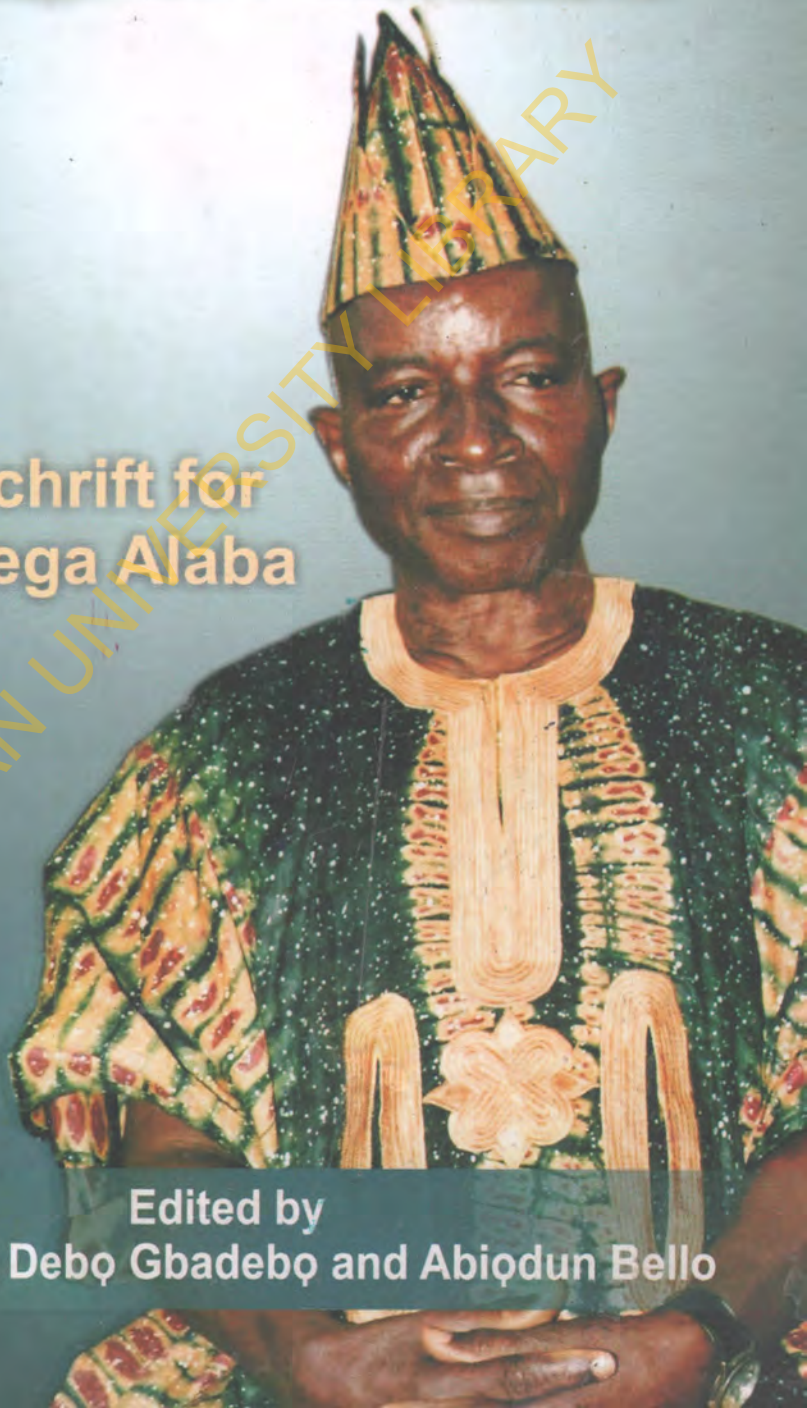


Current Studies in Yoruba Culture, Language and Literature

A Festschrift for
Olugboyega Alaba



Edited by
Deji Medubi, Debo Gbadebo and Abiodun Bello

Current Studies in Yoruba Culture, Language, and Literature

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Deji Medubi
Debo Gbadebo
Abiodun Bello

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Department of Linguistics, African and Asian Studies
University of Lagos

Current Studies in Yoruba Culture, Language, and Literature
A Festschrift for Olúgbóyèga Àlàbá

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Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria

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Contents

Profile of Ọ̀jògbọ̀n Olúgbóyèga Ọ̀mọ̀ Àlàbá	
Curriculum Vitae of Olúgbóyèga Àlàbá	
Foreword	
Part I: Culture	
Chapter One	1
Àwòrán Àwọ̀n Ọ̀ba Nínú Ìwé Ìtàn- Àròsọ̀ D.O. Fágúnwà <i>Duro Adeleke</i>	
Chapter Two	13
Are Nigerian Traditional Rulers Relevant in the Contemporary Democratic Dispensation? : A Literary-Cum Historical Analysis <i>Adebisi Ademakinwa</i>	
Chapter Three	30
Culture and Change in the Yorùbá Society: The Literary Dimension <i>Olugboyega Alaba</i>	
Chapter Four	53
Africa's Ọ̀gún in the Five Faces of the Ancient Greek God of Warfare <i>Idowu Alade</i>	
Chapter Five	71
Ojú Àmúwayé Yorùbá Nípa Ìṣèré Orò Ọ̀dún Igogo Ní Ìlú Ọ̀wọ̀ <i>A. O. Aransi</i>	
Chapter Six	103
Àgbéyẹ̀wò Orin Olórogún Ní Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá <i>Abidemi Bolarinwa</i>	
Chapter Seven	116
"Ìkúnlẹ̀ Abiyamọ̀ Nínú Èrò Ìjìnlẹ̀ Yorùbá: Ìdí Abájọ̀ Agbára Obìnrin" <i>Adéolá Adijat Fáléyẹ</i>	

Chapter Eight.....	132
Name as a Designate of Culture in Traditional and Contemporary Yorùbá Society of Nigeria	
<i>Olubunmi John Falolu & Yusuf Opeyemi Fadairo</i>	
Chapter Nine.....	150
Ìlò Amì Nínú Ọdún Ọgún Ní Ìlú Oṅdó	
<i>M. A. Fasehun</i>	
Chapter Ten.....	164
African Conception of Human Existence: The Yoruba Experience	
<i>Debo Gbadebo</i>	
Chapter Eleven.....	181
The Existentialism of Yoruba Traditional Religion	
<i>Samuel Jegede</i>	
Chapter Twelve	198
Yoruba and the Notion of Sustainability In Natural Resources Management	
<i>Yemi Oke</i>	
Chapter Thirteen.....	220
Ọrìṣà Bìbọ Nílẹ̀ Yorùbá: Ogunojalú Nílúú Ọgbómòṣọ Gégé Bí Àfojúṣùn	
<i>Sunday Owóadé</i>	
Chapter Fourteen.....	231
Ìyánròfẹ́fẹ́ Nínú Oríkì Ìran Sòókò Ní Ilẹ̀ Ifẹ̀	
<i>Ejítóyòsí Qláyemi Salámi</i>	
Part II: Language	
Chapter Fifteen.....	244
Focus Construction in Yorùbá Literary Text: A Case Study of D. O. Fágúnwà's Ọgbójú Ọdẹ Nínú Igbó Irúnmolẹ̀	
<i>Priscilla L. Adénúgà & Oládiipò Ajíbóyè</i>	
Chapter Sixteen.....	259
Àgbéyẹ̀wò Gbólóhùn Àkíyèsí Alátẹnúmọ̀ Nínú Ẹ̀ka-Èdè Ìjẹ̀bú	
<i>R.A. Adésuyan</i>	

Chapter Seventeen.....	273
Òrò-Orúkò Aṣèbèèrè Nínú Èka-Èdè Ifẹ̀	
<i>Lawrence Olufemi Adewole</i>	
Chapter Eighteen.....	279
Constituent Questions in Àwòrì Dialect of Yorùbá South West Nigeria	
<i>Akin Aina</i>	
Chapter Nineteen.....	300
Distribution and Function of <i>Tí</i> , <i>Bí</i> and <i>Tì</i> in Èkó Dialect	
<i>Oládiipò Ajíbóyè, Àjìkí Adéyemi & Èniolá Ládiipò</i>	
Chapter Twenty.....	317
Olùkùmi Focus Constructions	
<i>Alimot Eléshin Ajíkòbi</i>	
Chapter Twenty One.....	330
Appraisal of Prepositional and Antithetical Properties in Some Yoruba Verbs	
<i>Olu Akeusola</i>	
Chapter Twenty Two.....	338
Verbal Peculiarities of Yoruba Language: A Comparative Appraisal of Verbal Properties in English, French and Yoruba	
<i>Olu Akeusola</i>	
Chapter Twenty Three.....	348
Peculiarities of Yoruba Grammar: Appraisal of Yoruba Verbless Sentences, Resumptive Pronouns and Redundant Verbs	
<i>Olu Akeusola</i>	
Chapter Twenty Four.....	365
Àṣà Àtí Òfin Gírámà Tí Ó De Àmúlò Ọ̀rọ̀ Arópò-Orúkò Nínú Èdè Yorùbá	
<i>Sunday Oláyínká Awoláoyè</i>	

Chapter Twenty Five.....	375
Referential Cohesion in Yorùbá <i>Adéyemí Dáramólá & Kéhìndé Oládèjì</i>	
Chapter Twenty Six.....	400
Aspects of Prefixation in Yorùbá: The Harmonic Interaction <i>Bísóyè Eléshin</i>	
Chapter Twenty Seven	409
Two Types of <i>Oní</i> in Yoruba: A Critique <i>Fọlọrunṣọ Ilọri</i>	
Chapter Twenty Eight	421
Analysis of Collocative Words in Yorùbá Language Usage <i>Joseph Oṃọniyì Friday-Otun & Olátúbòsùn Oṃóléwu</i>	
Chapter Twenty Nine.....	442
Exploring the Linguistics Perspectives in the Nigeria-Sudan Relationship <i>Abdulrazaq Moh'd Katibi & Khadijat Olaniyan-Shobowale</i>	
Chapter Thirty.....	459
Instances of Language Variation from the Perspective of the Yorùbá Language Contact with English <i>Abiodun Ogunwale</i>	
Part III: Literature	
Chapter Thirty One.....	483
Àgbéyèwò Èrò Akéwì Lórí Ewì <i>Olúyémìsì Adégbòwálé</i>	
Chapter Thirty Two.....	501
Envisioning Ideal Politics, Democracy and Sustainable Governance in the Selected Novels of Afọlábí Olábímtán <i>Àrìnpé Adéjùmò</i>	

Chapter ThirtyThree.....	516
Èrò Báyéserí Ọ̀jògbón Àlàbá Lórí Ọ̀rò Èsìn Nínú Àṣàyàn Àròfò. <i>Hezekiah Olúfẹ̀mi Adéòṣun</i>	
Chapter ThirtyFour.....	526
Literary Representation of the Military Era in Bamiji Ojo's <i>Ọ̀ba Adíkúta</i> <i>Léré Adéyẹ̀mí</i>	
Chapter Thirty Five.....	546
Ìpèdè Àrẹ̀nìjẹ̀ Nínú Àṣàyàn Ìwé Eré-Onítàn Yorùbá <i>O.A. Adéyẹ̀mọ</i>	
Chapter Thirty Six	564
Fíimù Àgbéléwò Gẹ̀gẹ̀ Bí Ohun-Èlò Ìkóni Ní Àṣà àti Lítirésọ̀ Alohùn Yorùbá: Fíimù <i>Arugbá Àti Baṣòrun Gáà Gẹ̀gẹ̀ Bí Àwòta</i> <i>Adéyẹ̀mí Adéyíńkà & Ìfẹ̀olúwa Akínṣolá</i>	
Chapter Thirty Seven.....	583
A Historical Treatise of <i>Atọ̀ka</i> Photoplay Magazine <i>Adénìyì Àkàngbé</i>	
Chapter ThirtyEight.....	605
Olúgbóyẹ̀ga Àlàbá Fẹ̀yintì <i>Dayọ̀ Àkànmú</i>	
Chapter Thirty Nine.....	611
Àlàbá's Òwèrè Èniyàn Méjì Péré (The Struggle between Just Two People): An Adumbration of Marxist Literary Theory <i>Ẹ̀kẹ̀hìndé Elújùlọ</i>	
Chapter Forty.....	621
A Study of Literary Devices in Olú Owólabí's <i>Líṣàbí Agbòngbò Àkàlà</i> and Láuwayì Ogúnníran's <i>Ọ̀mọ̀ Alátẹ̀ Ìlẹ̀kẹ̀</i> <i>Hamzat, S. A. O. & Adéyẹ̀mí, O.</i>	
Chapter Forty One.....	648
Èrò Ìjìnlẹ̀àtì Ọ̀rò Ìṣẹ̀lẹ̀ Àwùjọ̀ Nínú Àwọn Àròfò̀ Olúgbóyẹ̀ga Àlàbá <i>Adédòtun Ọ̀gúndẹ̀jì & Luqman Kiaribèé</i>	

Chapter Forty Two.....	672
Yorùbá Playwrights and Politics in Nigeria: An Examination of Selected Yorùbá Written Plays	
<i>Layò Ògúnlólá</i>	
Chapter Forty Three	691
Ìmò-Ìjìnlẹ̀-Èrò Yorùbá Bì Orisun Ìṣura Ewì Àpilẹ̀kò: Èrì Látì Inú Ifá	
<i>Tẹ̀wógboyè Òkẹ̀wándé</i>	
Chapter Forty Four.....	703
Ìwúlò Orin fún Ìtanijí Lóri ÌwàỌmọ̀lúàbí àti Ìbágbẹ̀pọ̀ Àlàáfíà ní Àwùjọ:	
Orin Dádákúàdà Gégé Bì Àpẹ̀rẹ̀	
<i>Hakeem Olawale</i>	
Chapter Forty Five.....	717
Àgbéyèwò Ọ̀rò <i>Jéndà</i> Nínú Orin Sàlává Àbẹ̀nì	
<i>Olúkẹ̀mì Olófínsao</i>	
Chapter 46	736
Olúgbóyèga Àlàbá, Onímò Ìjìnlẹ̀ Èrò Nípa Ilé-Ayé: Èrì Látì Inú	
<i>Onírúurú Àròfò Àti Àṣàyàn Àròfò</i>	
<i>Olátúbòsún Ọmóléwu</i>	
Chapter Forty Seven	759
Àrìwísí Ònkòwé Alátínúda Nípa Àbùdá Àdámọ̀ Erémọ̀dé Nínú	
<i>Ogún Ọmọ̀dé</i>	
<i>Ayòdélé Solomon Oyèwálé</i>	
Chapter Forty Eight.....	781
Gender and Social Representation of Women in Yorùbá Folktales:	
A Critique of <i>Alò Àpagbè</i>	
<i>Olaide Sheba</i>	
Part IV: Stylistics	
Chapter Forty Nine.....	792
A Study of Aspects of Technocultural Variations in English and Yorùbá	
Speech Usage in Nigeria	
<i>Babátúnjì Hezekiah Adépòjù</i>	

Chapter Fifty.....	816
Modernization and Globalization of Yorùbá Language through Ontology Development: A Preliminary Investigation <i>Akin Aina</i>	
Chapter Fifty One.....	834
The Politics of (En)gendering and the Crisis of Homology: A Comparative and Counter-Perspective Study of Judith Butler and Oyeronke Oyewumi <i>Abiodun Bello</i>	
Chapter Fifty Two.....	842
Yorùbá Sexual Related Symbo-Figurative Expressions: A Metaphorical Description <i>Taofeek Dalamu</i>	
Chapter Fifty Three.....	860
A Discourse Analysis of Translated Proverbs from D.O. Fágúnwà's Yorùbá Novel <i>Ògbójú Ọde Nínú Igbó Irúnmọlẹ</i> <i>Alfred Adéníyì Fátúàse</i>	
Chapter Fifty Four.....	875
Yorùbá Youths, Proverbs and a Common Misconception: An Explication <i>Olúşégun Rótímí Fátúrótì</i>	
Chapter Fifty Five.....	887
Adoption of Proverbs as Titles of Literary Works <i>Esther Títílàyò Ọjó</i>	
Chapter Fifty Six.....	900
Stylolinguistic Perspective of Syntactic Techniques in the Art of Yorùbá Newspapers Writing <i>Olutọla Ọşunnuga</i>	

Chapter 37

A HISTORICAL TREATISE OF ATÓKA PHOTOPLAY MAGAZINE

Adéníyì ÀKÀNGBÉ

Photo-drama is one of the principal media of performance by the Yoruba theatre arts practitioners. It is the only channel of dramatic expression in print media. Atóka photoplay magazine was the foremost and the most principal of this attempt. It existed and survived for twenty five years. Its rise was meteoric, its acceptance was unprecedented and its output was sporadic. Like a wild fire in the harmattan season, the media became popular, celebrated and highly acceptable to the masses particularly the middle class. None of others that succeeded it was able to make such a remarkable impact. In spite of its great fame and vivid impact however, as characteristic of the Yoruba theatre movements, Atóka photoplay magazine suffered documentation problem. To date, Yoruba photodrama still remains a green farmland begging to be cultivated, and a literary field itching to be tilled as there is paucity of study on it. There has been scanty research on its history, production processes, and literary analysis of its play productions. It is this problem that this study wants to solve by filling the academic gap on history of Atóka photoplay magazine. Our focus in this paper is historical and as such, the paper dwells on the evolution, rise, and decline of Atóka.

1. INTRODUCTION

Atóka photoplay magazine was a unique publication that was prevalent in the South–West Nigeria from 1967 to 1991. Published by West African Book

Publishers (WABP) and printed by Academy Press (AP), it was a dramatic collaboration of theatre practitioners and publishers which aimed at bringing entertainment in form of play productions to the door steps of the teeming theatre lovers in printed form. Christened *Yorùbá Photoplay Series* at inception, *Atóka* adopted its name in January 1970. It sustained regular bimonthly publications until the mid-1980s, and went out of circulation in 1991. *Atóka* had two broad contents: drama and additives (*àfikún*). The dramas in *Atóka* are diverse and they are from multiple sources. A great percentage of the plays are from the repertoires of the various theatre companies, many of which have been produced on stage. In addition to this however are series of secondary materials which we referred to as additives. The additives are medley of add-ons or supplements which feature regularly and are meant to flavour and enrich the publication. These additives comprised *Ìtàn àròsọ* (prose-fiction), *Ewì* (poetry), *Òré òkèèrè* (pen-pals), *Ìròyìn kàyééfi* (comic news), *Àwòrán èfè* (cartoons), *Ìpolówó ojà* (advertisements), *Àgbòràndùn* (general counseling) and *Ànnì Ayò* (love counseling). *Atóka* was the first and longest-serving version of photoplay in Yoruba that made a long lasting impression on the social, cultural, and economic planes. As the name 'photoplay' implies, the magazine employs the real pictures of the actors and actresses to tell its dramatic story; photography is therefore a principal medium of expression in *Atóka*.

Literary study on *Atóka* photoplay magazine was pioneered by Ògúndèjì (1981:8-12). This was followed by Aróhunmólàşẹ (1982:8-21), Adéoyè (1984), Bólájí (1985), Adélékè (1995:23-24) and Àkàngbé (2005:72-76). In 2014 however, Àkàngbé carried out a seminal study on the history, production and content of *Atóka* photoplay magazine. This study is divided into seven parts namely: introduction, precursors of Yorùbá photoplay magazine, evolution of Yorùbá photoplay magazine, development of *Atóka* photoplay magazine, historical exploration of *Atóka* photoplay magazine, the *Atóka* series, and conclusion.

2. Precursors of Yorùbá Photoplay Magazine

Photoplay is the only print media adopted by the Yoruba theatre practitioners, it is employed as a secondary media of dramatic performance by the

practitioners of Ogunde dramatic tradition, it is therefore an ancillary media. It would be recalled that there was a magazine founded in Chicago, United States of America in 1911 named *Photoplay*. It was one of the first film fan magazines in America. A reputable publication, *Photoplay* began as a short-fiction magazine which was mostly concerned with the plots and characters of films at the time and was used as a promotional tool for those films. *Photoplay* created a format and maintained a standard which became precedence for almost all celebrity magazines that followed, and it boasted of a circulation figure of 204,343. The popularity of the magazine was enhanced by the public's constituent rising interest in the private lives and exploits of celebrities. It is on the strength of this that *Photoplay* magazine was credited with unending celebrity media (Doyle 2008, www.pophistorydig.com/?tag=photoplay-magazine.history).

There is a remarkable conceptual, technical, and functional difference between the western photoplay magazine and the Yorùbá photoplay magazine. Primarily, the Chicago-based western photoplay magazine was a fan magazine for film stars. A fan magazine is a periodical which publishes information and gossips about celebrities. According to www.merrian-webster.com/dictionary accessed 21/09/2013, fan magazine is “a magazine devoted to the exploitation of popular interest in the personalities of the sports or entertainment world (as movie, radio, TV)”. The magazine therefore was publicity medium for the film stars as well as for the producers. As corroborated by Pierce and Hoyt (2014) in www.mediahistoryproject.org/fanmagazines, “Fan magazines gave audiences a way to experience the magic of the movies beyond the theatre. The magazines also gave producers a way to promote their stars and coming films.” In terms of format, *Photoplay* was fictional; content-wise, it gave sketchy presentation of the plots and characters of films; and reputation-wise it was popular and widely accepted. So virtually, the western *Photoplay* magazine was by definition, outlook, content and preoccupation remarkably different from Yorùbá photoplay magazine.



Fig. 1: Cover samples of *Photoplay Magazine*

One major precursor of *Atóka* magazine was *African film*. *African Film* was published by Drum Publications in Nigeria and later also in Kenya and Ghana in the early 60s; it was just one of the many photo comics or “look books” that flooded English-speaking West Africa in the early post-colonial era (www.chimurengalibrary.co.za/African-film accessed 10/10/2013). It was a “photo-comic magazine featuring an African facsimile of James Bond, known as Lance Spearman, and it once ruled the newsstands in cities across the English-speaking black Africa. It was very glaring that the magazine was a delight of the youths and a staple of both the educated and the half-educated, particularly the urban dwellers. *African Film* was unique for adopting the real photographs of its actors and actresses rather than using caricatures. As commented by Miseler in www.thisdaylive.com/articles/missing-spearman accessed 21/09/2013, the magazines are known as “look-reads” in publishing trade and it used to be popular in the Europe. It was introduced to South Africa in 1964. Initially, almost all was about white heroes like captain Devil of the South African secret police. Soon, Drum Publications of South Africa began to photograph black men in adventures in order to appeal to black men. According to Àkàngbé (2014: 70), “the *African Film* magazine was so famous among its African readers that its circulation figures were estimated at 100, 000 in West Africa; 45, 000 in East Africa and 20, 000 in South Africa”.

African film influenced the birth of Yorùbá photoplay magazine a lot. According to Oyèwọlé Olówómọjúòrẹ a.k.a. Kèngbè ọ̀rọ̀, ¹ *African film* had direct impact on the evolution of Yorùbá photoplay *Atóka*. He said the quest by some curious people to have Yorùbá version of *African film* gave birth to *Atóka*.



Fig. 2: Cover samples of *African Film Magazine*

A co-traveller of *African film* was the *Boom* which was about the adventures of Fearless Fang which could be regarded as the African version of Tarzan. *The Stranger* (a black Lone Ranger) was another magazine in the category of *African Film* and *Boom*. They all competed for the same readers' attention. However one commonality which they all shared was that they were all comics making use of actual photographs of black people rather than hand-drawn illustrations. Also in all, dialogue bubbles were positioned over the heads of characters or beside them. The three magazines arrived at Africa in the order of discussion, and their influence was also in that order.

One other tradition that could have had an impact on *Atóka* photoplay magazine was the newspaper cartoon. Every newspaper has its cartoon section which is pictorial and tells its stories also in hand-drawn pictures. Though it is in fragmented episodes which, in most cases, are published daily; it does tell a complete story eventually. Cartoons are artistic and sensible creations which convey its clear messages to the readers: it could be humorous and funny but behind the façade of the humour is a great didactic message.

Of much relevance and influence to *Atóka* is *Àwòrèrùin*. The Yorùbá magazine with a comic segment was a publication of the then Ministry of Education in the old western region which dated back to the 1940s and was in print till the late 70s. *Àwòrèrùin* was a rich publication in Yorùbá language which was circulated to all the primary schools in the defunct western region. Though predominantly prosaic, *Àwòrèrùin* was a periodical and it had assorted sections such as “Èlà Lọ̀rọ̀ àti Mátànmi”, a puzzle segment, and an interesting cartoon column titled “Ayọ̀ àti Àládé”, among others, though the column employed drawing instead of pictures.

3. Evolution of Yorùbá Photoplay Magazine

Atóka was the first Yorùbá photoplay magazine and it started production in 1967. It was published by West African Books Publishers (WABP) which was located in Industrial Avenue at Ilupeju in Lagos State. According to Oyèwọ̀lé Olówómojúòrẹ̀², former editor of the magazine, the curiosity to have a replica of *African Film* in Yorùbá gave rise to the establishment of *Atóka*. Incidentally, Academy Press (AP), the leading printers in West Africa as at then, acquired the state of the arts equipment. It was reputed to be the best printers of almanac and diary in the whole of West Africa then. The quality

machines that were acquired were being underutilised so there was the quest to put them to maximum use for profitability. The only way to achieve this was to find more jobs for the machines. Academy Press then founded a sister company, WABP, as a publishing arm. WABP would generate manuscripts and prepare them for press while AP would do the printing. With this, it was hoped that Academy Press would have enough jobs to keep its array of machines running round the clock.

Retired Rev. Moses Láoyè Egunjòbí³, popularly called Láoyè Egunjòbí, also corroborated Oyèwọ́lé Olówómojúòrẹ̀' s submission. According to him, Richard Gamble, a white man collaborated with Àládé Idris Anímáshàun and Doherty, among others, to establish Academy Press, the only modern press that engaged in colour printing in the whole of West Africa then. Due to insufficient job however, the idea of founding a publishing company came up with the hope that West African Book Publishers would be feeding Academy Press with jobs. As revealed by Láoyè Egunjòbí, a photoplay initiative in English language preceded *Atóka* initiative. A photoplay magazine called *Magnet* was the initial project but it was not so successful. *Magnet* was patterned after *African Film*. It was also a mysterious story about a hero with unlimited power and prowess. It was the failure of the English project that gave rise to the Yorùbá photoplay magazine which Şégun Şófowótè championed. As submitted by Láoyè Egunjòbí, the magazine targeted the middle-class and not the elites. It was meant to engage the artisans, the market men and women and the self-employed. Its aim was to promote Yorùbá language and culture while entertaining and educating the readers at the same time. So, *Atóka* was meant to fill a void by meeting the reading and entertainment needs of the middle-class.

West African Book Publishers was established to publish books and produce series of magazines so Rasheed Oníkòyí was employed to take charge of photoplay publications. He was employed to direct drama that would be published. Already the company had been publishing a photoplay magazine called *Magnet*. *Magnet*, according to Abímádé Ọládẹ̀jọ⁴, the pioneer photographer, had produced thirteen editions before the outbreak of the Nigeria - Biafra civil war in 1967 which stopped further production and cut-off the market. This was because the magazine was predominantly selling in the Eastern part of Nigeria which unfortunately had become the centre stage of

the battle. Since the market of *Magnet* had been lost, the management looked inward to explore the opportunities in the West and the decision to experiment with the Yorùbá theatre artistes was taken. That gave rise to the birth of Yorùbá photoplay. Having agreed to venture into the production of a Yorùbá version of *Magnet*, Rasheed Oníkòyí advised the management to employ someone who would competently take charge of the new Yorùbá photoplay project. So he recommended Şegun Şófowótè who was then engaged at WNBS/WNTV. As a producer at WNTV/WNBS, Şegun Şófowótè had worked closely with Hubert Ogunde, Kólá Ògúnmólá, Dúró Ladipo, Oyin Adéjóbí, Àyinlá Olùmègbón, Akin Ògúngbè, Òjó Ladipo, Isólá Ògúnşólá, and hosts of other performing theatre groups. As a matter of fact, many of them had become his personal friends so he had no problem in enlisting their cooperation; so the Yorùbá photoplay magazine project became a reality.

The photoplay project took-off with Şegun Şófowótè as the *Olótiú* (editor); Abimbádè Oládèjò (*a.k.a.* Abim) an indigene of Ìbàdàn, and a veteran photojournalist, as the *Ayàwòrán* (photographer); Délé Dúródólá as assistant photographer (*igbákejì Ayàwòrán*); and Adéwálé Johnson and Tony Bassey (who both left WABP in quick succession before they were replaced by) Jidé Sálísù as graphic artist (*afàwòránjẹwò*). Typesetting was outsourced with one Mr. Adéyemí (a staff of West African Examinations Council at Yaba) as a freelancer. After a while, Miss Adefunke Ọrèbíyí (who later became Mrs. Adefunke Şófowótè) was appointed as secretary to assist in the administrative work. Rasheed Oníkòyí, the editor of *Magnet* was mandated to direct the maiden edition of Yorùbá photoplay series titled *Yorùbá Ronú* by Hubert Ogunde which was acted and shot on stage at J.K. Randle Hall.⁵ This maiden edition simply adopted the title of the play – *Yorùbá Ronú* – as its name. The second production titled *Ológbò Dúdú* was also from the stable of Hubert Ogunde. It was in two parts: Number 1 and Number 2, and was also directed by Rasheed Oníkòyí. This second edition was labelled *Yoruba Photoplay Series* which was the name which the magazine adopted for the next three years. It was from the third edition (volume 3) titled *Òmùtì* by Kólá Ògúnmólá that Şegun Şófowótè fully took over by handling both the field and in-house production activities.

The *Yorùbá Photoplay Series* team was quite disciplined and devoted to their duties. According to Şegun Şófowótè,

we formed *Egbé Elédèpípé* (Committed-speakers' caucus) and it became an offence for anyone to speak English language or code-switch. In other word, we must speak pure and unadulterated Yorùbá language at all time and any defaulter would pay a fine. Miss Funke Ọrẹbíyíí, the secretary, was the record-keeper. At the end of the year, the amount realised was calculated. Because I was clearly ahead of them in terms of performance, I offered to opt out and gave the price to the next person to me who happened to be Funke. The amount realised was used to buy a good book for the winner.⁶

The name eventually adopted for the photoplay series was also a product of competition. It was Abimbádé Ọládẹ̀jọ who came up with the name *Atóka* for the hitherto known *Yoruba Photoplay Series*. According to Ọládẹ̀jọ himself⁷, the management of West African Book Publishers which comprised Mr. Richard Gamble, Alhaji Àládé Idris Anímáshun, Mr. Bánkólé, Mr. Doherty and others instructed Şẹgun Şófowótẹ who was the editor to evolve a name for the magazine. A committee was set up and the staffs were asked to suggest names. Abimbádé suggested "Atóka" which was instantly received by all. According to Abimbádé Ọládẹ̀jọ who recalled his childhood experience back home at Ìjàyè-Orílẹ, his country home and a suburb of Ìbádàn city along Ìşẹyìn road, "Atóka was a bird that was usually found on *ìgbá* (sheabutter tree). The bird was a path-finder to farmers and hunters if they missed their ways". Láoyè Egunjọbi also corroborated this that the production team which comprised Şẹgun Şófowótẹ (editor), Láoyè Egunjọbi (assistant editor), Abimbádé Ọládẹ̀jọ (photographer), and Délé Dúródọlá (assistant photographer) tasked themselves to produce a name, and at a meeting, Abim suggested "Atóka" which we all accepted. According to him,

Agbé e yẹwò lẹ̀tùn-ún a gbé e yẹwò lósi, a wá rí i pé ó n tọka lóòótó. Ó n tọka èdè, ó n tọka àşà, ó n tọka imọ. E jé á máa pè é bẹẹ. Bí ó şe wọlé lẹ̀jọ náà niyẹn. Láti ìgbà náà ni a ti yí orúkọ rẹ padà sí *Atóka*⁸

We pondered over the suggestion and discovered that truly it reflects. It reflects language, it reflects culture, it reflects wisdom. Let us endorse it. That was how it was accepted and since then *Atóka* has become its adopted name.

Atóka, truly, is a pointer to the good, the bad and the ugly in the society. It also points at the past, the present, and the future. *Atóka* photoplay magazine was a goldmine of information to the readers. Incidentally, Şégun Şófowotè had a column named “*Atóka ní tóka*” where he counselled, taught, informed and entertained his readers; among others.

Atóka is both the name of the magazine as well as its logo. The name is functional and the logo is iconic. The bird is a symbolic signification of the inherent values of the publication. The bird is the signifier while the publication is the signified. The relationship of the bird *Atóka* and the photoplay magazine in iconic signification is based on their similarities or sameness which is motivated. The bird ‘*Atóka*’ is a beacon, a pivot and a pathfinder for the ‘lost’ and semiotically, the *Atóka* photoplay magazine is a cultural beacon, a linguistic pivot, and a pathfinder for the socio-cultural values of the Yoruba society. By implication, *Atóka* is an inspiration to the society and a guiding light to the citizenry.

The *Olótúú* is the backbone of the photoplay production and he is instrumental to the success of the magazine at every production stage. Let us delve into the oral literature for a plausible explanation of the meaning of *Olótúú*. In Yemojì festival at Ìlónẹ̀-Ìjẹ̀bú near Ìlése in Ogun State, one of the performers is named *Olótúú-òşèré* i.e. the leader of the instrumentalists⁹. The functional role of *Olótúú-òşèré* clearly thrusts the coordinating and directorial responsibilities on his laps to ensure the success of the performance. It is in this sense that the term is also employed in the broadcasting industry where *olótúú* (producer) is the boss of the programme presenter (*atókùn ètò*) in radio parlance. This draws our attention to the fact that the term ‘editor’ is variously employed with different specialisations in the creative industry with varying degrees of responsibilities.

An editor in the publishing industry technically prepares a manuscript for publication; a newspaper editor supervises, oversees and takes responsibility for every content of the publication; a movie/film editor prepares the final

version of a movie, determines the length and the order of shots and scenes; a radio/television editor is the one who has the overall control of a programme be it news, magazine, drama, etc. In *Atóka*, the responsibility of the editor is even much deeper and wider than those itemised above as he practically combines virtually the tasks of all these professionals. *Olótúú* is the stage manager, he is the artistic director, he is the location manager, the props manager, and the costumier. He is the origination and design manager, the dialogue writer, the content editor, the copy editor, the proofreader, and the production manager. In short, the editor of the *Atóka* photoplay magazine was a super-professional who was creatively ingenuous and literary-minded. *Olótúú* is therefore the creative, technical and production pillar of the magazine. The editor solely adapted the dialogue of the performers for *Atóka* media. The speeches must be concise, precise and exact. Photoplay media does not tolerate lengthy speeches so dialogues could not be wordy or verbose. Therefore the editor was the author of the entire texts in the magazine. He also determined the cover concept which was also composed of the photographs of the actors and actresses.

Atóka series did not have date (month and year) and volume (volume number and part number) initially. According to Şégún Şófowótè, it was later when the production became regular that dating and numbering were introduced. From the archive, the researcher discovered that dating and numbering system began in January 1969 with Dúró Ladipò's *Oba Kòso*, Volume 11, Series 28, Number 4. It is remarkable that the numbering retrogressively took into consideration all the past editions of the photoplay magazine right from *Yorùbá Ronú*, the maiden edition. The numbering pattern has five features namely: volume, series number, month, year, and part number. Incidentally, the next edition that followed Dúró Ladipò's *Oba Kòso*, Volume 11, Series 28, Number 4 was not dated obviously due to omission. Oyin Adéjòbí's *Orogún Adédigba*, Volume 12, Series 29, Number 1 had no indication of date and year. However the subsequent editions regularly showed these features. Şégún Şófowótè submitted that Hubert Ogunde was frequent in the initial productions of *Atóka* primarily because of his dominance in the industry and also his proximity to the company. Ogunde lived in Lagos as against his contemporaries who lived in faraway places like Ìbàdàn, Abéòkúta, and Òşogbo. It is noteworthy that Hubert Ogunde produced four of the first

seven productions of *Atóka*. The length of a play and how interesting the play was usually determined how many parts it would have.

On marketing, WABP had an arrangement with Drum publications because of its distribution and marketing network which WABP did not have. So at inception, *Drum* served as the marketing agent for WABP on commission basis. Financial wise, *Atóka* was very profitable and far more rewarding to the artistes than their performance on television media¹⁰.

3.1. Development of Yorùbá Photoplay Magazine

The rise of *Atóka* photoplay magazine was meteoric. It gained a wide acceptance and it became an instant success. The development of *Atóka* photoplay magazine was phenomenal. This tremendous growth was precipitated by a number of factors.

Atóka project was a novel experience. It was novel in the sense that it had no precedence in the history of Yorùbá drama, as such; its introduction to the Yorùbá theatre-loving audience was an instant appeal to the dramatic sensibilities of the teeming audience. Apart from this, *Atóka* photoplay magazine was a reinforcement of the play productions of the theatre companies. The print medium was an ancillary media; it was not primary as virtually all the plays that featured in *Atóka* had been produced on stage. There was no exception to this. In other word, the audience was already aware of each title and as such were familiar with it, so their patronage was ready-made. Moreover, owning and reading *Atóka* photoplay magazine was a status symbol. It was fashionable to be identified with newspapers, the middle-class and semi-educated Yoruba readers also found it fulfilling to read *Atóka*. As Láoyè Egunjobi revealed, all the market women and artisans at Ìsàlẹ̀ Èkó, Campus, Igbòṣéré, Ìta Fájì, Tinúúbú, etc. made it a point of duty to buy each edition for themselves, borrowing was not in vogue, buying a copy for oneself was the order of the day. To corroborate this, this researcher who lived and grew up in Igbó-òrà, then a less city which was above a hundred kilometres from Lagos, the production centre of *Atóka* magazine, did not lack any edition as his uncles and their neighbours always purchased a copy.

Atóka photoplay magazine provided a ready medium of entertainment. It would be recalled that unlike now when electronic media avails us its diverse megaphones: radio, television, internet, cable networks, satellite dish, cell

phones, etc; apart from radio then, with its very few stations, there was no other means of entertainment. So the advent of *Atóka* met the yearning needs of multitudes of Yorùbá audience. In terms of production, *Atóka* was very presentable. The publication size, the layout, planning, textual and graphics arrangements, assorted columns, and quality printing all give sufficient endearment; so the physical outlook of *Atóka* was attractive, let alone its rich contents. One remarkable index of production excellence is its lovely cover in process colours. Full colour printing was not a common trait of production in the 1960s and 1970s, the beautiful covers in process colours was a factor of distinction which distinguished *Atóka* photoplay magazine from other periodicals. This quality was also a strong factor of attraction for the readers.

As typical of a periodical which must keep to its regulated production schedule, *Atóka* was able to consistently keep faith with its fortnight release date. Its teeming readers were very sure of grabbing a fresh edition every two weeks; this ability to keep the unwritten promise also contributed to the success story of the magazine. High quality level of production of *Atóka* enhanced its sales. The minimum print-run of *Atóka* per edition was 60, 000 copies. As Láoyè Egunjòbí¹¹ revealed, the 60,000 copies benchmark was for up-coming artistes who were relatively popular but for star artistes like Ogunde, Ògúnmólá, Ladipo, Adéjòbí, Pàimó, Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣolá, Àyìnlá Olùmègbón, Akin Ògúngbè, and so on, the production volume was usually between 80, 000 and 100, 000 copies. It was also remarkable that there were hardly returned copies due to lack of sales and even if there were, such copies hardly stayed in the warehouse before orders would be placed from outside Nigeria like Ghana, Republic of Benin, other West African countries and even the United States of America.

4. Historical Exploration of *Atóka* photoplay magazine

This section undertakes an exploration of the salient historical factors associated with *Atóka* photoplay magazine. The maiden edition of the magazine was *Yorùbá Roni*, its manuscript was solicited from Hubert Ogunde, it was a bilingual production in Yorùbá and English languages, and its production suffered some technical errors. It was the only edition that had English version.

In terms of nomenclature, the title of each play doubled as the name of the magazine at its inception in that the magazine did not have a distinct name of its own. This was applicable to *Yorùbá Ronú* (produced in only one number), *Ológbò Dúdú*, Numbers 1 – 2; *Qmùtí*, Numbers 1 – 3; *Àròpin N Tèniyàn*, Numbers 1 – 3; *Móremí*, Numbers 1 – 2; and *Kúyè*, Numbers 1 – 3. It was from *Awo Mímó*, Number 1 that the name *Yorùbá Photoplay Series* was introduced as a formal nomenclature for the magazine. With this christening also came another peculiarity which was the introduction of the *Volume* and *Number* system. Hitherto, no *volume* was indicated while the *number* was only indicated in Yorùbá with the inscription of the word *Apá Kinni*, *Apá Kejì*, etc. in a boxed ring under the play title. The data collected for this study showed that thirty-four editions of the magazine bore the name *Yorùbá Photoplay Series*; this was from Hubert Ogunde's *Awo Mímó*, Number 1; to Oyin Adéjòbí's *Fowórákú*, Series 48, Number 3, produced in November 1969.

Dating and comprehensive numbering of the magazine began in January 1969 with the introduction of two durational indicators (month and year) and one number element (series number). This practice began with Dúró Ladipò's *Oba Kòso*, Volume 11, Number 2. Its durational elements were January (as the month) and 1969 (as the year). Its Series number was 28. The Series number took into consideration all the past editions since inception. The implication of this was that Dúró Ladipò's *Oba Kòso*, Volume 11, Number 2 of January 1969 was the 28th edition of the magazine. Surprisingly however, *Orogún Adédigba*, Volume 12, Series 29, Number 1 by Oyin Adéjòbí which was the very next edition that followed it was not dated. This must have been due to omission on the part of the editorial team though one would have expected the editor to indicate erratum in the following edition, this, unfortunately, was not done. The magazine adopted its final name of *Atóka Photoplay Magazine* in January 1970 with *Asikò Náà Tó*, Volume 19, Series 49, Number 1 of January 1970 by Ìṣọlá Ògúnṣọlá. This implied that fourteen (14) (3.25%) editions adopted their play titles as the name of the magazine, thirty-five (35) (8.1%) editions had *Yorùbá Photoplay Series* as their title while three hundred and eighty one (381) (88%) were produced under the name *Atóka Photoplay Magazine*.

One can ask what the implication of these labels was. Which of the elements was for the magazine as a whole and which was for individual plays? Why the multiple numbers for one publication in addition to month and year?

The answers are not far-fetched. The purpose of the numbers was for referencing. Conventionally, Volume and Number elements are key indicators in referencing periodicals; this thus implies that *Atóka* certified standard referencing criteria. As to the dual references, while Volume and Number were reference indicators for individual editions, Series number was for the entire publication. Series number was a cumulative and progressive numbering of the publications sequentially. This initiative was functional and commendable as it readily indicated the number a particular edition occupied in the continuum. *Apá Kinni*, *Apá keji*, etc. was a translation of the number which had already been written in English. Moreover it was the oldest numbering element introduced right from the inception. It began with Ogunde's *Ológbò Dúdú* (published in two parts in 1967) which was the second title; and it subsisted through the formative years when *Atóka* had no formal reference numbers. Its retention, therefore, was both functional and historical. Finally, month and year were the time indicators which were very vital because without these, all the other elements would be of limited value because they could not be ascribed to a particular period or point in time. On the whole, one can see that the evolution of the numbering system was gradual.

The production of *Atóka Photoplay Magazine* also had a number of historical issues. It was published fortnightly but there were exceptions where the schedules were disrupted due to in-house challenges and mostly lack of funds. For instance, four editions were released in August 1969 as against the regular two editions or at most three editions per month. These were: *Obìnrin Àsikò*, Volume 15, Series 40, Number 4 of August 1969 by Kólá Ògúnmólá; *Woléwolé Arúfín*, Volume 16, Series 41, Number 1 of August 1969 by Àyínlá Olùmègbón; *Woléwolé Arúfín*, Volume 16, Series 42, Number 2 of August 1969 by Àyínlá Olùmègbón; and *Woléwolé Arúfín*, Volume 16, Series 43, Number 3 of August 1969 by Àyínlá Olùmègbón. One could not but wonder why the harvest of editions in August 1969. The management reason advanced was that the frequency was in a bid to clear the backlog of the productions in the editorial. We noticed an error of number labeling on *Àsikò Nàà Tó*, Volume 19, Series 50, Number 2 of January 1970 which was wrongly numbered as Series 49 like the Number 1 that preceded it. We therefore had Numbers 1 and 2 as Series 49 instead of Series 49 and Series 50 respectively.

Though in Number 3, the numbering error was corrected as the serialisation was normalised but professionally, there was supposed to be an erratum in Series 51 pointing at that error but there was none.

For economic reasons, and at times due to in-house factors, regular bi-monthly production was skipped. We discovered that there was no production in November 1972 as *Kẹhìnsókun*, Volume 37, Series 112, Number 6 by Hubert Ogunde was produced in October 1972 while Adébáyò Fálétí's *Bàbá Kérésì*, Volume 38, Series 113, Number 1 that followed it was published in December 1972. There was another production break from September 1973 to January 1974 as *Eni A Wi Fún*, Volume 44, Series 133, Number 3 of September 1973 by Àyìnlá Olùmẹ̀gbón was followed by *Olówó Bánkà*, Volume 45, Series 134, Number 1 of January 1974 by Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá thus implying that there was no production from October to December 1973. Again in 1983, there was another long break in production from May to December. The break was in the course of the production of *Alàgbà Jeremáyà* written by Oyetunde Awóyèlé, a four-Number Volume. *Alàgbà Jeremáyà*, Volume 96, Series 338, Number 2 was published in May 1983 but its third part, *Alàgbà Jeremáyà*, Volume 96, Series 339, Number 3 was not published until December 1983. There was yet another production break between May 1985 and March 1986 as *Ha Olori Àgbà*, Volume 103, Series 374, Number 3 by Adé-Ọlọ́fin was produced in May 1985 while the following edition: *Ha Olori Àgbà*, Volume 103, Series 375, Number 4 was produced in March 1986. Economic issues were largely responsible for these hiccups in production schedule.

A survey of the content of *Atọ́ka* revealed that some *Olótùú* also wrote plays which were performed by theatre companies and published in *Atọ́ka*. Examples included *Àsikò Nàà Tó*, Volume 19, Series 49 – 51, Numbers 1 – 3 of January – February 1970 by Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá. The play was written by Şégun Şófowótẹ̀, the pioneering editor, for Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá group. The rider to the title: *Eré Şégun Şófowótẹ̀ kan tí Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá àti àwọn Eléré rẹ̀ ẹ̀* (meaning a play by Şégun Şófowótẹ̀ produced by Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá theatre company) was a clear indication of who the playwright was. Şégun Şófowótẹ̀ also wrote *Rirò Ni Tèniyàn*, Volume 14, Series 33 – 36, Numbers 1 – 4 of April – June 1969 for the Akin Ògúngbè troupe. In the same vein, Mr. Oyèwólé Olówómojúorẹ̀ had some of his plays produced in *Atọ́ka*. He wrote *Ìyá Aládiúnrà*, Volume 87,

Series 292 – 295, Numbers 1 – 5 of June to August 1981 for *Tíatà Qrànmiyàn* and *Akòwé Elépo*, Volume 88, Series 297 – 301, Numbers 1 – 5 of August to October 1981 for *Gbóláhàn Àtándá* theatre troupe.

The cover price of *Atóka Photoplay Magazine* was another historical issue of attention. It was discovered that the cover price changed ten times in the twenty-five years that it lasted. The changes, of course, were precipitated by the market forces. The prices are listed below.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| a. April 1967 – August 1970 | - 1 pence |
| b. August 1970 – February 1974 | - 1/6d |
| c. February 1974 – August 1974 | - 15 kobo |
| d. August 1974 – December 1975 | - 20 kobo |
| e. January 1976 – June 1976 | - 25 kobo |
| f. June 1976 – February 1979 | - 30 kobo |
| g. March 1979 – May 1986 | - 50 kobo |
| h. June 1986 – December 1986 | - N1.00 |
| i. January 1987 – October 1987 | - N1.50 kobo |
| j. November 1987 – 1991 | - N1.00 |

We are curious about two of the price changes. The first was the change of currency in 1974 from British pound sterling to Nigeria naira and kobo. This was as a result of the official currency change announced by the General Yakubu Gowon-led military regime in February 1974. With this change, the indication of the cover price in British currency stopped in February 1974. While *Olówó Báńkà*, Volume 45, Series 136, Number 3 indicated its cover price in both the British and Nigeria currencies (1/6d and 15 kobo) to bid farewell to pound sterling and say welcome to naira; *Olówó Báńkà*, Volume 45, Series 137, Number 4 was only in the Nigeria currency. The second curiosity was the reduction in the cover price from N1.50 kobo to N1.00 in November 1987. The factor accountable for this was the reduction in the size of the magazine. The conventional A3 production size of *Atóka* was changed to A4 size to reduce the production cost from Series 398 – 430 between 1987 and 1991. The reduction began with *Òrò Àgbàlá*, Volume 108, Series 398, Number 1 of February 1987, a play written by Báyo Láléyẹ for Òjẹ Baba theatre group. The essence of this reduction was also to enhance the dwindling sale. An observation arising from this is that playwrights who were not members of the Ogunde dramatic tradition could also write plays to be

performed in *Atòka* thus bringing such writers to limelight. The instance of Báýò Láléyè was an example. In a bid to beat the production cost down further, the management resorted to reprinting the past editions from Series 411 to 430. The reprints (*Àtíntè*) began with *Ìkúnlẹ̀ Abiamọ̀*, Volume 112, Series 411, Number 1 of October 1987 by Àyínlá Olùmègbón. Our observation was that the reprinted editions were labelled and numbered as if they were fresh production whereas they were not new. We regarded this as a lapse.

Atòka enhanced the development of print media advertisement in Yorùbá. The editors deserved applause for this laudable initiative as they took it upon themselves to translate the *ad* (advertisement) copies into Yorùbá language to the delight of the advertisers, the financial gains of WABP and the corporate value of *Atòka* as a print medium. *Atòka* also promoted the culture of script writing among theatre practitioners as against the improvisational techniques which they were used to. This practice helped to prepare them for the next level of film production. Similarly, the practice of going to locations for shooting of *Atòka* plays and its associated experiences, no doubt, prepared the artistes in advance and enhanced their performances in later years at film locations.

5. The *Atòka* Series

Atòka was a distinct phase in the Ogunde dramatic tradition. The implication of this was that it was Hubert Ogunde, the doyen of theatre himself, who also pioneered *Atòka*. It was a household name in the entire South west and other parts of Nigeria particularly in the North. Its impact was also vivid across the West African borders.

Atòka ceased production in 1991 though its fortune had started nose-diving shortly before then. Its demise was partly precipitated by the advent of the home-video and its wide and instant acceptance. Home video tradition was quite appealing to the masses in that it was an innovation, which was quite new and strange to the people. Also, like *Atòka*, it was quite convenient and less tasking. It was very comfortable to sit back and watch drama production in the comfort of one's sitting room or a beer parlour, restaurant, hotel, etc. as the case may be. Unfortunately, the economic downturn of the 1980s had caught up with *Atòka* so its production cost had risen with the astronomical

increase in the prices of paper, ink, and other printing consumables. The overhead costs has also jumped which all impacted negatively on the entire production cost and selling price. For instance, the cover price of *Atóka* which was stable at 50 kobo from 1979 shot up and doubled its price to N1.00 in 1986 and by 1991, a copy of *Atóka* was being sold for N1.50. It would be recalled that the advent of home-video did not only harm the fortune of *Atóka*, it practically killed stage drama. Like the proverbial cobra which kills its own mother, the home-video came and killed *Atóka* and particularly the stage drama which was its forebear. Nevertheless, it should be noted that *Atóka* had prepared the average Yorùbá drama audience for the home video.

In all, *Atóka* had five editors from its birth to demise.¹² Şégún Şófowótè and Abimbádé Ọlálékan Ọládèjọ (Abim)¹³ were recruited at the same time. The role of the editor was central and pivotal to the production of *Atóka*. The editor of *Atóka* known as *Olótúú* was the brain behind every production and of course the backbone of the venture. He is the instant rallying point for other collaborating professionals. He is the 'alpha and omega' of every production as each edition began from him and ended with him. The *Olótúú* was responsible for determining the particular title to be produced. He arranged for the performance and shooting of the play production at the various locations. He directed and supervised the composition of the artwork which entailed developing the negatives of the pictures taken at locations, selecting the pictures that would make the production, composing the story from the pictures, constructing the matching dialogues, determining the production sizes of each photograph, editing and proof-reading the artwork and its eventual approval for press. It must be noted that the editor determined the title of each production; while he could agree with the working title given by the theatre company, he could also change it entirely. He also determined all their supporting columns. One major relief for production cost was advertisement. The various companies that advertised in *Atóka* helped to lessen the burden of the cost of production. Of all the companies that advertised in *Atóka*, it was Patterson & Zochonis (PZ) that stood most solidly behind the magazine through its frequent advertisement of Cafenol, APC Elerin, Robb, Venus cream, etc.

Atóka was very profitable initially. At its inception, it was a major source of income for WABP as its proceed was sufficient for the payment of salary

for the organisation's workforce. The commission that was being paid to the theatre groups was also tangible. For instance, the late Oyin Adéjòbí procured a brand new Peugeot car on collecting his royalty from WABP on one of his play productions.¹⁴ Several theatre practitioners patronised *Atòka*. The queue of titles was usually endless. The notable and popular artistes with *Atòka* included Hubert Ogunde, Dúró Ladipo, Kólá Ògúnmolá, Akin Ògúngbè, Oyin Adéjòbí, Ìṣòlá Ògúnṣolá ((Dr. I. Sho Pepper), Jimọ Àlìù. Léré Pàímó, Àyinlá Olùmègbón, Ray Èyíwùmí, Fẹ́mi Oyèwùmí, Báyo Láléyẹ, Moses Omilani, etc.

Atòka had a definite format. It was 32 pages, not a page more and not a page less. It should be noted that two methods were adopted to catch up with the rising cost of production in the latter days of *Atòka*. The first measure was the reduction in the size of *Atòka* from foolscap size to A4 size. This was to reduce the paper consumption and thereby cut down the costs of films, plates, impression (printing), and of course paper – both for the inner texts and the cover. The second measure was the reproduction of the old plays. The plays that had been produced long ago were reprinted.¹⁵ This measure eliminated the entire origination costs. The cost of going to the location, shooting, recording and snapping pictures at locations, including the overhead costs, were eliminated. Also, the costs of films and plates were also saved significantly. It was only the cost of paper and printing that were expended. This was a good relief tactic. On the whole, *Atòka* produced one hundred and twenty (120) volumes which amounted to four hundred and thirty (430) series. It should be noted that series 398 to 430 which were predominantly a reproduction of some of the popular old titles were produced in A4 size.

CONCLUSION

This paper has critically examined the historical factors that gave rise to the evolution and development of *Atòka* photoplay magazine. It has been established that a number of magazines were precursors of *Atòka* notable among which were primarily *African Film* and secondarily *Magnet*. It was also established that the staff of *Atòka*, particularly the editors, were critical factors in the development and production of the photoplay magazine. A number of factors accounted for the meteoric rise and acceptance of *Atòka* and similarly, a number of other crucial factors also aided its demise. Apart from *Atòka*,

other photoplay magazines came up which included *Kàyéfi*, *Ìbùkún Aláwàdà*, *Atónà* and *Atóka Aláròyé*. None of these however could survive and make concrete social and economic impact as *Atóka* did.

Notes

1. Alàgbà Múritálá Oyewòlè Olówómojúòrè made this categorical submission during the first interview session I had with him in his residence at Àkóbò-Ojú irin area in Ibàdàn on Sunday July 1, 2007.
2. This submission was also made by Alàgbà Múritálá Oyewòlè Olówómojúòrè.
3. These submissions were made by Alàgbà Láoyè Eégúnjòbí, a former editor of *Atóka* and a retired Baptist Reverend. He stated this during my first scheduled interview with him on Wednesday 7th October, 2009 at his residence at Aáwé, Òyó State.
4. Mr. Abimbádé Qládèjò the pioneer photographer, made this submission on Thursday 20th June, 2013 in his residence at Block 269, Amuwo-Odofin Housing Estate, Mile 2, Lagos State, during an interview he granted the researcher.
5. Pa. Şégún Şófówótè discussed extensively with the researcher how *Atóka* began, its formative experience and the role played by each of the pioneering staff. He recalled vividly the maiden production at J.K. Randle Hall. The interview was held at Grail land in Àjúwòñ area of Lagos on Wednesday 17th April, 2013.
6. This was also revealed by Pa. Şégún Şófówótè on Wednesday 17th April, 2013.
7. Mr. Abimbádé Qládèjò recalled that he was the one who suggested the name *Atóka* and it was well received by others, Mr. Şófówótè, Mr. Láoyè Egunjòbí and Mr. Èniqlá Adéyemí all corroborated Mr. Abimbádé Qládèjò's submission during the researcher's interview with them at various times.
8. This was a functional and philosophical view expressed of *Atóka* photoplay magazine by Pa. Láoyè Egunjòbí in his country home at Aáwé in Òyó State on Wednesday 28th November, 2012. That was the second extensive interview session he granted me.
9. Professor Ógúndèjì revealed this in his house on Saturday September 1, 2012 during one of the numerous discussion sessions he granted me on the *Atóka* project.
10. Pa. Şégún Şófówótè also made this revelation during the interview.
11. This was revealed by Láoyè Egunjòbí on Wednesday 7th October, 2009 at Aáwé during the first interview session he granted me.
12. These were Mr. Şégún Şófówótè, 1967 – 1972; Mr. Láoyè Egunjòbí, 1968 – 1978; Mr. Oyèewólè Olówómojúòrè, 1975 -1979; Qba Adébólú Fátúnmişe, 1978 - 1981; and Mr. Èniqlá Adéyemí, 1979 – 1991. This research also studied the pioneering photographer, Mr. Abimbádé Qlálékan Qládèjò (Abim), 1967 – 1972.
13. Mr. Şégún Şófówótè joined WABP in 1967 when he set up a strong structure for *Atóka*. He was at the helms of affairs of *Atóka* till 1972 when he was mandated to start another magazine named *Lagos Life*. He was in charge of *Lagos Life* till 1974 when he resigned from WABP. Mr. Abimbádé Qlálékan Qládèjò popularly called 'Abim' was the pioneering photographer of *Atóka*. Like Şégún Şófówótè his boss, he also joined in 1967 and was moved as a pioneering photographer to *Lagos Life*. So he left *Atóka* in 1972 along with other crew comprising Mr. Şégún Şófówótè as editor, Mr. J.O. Onífádé as Advert Manager, and Mr. Jide Salisu as Graphic Artist. Mr. Abimbádé Qlálékan Qládèjò, like Şófówótè, also quitted WABP in 1974.

14. This was the submission of Mr. Èniqlá Adéyemí during an interview session the researcher had with him on Monday 30th May, 2011. The interview was conducted in his house at No. 2, Yísá Street, Kúdèyibù Estate, Ìjègun, Àlímòṣò Local Government Area, Lagos State.
15. This was also confirmed by Mr. Èniqlá Adéyemí. Some of the reprinted editions were *Oba Kòso* by Duro Ladipo, (Volume 112); *Ìkúnlè Abiamọ* by Àyìnlá Olùmègbón, (Volume 113); *Ọmùtí* by Kólá Ọ̀gúnmlá, (Volume 114); *Àkòbí Olòògbè* by Oyin Adéjọbí, (Volume 115); etc.

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