, and not only its setting.

4.2 *The Figurine* (2009): music, suspense, and the ambiguity of fate

In Kunle Afolayan's *The Figurine* (2009), sound can be examined in relation to the film's negotiation of supernatural belief, psychological expectation, and apparently coincidental events. Whereas *Saworoide* situates musical meaning within a communal and political order, *The Figurine* centres on the legend of Araromire and the uncertainty surrounding the fortunes of the characters who encounter the figurine. The analytical question is therefore not simply whether music accompanies suspenseful scenes, but whether the placement and recurrence of identifiable musical material influence how viewers anticipate and interpret subsequent events.

The opening narration introduces the legend of Araromire and the association between the figurine, seven years of good fortune, and a subsequent period of misfortune. The title song, "Araromire," is credited to Wale Waves in the International Film Festival Rotterdam catalogue. The catalogue also describes the song's language as invented rather than Yoruba (International Film Festival Rotterdam [IFFR], 2010). This distinction is relevant because the song's possible cultural and dramatic associations cannot be established through a literal translation of its lyrics. They must be examined through its audible characteristics and its placement within the film.

The opening legend establishes a narrative framework against which subsequent appearances of the figurine can be interpreted. The forest encounter, the discovery of the object, its reported returns after attempts to discard it, and the later shrine sequence are therefore important focal scenes. Their analytical significance depends, however, on the relationship between what is heard and what is shown. A musical cue that precedes a visual revelation may prepare the viewer for an event; a cue that accompanies the revelation may intensify its emotional effect; and a cue that follows it may encourage retrospective interpretation. These functions should be distinguished rather than grouped together under the general label of suspense.

The concept of musical foreshadowing is useful where an identifiable musical event precedes a later development and encourages anticipation. The stronger claim that a recurring theme establishes musical determinism requires additional evidence: the relevant passages must contain recognisably related musical material, and its recurrence must be considered in relation to the events accompanying it. The appearance of the figurine in multiple scenes does not, on its own, demonstrate that the same musical theme accompanies those appearances.

The forest sequence provides a particularly useful example of the need to distinguish observation from interpretation. In the narrative account considered here, an unusual sound precedes the discovery of the figurine during the characters' forest trek. Rain and the subsequent sheltering episode form part of the

same sequence. These events establish an audiovisual progression in which sound, environmental conditions, movement, and visual revelation contribute to the discovery. The sound should not automatically be classified as a musical motif: it may be a musical cue, an environmental sound, a sound effect, or a combination of these. Its classification depends on direct listening to the sequence.

The later episodes in which the figurine is discarded, returns to the house, and reportedly reappears after being burnt provide further opportunities to examine how sound shapes expectation. The relevant comparison concerns the precise audible events at these points and their relationship to the figurine's visual appearance. If a recognisable musical motif recurs, its placement may strengthen the association between the object and the legend introduced at the beginning. If the scenes instead rely primarily on environmental sound, sound effects, dialogue, or silence, the analysis should describe those elements without attributing the effect to recurring music. In either case, the narrative repetition of the object remains significant, but its musical significance must be demonstrated separately.

The film's ending complicates a straightforward interpretation of these events as evidence of supernatural causation. Lara eventually explains that she replaced the figurine at Femi's request, while Femi later confesses to manipulating events to obtain Mona. His actions provide a human explanation for at least some of the apparently inexplicable occurrences. The shrine sequence, in which Femi kills Sola, and the final question addressed to the viewer preserve the tension between belief in fate and the possibility of deliberate human intervention (Afolayan, 2009).

This ambiguity is central to the film's narrative design. Sound may encourage viewers to connect the characters' misfortunes with the legend of Araromire before the film discloses the extent of Femi's manipulation. Such an effect would make music an agent of expectation rather than evidence that the supernatural explanation is objectively true. The concept of musical determinism is therefore best understood as a possible effect on the viewer's interpretation, contingent on the placement and recurrence of identifiable musical material. This reading is compatible with Joseph and Hosea's (2020) discussion of music's capacity to foreshadow developments in Nollywood cinema, while recognising that the relationship between sound and narrative meaning must be established for each sequence.

A further distinction is necessary when considering musical repetition and memory. A claim that music returns in a slower, softer, or more fragmented form during recollection scenes requires direct comparison of the relevant passages. Such an interpretation would need to identify the recurring material and establish changes in tempo, dynamics, instrumentation, melodic contour, or phrasing. Without that evidence, it would be premature to describe musical transformation as a sign of psychological distress or unstable memory. The more defensible argument is that the film's repeated return to the figurine and its legend encourages viewers to reconsider earlier events in the light of later revelations.

4.3 Comparative synthesis

Read together, *Saworoide* and *The Figurine* reveal a continuous but changing logic. In both, music works as an alternative system for constructing, interpreting and feeling a story, and not as an accompaniment to it. The themes, historical settings and styles of the two films differ, yet both rest on the same idea: that the narrative of each film is incomplete without sound. Table 1 summarises the main differences.

Table 1. Functions of music in *Saworoide* (1999) and *The Figurine* (2009)

Dimension	*Saworoide* (1999)	*The Figurine* (2009)
Main musical resources	Brass-bell talking drum (Saworoide); songs and proverbs of the elder Baba Opalanba; protest songs of the Jogbo youths	Title song "Araromire" in an invented sung language; instrumental underscore; ambient sound on the forest trek
Key sequences	Drum phrase at the opening and close; the elder's warning about the oath and the crown; the youths' protest songs; the final drumming against Lagata	Narrated legend at the opening; discovery of the figurine on the trek; its returns to the house; the shrine sequence in the rain
Domain of meaning	The Jogbo community: kingship, oath and public protest	Three friends and one marriage: fortune, desire and belief in a goddess
Principal narrative	Binds king, crown and drummer in one	Suggests that the seven-year cycle is

function	rule; warns the corrupt; voices judgement	fate; sustains suspense until the shrine sequence
Relation to memory	Recalls the oath between ruler and people when it is broken	Repeated returns to the figurine and its legend prompt the viewer to reconsider earlier events in the light of later revelations (Section 4.2)
Effect on the viewer	Signals the political stakes before characters state them	Holds the viewer between fate and coincidence until the final reveal and caption

In *Saworoide*, music belongs to a political and social ontology. The ritual soundscape and the talking drum actively structure social reality inside the story, and do not merely reflect cultural identity. Sound serves as a medium of resistance, legitimacy and authority. Because it works as a public code that ties society to history and tradition, narrative meaning is bound to collective aural memory. The story is delivered through a shared acoustic system that establishes who is in charge, who is accountable and how justice is symbolically upheld, and not only through characters and events.

The Figurine moves musical meaning inward, from the communal to the psychic and metaphysical. Music here is concerned less with the order of society than with perception, expectation and belief in destiny. Sound placed around the figurine's appearances can act as an auditory marker of expectation, and it may influence how the viewer understands cause and effect. In place of an outward political order, the soundtrack can create an inner order that conditions fear, expectation and belief in fate. The individual's experience of time and consequence becomes more important than group memory.

Despite these differences, the two films suggest that music in Nigerian film adaptation can serve three main narrative purposes. First, it is a structural system of narrative that shapes pacing, continuity and transition in ways that visual editing cannot. Second, it is a cultural and symbolic code, carrying meanings drawn from indigenous custom, spiritual belief and collective memory. Third, it is an affective regulator that directs the viewer's emotional and psychological interpretation of events before they have been fully processed intellectually. Taken together these functions suggest that Nigerian film adaptation works as a layered audiovisual system, with meaning spread across sound and picture and not concentrated in dialogue or visual action. Music often precedes, foreshadows or reinterprets a story instead of simply supporting it, and audiences are frequently guided toward meaning by sound before the image confirms it.

Both films also suggest that Nigerian film adaptation can operate within an aesthetic framework in which sound is not subordinate to the picture. Music serves as a parallel narrative structure, producing political meaning in *Saworoide* and psychological meaning in *The Figurine*. Any serious analysis of Nigerian cinema should treat music as part of the intelligence of the storytelling and not as background.

4.4 Implications for scholarship and practice

The comparison also points to a tension in Nigerian filmmaking. Music is deeply important to narrative building at the level of cultural tradition and audience experience, yet it is under-theorised in formal film study and under-integrated in production planning. The two films examined here show that music becomes a major force behind narrative coherence when it is fully integrated into the logic of the story, as in the ritual framework of *Saworoide* or the sound design of *The Figurine*. In the wider industry, where music is often treated as post-production enhancement, its narrative potential is greatly reduced.

For production practice, this suggests that composers and sound designers should join a project at the scripting and pre-production stages, so that music is conceived as part of the narrative and not applied afterwards. Closer cooperation between filmmakers, musicologists and ethnomusicologists would also help indigenous musical systems to be preserved and adapted in ways that respect their communicative depth. For teaching, film, theatre and music programmes in Nigerian universities could give film music a place as a narrative structure, so that future practitioners and critics learn to hear it as an active storytelling tool.

For scholarship, the findings call for more theory-driven work that goes beyond describing where music appears in a film. Such work would draw on African musical epistemologies and performance traditions and treat music as central to meaning-making. Filmmakers, for their part, could draw on indigenous Nigerian musical traditions more deliberately, valuing them not only for cultural authenticity but also for their narrative power, symbolic range and ability to express fine shades of meaning suited to African storytelling

aesthetics.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to reconsider the role of music in Nigerian film adaptation, and specifically how it contributes to narrative meaning beyond its usual treatment as background accompaniment. Through a framework drawn from African musicology, performance aesthetics, adaptation theory and film sound studies, and through close analysis of two films, it has shown that, in these two films, music works as a central narrative system and not as a peripheral decoration.

The analysis of *Saworoide* and *The Figurine* shows that music serves several connected narrative purposes. In *Saworoide* it operates as a system of authority, historical memory and moral regulation, and is built into the political and cultural logic of the story world. The ceremonial soundscape and the talking drum act as a form of encoded communication that establishes and tests social order and legitimacy. In *The Figurine*, music moves toward the psychological and the metaphysical. It shapes perceptions of fate, suspense and emotional ambiguity, and the placement of sound around the figurine can encourage the viewer to expect misfortune before the film discloses the human explanation, which keeps belief in fate and the possibility of coincidence in tension.

A common pattern appears in both films: music organises meaning and does more than enhance scenes. It encodes cultural knowledge, regulates emotional experience and structures narrative progression. Music therefore works as a parallel storytelling system that interacts constantly with the verbal and visual elements of the film.

The study also points to a mismatch between theory and practice. Nigerian films appear to rely on music to carry emotional and narrative weight, but scholarly and production frameworks rarely theorise this role or build it in deliberately. Music's full expressive and structural potential is limited when it is added in post-production. By placing Nigerian film within African performance traditions and the processes of adaptation, the study has argued that music should be seen as an essential element of narrative development. This is especially so in cultures where oral performance, rhythm and sound have long been basic to communication, and where music is constitutive of narrative and not supplementary to it.

The paper therefore argues for a change of orientation in both scholarship and production. On the evidence of these two films, Nigerian film adaptations can be understood as sound-image narrative systems in which music is recognised as a co-author of meaning. A fuller account of how stories are made, passed on and experienced in Nigerian cinema depends on this change.

6. Limitations of the Study

The study analyses two films chosen purposively and interpreted by the authors, and it does not claim that its findings hold for Nigerian cinema as a whole. The analysis is interpretive and rests on close viewing and listening. It does not measure audience response, and it did not draw on interviews with directors, composers or sound designers. Both films draw on Yoruba culture, so the findings may not extend directly to Nigerian films rooted in other cultural traditions. Future research could add audience-reception studies, production-based work with composers and sound designers, and comparative analysis of films from other languages and regions of Nigeria.

Declarations

Ethical approval: This study is a qualitative analysis of two commercially released films. It involved no human participants, personal data or animals, and ethical approval was therefore not required.

Consent to participate: Not applicable.

Consent for publication: Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials: The study analysed published films, which are cited in the reference list (Kelani, 1999; Afolayan, 2009). The cue logs compiled during the analysis are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Authors' contributions: Oreoluwa Adeboye conceptualised the study, reviewed the literature and contributed to the analysis of the films. Olabisi Adeosun contributed to the theoretical framework and the analysis, and reviewed and edited the manuscript. Iyanuoluwa Olaniyi Ajayi designed the methodology, led the analysis and the drafting of the manuscript, and handled correspondence. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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