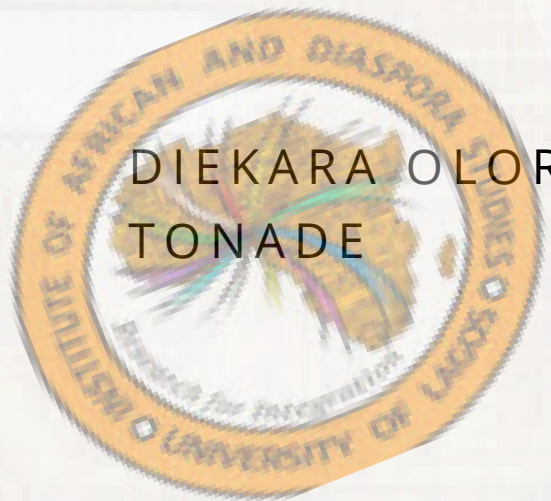

Remediating the past: Nollywood's historical epic films and the making of (youthful) publics in Africa

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Where are your own children?

Outline

- Background: Nollywood and the contemporized historical epic
- Postcolonial Africa and the theatre of correctives
- The historical film in present action
 1. Visual techniques and semiotic registers
 2. Conflict and the present conditions of youth
 3. Speaking through the gap: Apostrophe and the youthful audience
- The historical epic and the making of political youth
- Work to be done



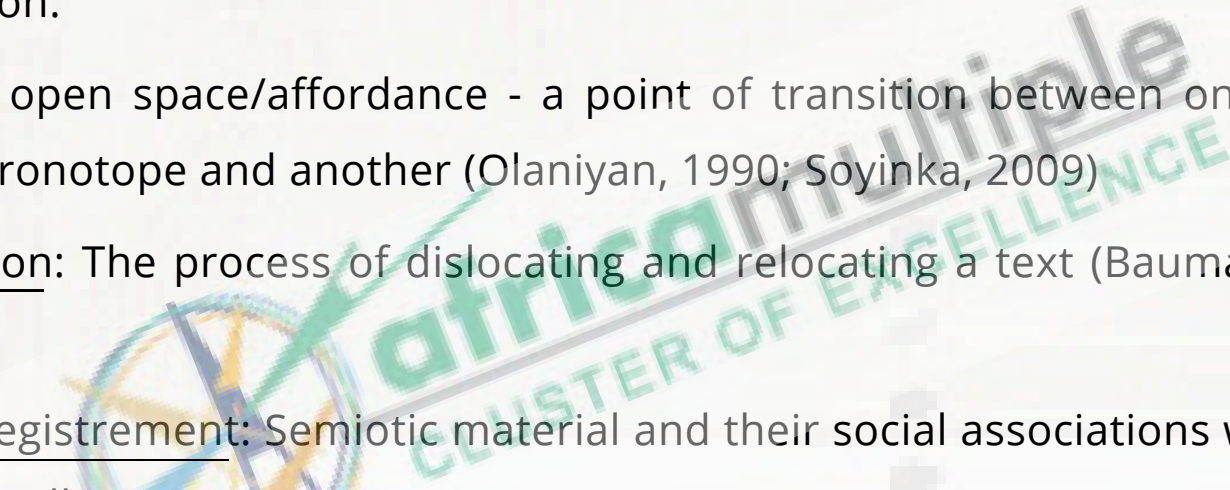
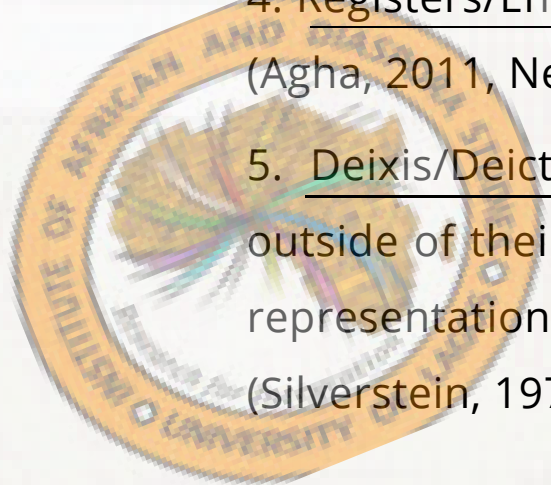
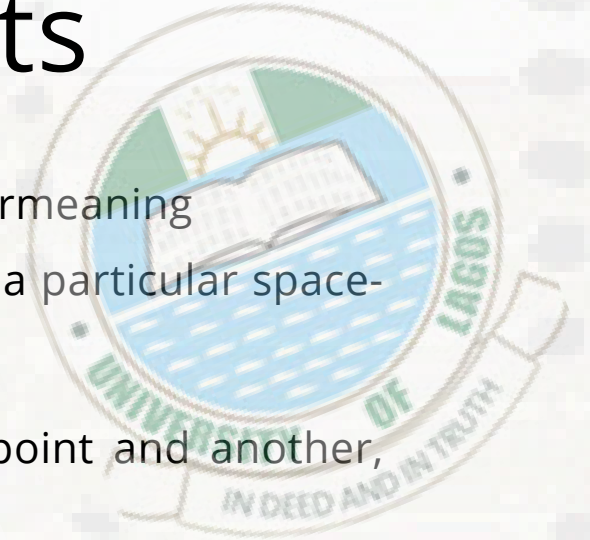
A note on methodology

“What do we need to know to interpret a text? This question leads into the very constitution of the text itself. We are asking what it is that makes a text textual – what enables it to exist, to be recognised or remarked as a text. An anthropology of texts needs to go below the level of documenting genres and relations between genres, defining characteristic styles, and relating these to a social context immediate or distant. Text is differently constituted in different social and historical contexts: what a text is considered to be, how it is considered to have meaning, varies from one culture to another. We need to ask what kinds of interpretation texts are set up to expect, and how they are considered to enter the lives of those who produce, receive and transmit them.”

Karin Barber (2007, 67)

A few organizing concepts

1. Chronotopes: The fusion of time and space within a specific order of recognition or meaning (Bakhtin, 1937) i.e. what social relations become possible when people occupy a particular space-time configuration.
2. The Gap: An open space/affordance - a point of transition between one point and another, between one chronotope and another (Olaniyan, 1990; Soyinka, 2009)
3. Entextualization: The process of dislocating and relocating a text (Baumann and Briggs, 1990; Inoue, 2006)
4. Registers/Enregistrement: Semiotic material and their social associations with specific identities (Agha, 2011, Newell, 2013)
5. Deixis/Deictic Shots: linguistic markers of spatiotemporal relation that have no meaning outside of their context (e.g place deixis - "here and there"). In film, they become forms of visual representation that point/direct a viewer's attention to a place, an object, time, or person) (Silverstein, 1976 Nakassis, 2019)



The contemporized historical epic

Nollywood's recent beloved genre is characterized by:

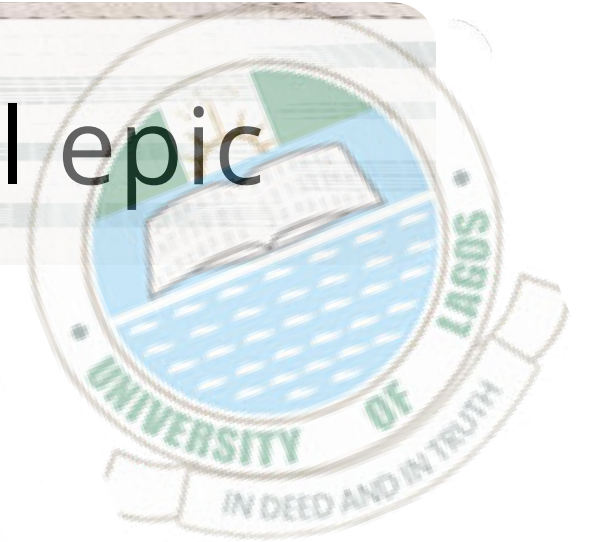


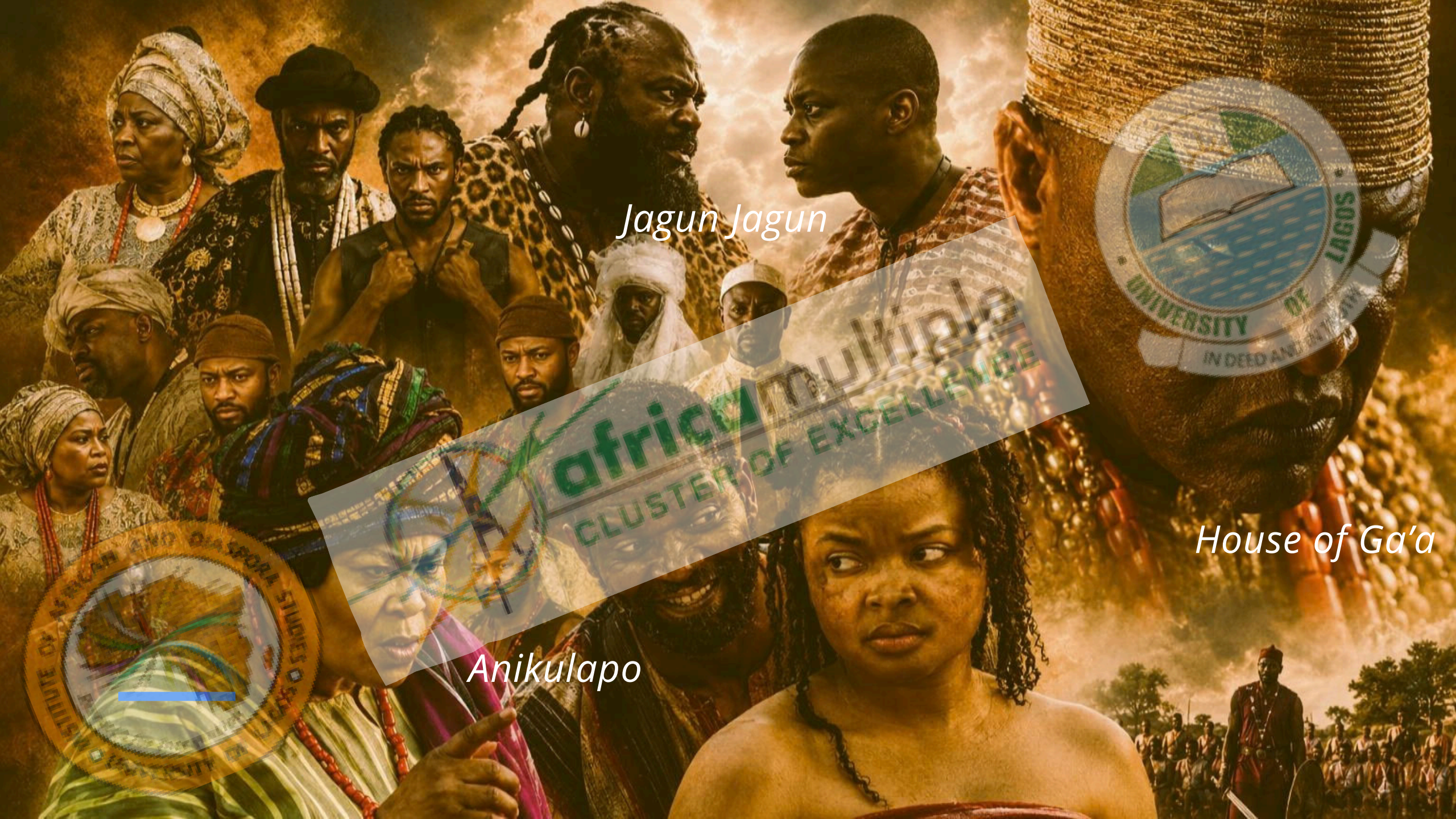
An African historical setting (real or imagined).

State-of-the-art production and circulation technologies, e.g. Visual Effects (VFX), Computer-generated imaging (CGI), and social media marketing.

In-vogue linguistic/semiotic registers worked into its in-film and circulation scripts.

Allegories of current (as opposed to past) social issues held within its historical narrative frame.





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House of Ga'a

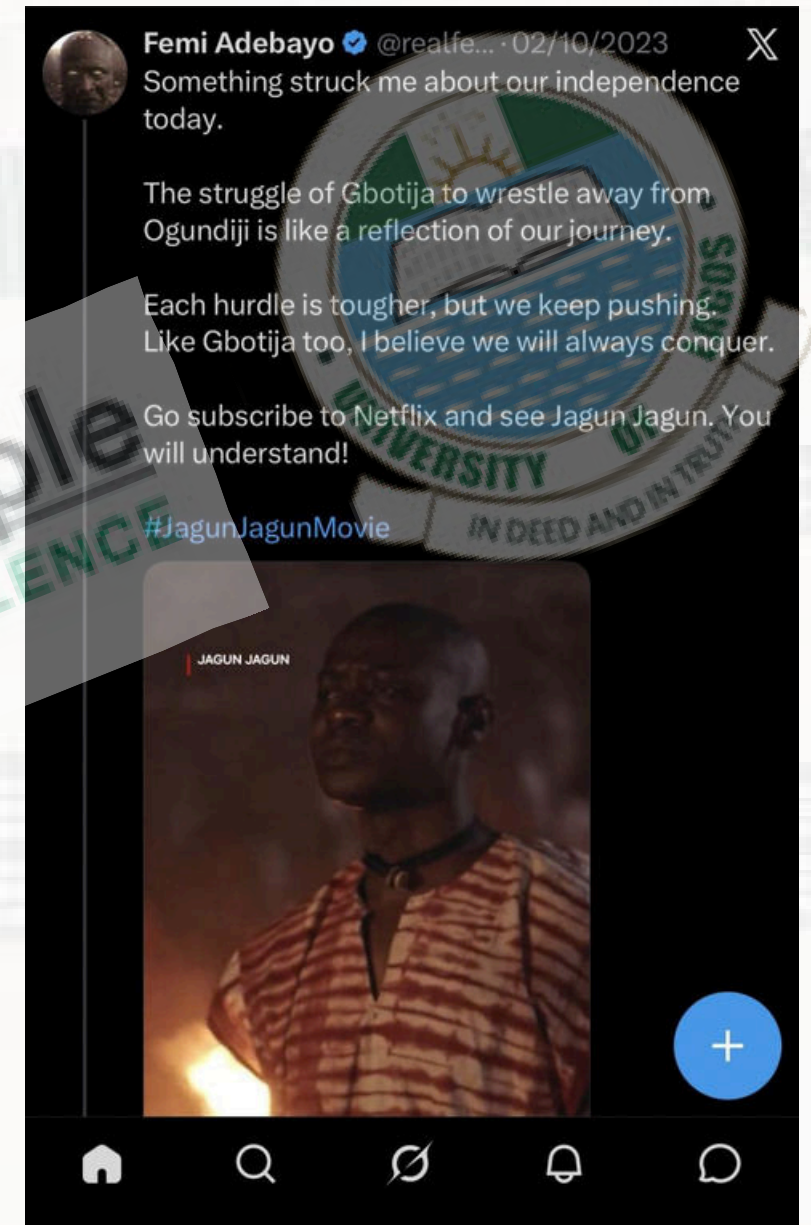
Anikulapo

On the contemporized historical epic

1. Their adjudged marketability is underscored by the mushrooming of “film villages” — large, capital-intensive development projects undertaken by Nollywood producers, built for the sole purpose of creating historical epics.

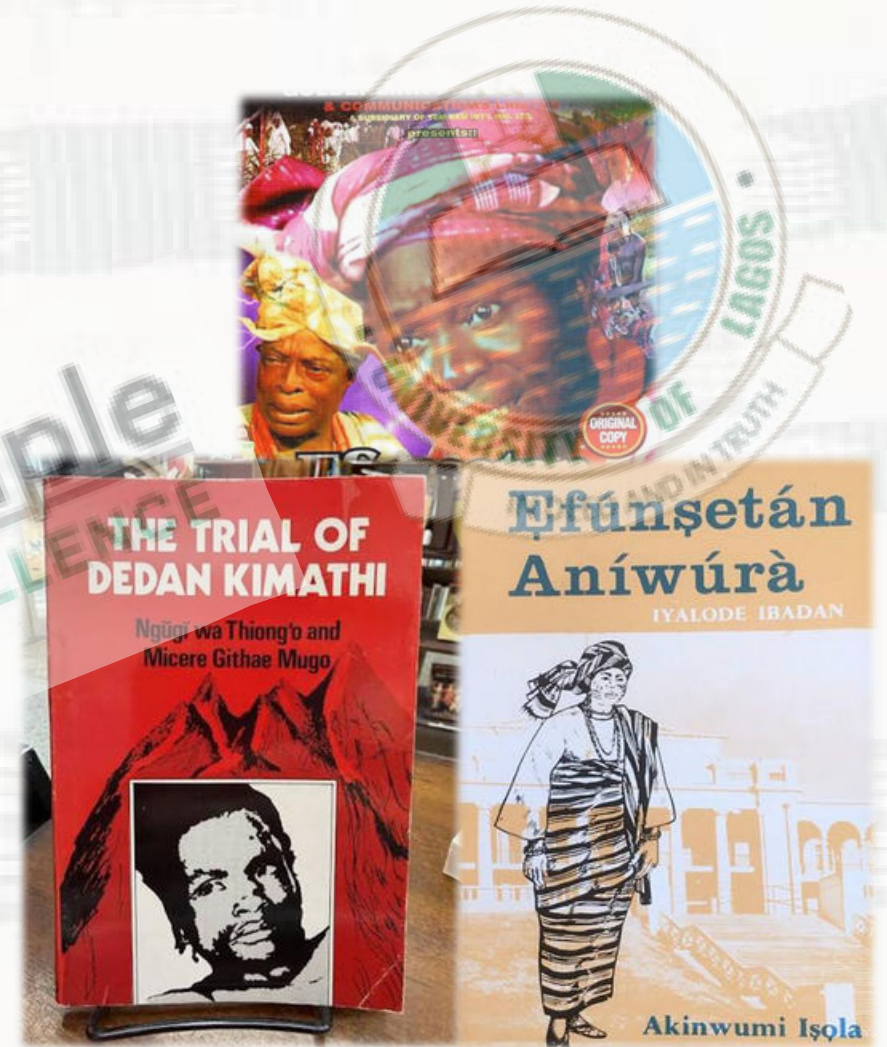
Examples: KAP Film Village (Kunle Afolayan)
BAP Film Village (Bolanle Austen-Peters)

2. Allegorization of current political issues renders political commentary relevant to both the past of the film’s putative setting and the present, to the there and the here, the then and now.
3. Enhanced by the deployment of in-vogue linguistic registers, this imaginative mixing of time-spaces or “chronotopes” (Bakhtin 1937), appears to be a deliberate cinematic motif. 👉👉
4. Recourse to African histories is often driven not only by the desire to retell, but also to reconstitute the epistemically given (Oloruntoba-Oju 2025).



Antecedents in post-colonial theatre

- The politics of cinematic correctives follows a longer tradition of historical re-constitution, found notably in post-colonial African theatre.
 1. Kimathi – from colonial “terrorist” to anticolonial “hero”
 2. Efúnṣetán Aníwúrà, once dramatized as a power-drunk villain, becomes, in future mediations, a force for women’s liberation.
- Postcolonial (historical) theatre, therefore, casts a light on how political ideologies shape characterization and how reimagined historical settings and subjects become didactic tools in the present (Adeboye 2026, Osundare 2007)



The historical film in present action (I)

VISUAL TECHNIQUES AND SEMIOTIC REGISTERS (ENTEXTUALIZATION)



The historical film in present action (II)

CONFLICT AND THE PRESENT CONDITIONS OF YOUTH



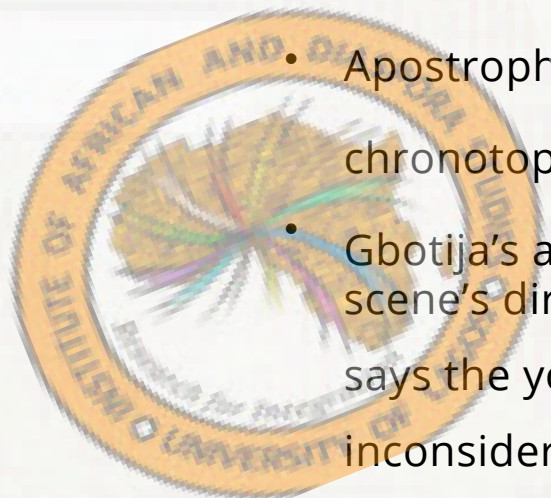
The historical film in present action (III)

APOSTROPHE AND THE YOUTHFUL AUDIENCE

Apostrophe as direct address to an absent (or differently emplaced) audience

In the scene:

- Deictic shots – the use of gestures and related linguistic signs to recruit audiences into a participatory frame (Nakassis 2019)
- Indirect Subjects – how narrative voice can not only “gambol between character perspectives” but also between “individual and collectives” (Brown 2021, 197).
- Apostrophes become tools of performance used to bridge the gap between various political chronotopes.
- Gbotija’s address highlights how youth become the absent audiences of the historical scene’s direct address: “Níbo ni àwọn ọmọ tí yín wà?” [“Where are your own children?”], says the youthful Gbotija to Ogundiji (despotic character), and apparently to the inconsiderate leaders of the present.



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The making of political youth

Remediation as politics

1. Efúnṣetán Aníwúrà: The effects of (mis)representation
2. Character re-telling and the “breeding” of “new Kimathis” (Osundare, 2007)
3. Galvanizing potential: Will new Gbotijas stand up?



masses". Kimathi's bold defiance, his keen understanding of the inner workings of its oppressive machinery, his unflinching patriotism, his hope in the possibilities of a liberated posterity (all of which strongly re-echo in *Detained*, Ngugi's account of his prison experience) are certainly not there only to help our understanding of the past, but to inspire a change in the present, to breed new Kimathis, a new Mau Mau against that child of colonialism and grandchild of slavery: neo-colonialism.

history. Akinwunmi Isola read it and, after meeting with the family, decided to salvage the situation by producing the 2005 film directed by Tunde Kelani. In a 2013 media interview, Isola reflected on his role in the Efunsetan saga:

I was very young with little education when I wrote the book. If I were to write it today, it would be different. Efunsetan can be described as a woman fighting for the rights of women. She could be described as a women's rights activist. She is not as tough as I portrayed her. I have met the head of her lineage, and we have discussed it. The new Efunsetan Aniwura film I produced was made with adjustments that portrayed the woman in her real self.⁶⁴

As noted above, the revision/redemption of the image of Efunsetan was provoked not only by the protest of her descendants, but also by the trenchant criticisms of feminist scholars who were on a mission to deconstruct negative images of the African woman in addition to their institutional and theory-building objectives. The study also

The making of political youth

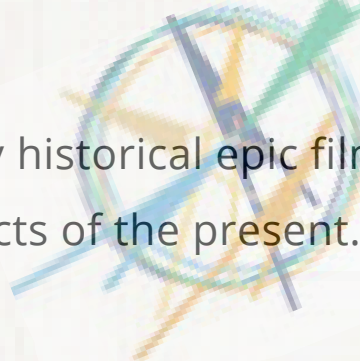
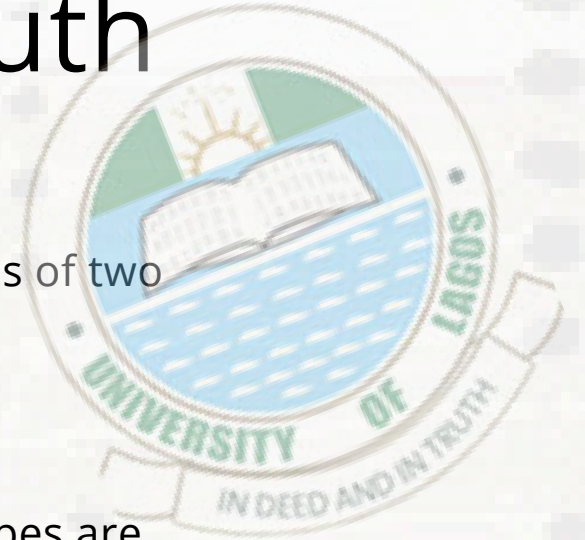
WILL NEW GBOTIJAS STAND?

In this lecture, I have examined Nollywood's new historical epics along the axes of two analytical points.

Through a range of semiotic (linguistic and visual) devices, historical chronotopes are remediated and made meaningful to young Africans in the present.

Contemporary historical epic films are made to produce political imaginaries that resonate with political conflicts of the present.

These two analytical points are not discrete or incidental. The new historical epics are purposed to produce new forms of political (youthful) subjectivity.



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Work to be done

- Conceptual analysis: The “film village” as an ultramodern facility
- Ethnography
 1. Nigeria — Film villages: KAP, BAP, Anwai Film village (Delta state), Film sets in Kaduna/Jos used to produce northern Nigerian epics.

Also: corrective theatre performances across the country
 2. Kenya — To follow the Too Early For Birds (TEFB) theatre practitioners on their production and performance series across Kenya.

