
The Role and Place of an Artist in an African Contemporary Society: a Reading of Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song*. (2016)

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Abstract

Contemporary African societies are undermined by political mismanagement. This delays the welfare of the population. Based on Odafe Atogun's novel *Taduno's song* (2016), this paper questions the function of the artist in the African contemporary society. The resort to cultural studies theory permits to view songs and music as factors of societal change thanks to the values they instill. The paper has found that beyond its entertainment function, art should also be committed to trigger the fight for freedom. The artist, therefore, should not be a puppet in the hands of the ruling class. He has the important responsibility to remain loyal to his ideals by defying the tyrannical regime in order to set the people free.

Keywords: African liberation, artist, tyranny, struggle, people

Résumé

Les sociétés contemporaines africaines sont minées par la mauvaise gestion politique. Ce handicap ralentit le bien-être de la population. Ce présent article, qui s'appuie sur le roman d'Odafe Atogun, *Taduno's song*. (2016) questionne la fonction de l'artiste dans la société africaine contemporaine. Le recours à la théorie des études culturelles permet de percevoir les chants et la musique comme des facteurs de changement sociétal parce qu'ils inculquent des valeurs ainsi que l'on peut lire dans le roman. Cependant, au-delà de sa capacité à divertir, la musique doit être engagée pour inciter à la lutte pour la liberté. L'artiste ne doit donc pas être une marionnette aux mains de la classe dirigeante. Il a l'importante responsabilité de rester fidèle à ses idéaux en défiant les pouvoirs tyranniques afin de libérer le peuple.

Mots-clés : Libération africaine, artiste, tyrannie, lutte, peuple

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Introduction

The welfare of the African society has remained the preeminent goal of African writers. Few years before and after the political independence, African creative writers were committed to setting their continent free from the burden of the Western political, economic, military and cultural hegemony. The core of their artistry challenged the Western misrepresentation of Africa and forecast the prospect of the African self-determination. Prominent pioneers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Ayi Kwei Armah, for example, would depict a Manichean universe in which Africans, victims of the Western domination, struggle to regain their freedom, their agency and their authenticity.

Yet, there has been a paradigmatic shift. About three decades after the African political independence, that accusatory posture has evolved into a more introspective approach with the new generation of African writers. Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Chris Abani, Amma Darko, etc. to quote but a few, scrutinize and question the African predicament, precisely, the internal malpractices of the new black-white man that hinders the development of the continent. Their narratives implicitly call for an urgent African sense of responsibility as to the issue of the welfare of the society. If critics like Chielozona Eze views that new orientation as a counter-discourse, one should admit that the two generations share the ambition to eradicate the plight of African people. He contends that, that new generation of African writers have adopted a tacit ethos of self-criticism instead of permanently blaming the other, that is, the West for their sorrows. He maintains that “if African literature had hitherto been occupied with addressing the misrepresentations of the African image, it is time that it engages in a thorough introspection in hope of addressing African humanity.” (Chielozona Eze 115)

Taduno’s Song by Odafe Atogun is indeed about the break with the African pioneers’ “anti-imperialist rhetoric”. His novel highlights a criticism of the abuse of the political power in Nigeria at the time of president Sani Abacha’s office. The narrative exposes the conflictual relationship between the artist Taduno and a political regime. The artist Taduno is caught in a dilemma. He had to decide whether he should sing in praise of the regime and find his fiancée back or to sing in defiance of the regime with the risk to die and lose his fiancée. That conundrum

represents the gist of Odafe Atogun’s creation with a latent conflict between the population and the tyrannical regime as a backdrop.

This article poses the issue of the artist’s freedom under a contemporary and oppressive African regime. It investigates the perception and the impact of art, not as an autotelic production, that is “pure art”, (Moritz) but as a “committed art” that has a moral, didactic, political, social... function (Senghor). Art operates as a mental, social and political dynamism that triggers the artist and the subaltern groups to actively resist and respond to economic and political exploitation. This research work is based on Odafe Atogun’s *Taduno’s Song*. It argues that music and songs, as cultural artefacts, bear a political dynamics susceptible to instigate the fight for an African societal freedom instead of playing an ornamental role for the artist’s mercantile and selfish profit.

In the narrative, art is represented as a cultural force at work towards social change. In that regard, cultural studies theory operates as a springboard to decipher the impact of art on a socio-political system. The proponents of cultural studies such as Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and later Stuart Hall concur that culture is a key armament for political and social change. Culture impacts collective consciousness. Therefore, controlling the diffusion of culture equates with the power to control the society and its pertaining interests. The present study mainly depends on the concepts of hegemony as viewed by Antonio Gramsci and the model of encoding/decoding coined by Stuart Hall in order to investigate the power relation between Taduno’s art and the political oligarchy in the Nigerian society as depicted in Odafe Atogun’s *Taduno’s Song*.

The investigation deciphers the issue of the artistic freedom first, through the object and function of Taduno’s music. Then it will emphasize on the psychological and socio-political repercussions of the dilemma that tears the artist. Finally, the analysis will uncover the outcome of the artistic commitment in a dystopian African society.

1. Taduno’s Music: the Voice of the Disenfranchised

Stuart Hall’s model of encoding/decoding (1980) in the context of cultural studies theory, deals with how media outputs such as broadcasted music, are produced and interpreted. In the narrative, Taduno is an encoder who produces a music that conveys ideas to subvert the political

system in place. According to Hall, there are three positions when the audience or people decode a message. The first position is the dominant /hegemonic position. In the narrative, the population, the disenfranchised are concerned with that position. They accept and share the code, Taduno's music and the political ideas that it conveys. The second position is termed as the negotiated position. That is the soldiers who first reject and then hesitate to finally adhere to Taduno's message. The third one is the oppositional position: the president who understands the message but categorically rejects it. Taduno will therefore have to deal with those three configurations of decoders. His music impacts everyone in their position in the society.

Characterization is used as a medium to shed light on people's standpoints with regards to their commitment. On the one hand, there are the opponents, those who combat Taduno and his music. That group is made of the state apparatus embodied by the president, the police, the military men. They dislike and reject Taduno's music. They act either to silence him dead or alive, or to have him perform for the interest of the tyrant. The president and his collaborators have no mercy in the achievement of their goal. On the other hand, there are the supporters, the admirers of Taduno's music. They find in that music the magic for individual and collective "healing". They also find in Taduno's art, the strength to set themselves free from a tyrannical power. Most of them, represent the disenfranchised. The poor, the job seekers, the homeless, the outcasts, the middle class welcome Taduno's music. His music irrigates indeed the whole narrative. It operates as a catalyst that influences the characters and defines their interactions.

The whole story is therefore built around Taduno. He is introduced in the narrative as a dethroned and exiled musician, escaping tyranny in his homeland. He had the following thought about himself: "I no longer existed because there was no way I could continue to exist without my music. My music was me, and they took it away from me. That was when I gave up the struggle and went into exile". (Atogun 30) Under the threat of jail and murder, Taduno found solace in a foreign country where he is known to nobody. He is a committed artist that uses his voice and music for the liberation of his people. His art defines his identity. The loss of his voice, equates with the loss of his influence on the society. His voice belongs to the masses and without it, he sinks into anonymity and

becomes impotent. The regime had all his records disappear so that he falls into the unknown. The protagonist himself had the following remark about that artistic disability: “I no longer existed because there was no way I could continue to exist without my music. My music was me, and they took it away from me. That was when I gave up the struggle and went into exile”. (Atogun 30)

Taduno’s voice and the sound of his guitar trouble the regime. The collective amnesia, as well as Taduno’s loss of his identity, reveal the author’s narrative strategy to represent the decadence of a society that does not experience the benefits of art made to serve the cause of the downtrodden. That touch of magic realism as the narrative unfolds, infers the incompatibility between the dystopian reign and a committed art. Characters in the novel forget everything about Tadundo’s existence. The scene about Taduno’s encounter with his neighbor and former friend Aroli gives an account of that oblivion the population strangely suffered from. The following excerpt is Aroli’s address to his neighborhood:

He says he knows me,’ Aroli spoke at the top of his voice. ‘Please let’s give him a chance to identify himself before we take the law into our hands. Poetic justice may not be necessary after all. Please let’s give him a chance to speak.’ (Atogun 14)

Such a general oblivion appears to open room for the dictator to perpetuate and spread his domination over the country. Taduno’s music is, thus, an art of denunciation and protest in the face of the political and military abuses. His commitment is vital to give oneself a direction to the society; otherwise, people would remain under the yoke of tyranny and be completely bewildered. The critics highlight the signification of that collective amnesia:

This loss of memory, a dramatic shift in the narration, symbolizes more of a collective inner loss of the citizenry, a sort of alienation both physically and emotionally. This absurdity could be read as a symbol of despair and lethargy that the citizenry has slipped into under an oppressive military rule. (Gbolo et.al 10)

Taduno is aware that his art performs a social and political function. The impact of his art on the population is, therefore, palpable. The music he plays influences the behavior of the Nigerian population. It arouses their consciousness about the danger of drifting into tyranny. Taduno’s art is not festive, that is for mere entertainment. His art is not an art for art’s

sake. But he plays his guitar to raise awareness and win the sympathy of the population. Even when a musical gathering is banned, Taduno defies that presidential decision by playing at the square, at the public venue and for the homeless.

As an artist, he plays, many roles in the Nigerian society. He is a psychologist. He cares about the fate of the people. His music turns despair into hope by bringing comfort and strength to the desperate. It gives them reasons to struggle in order to go ahead in life. Anyone caught under the spell of his music, discovers that a bright future is possible. The listeners think themselves as capable of starting over instead of giving up. The notice of the narrator is explicit: "His music turned what would have been pitch darkness into golden brightness" (Atogun 91)

In addition, people have an introspection when they listen to Taduno's music. They appear to trigger a questioning process about their own political and moral views that they finally find biased and groundless. For instance, the soldiers and the jailers that listen to Taduno's music turn out to accept inwardly that the artist is right to defend the cause of the marginalized. They find themselves rather imprisoned in inhuman and unjust convictions. They finally share with the artist, the same conviction even though they cannot express or implement their new view on their socio-political situation. The jailor finally admitted the importance of Taduno's music: 'Your music is beautiful,' the guard said. 'We need your kind of music in our sad society.' (Atogun 98) That is what is referred to as a negotiated position according to Hall's concept of encoding/decoding mentioned above.

Taduno's music is also unifying as it influences the collective attitude of the people. Through his music, the fans as well as the jailers discover the necessity and the possibility to set themselves free from the totalitarian regime, they live in. By listening to his music, people see not their peculiarities but their oneness as nation, as aware human beings who deserve freedom and the respect of their rights. People discover that they can fight together; that their ethnic membership, socio-economic status, gender cannot operate as division factors. Taduno plays a music of unity. His art impulses hope, love, confidence amongst the fans.

Taduno is feared by the tyrannical and military regime because his music is fundamentally political and capable of changing the destiny of a nation. He is therefore viewed by the regime as a foe that should be

eliminated. Conversely, the Nigerian population adopted Taduno as their savior instead of undergoing the meanness of the dictatorial regime. The exile that he experiences at the beginning of the narrative, unveils the irreconcilable relationship between the artist and politics. The narrator clearly pinpoints that close link between the artist and the population when they recover from the general amnesia. One can read: “they (the population) were in the company of a hero whose music would liberate them from the ruthless dictator.” (Atogun 110)

Taduno’s art takes side for the disenfranchised, those the regime considers as social and political nonbeings. They are the marginalized that undergo the course of the Nigerian socio-political history. His art mobilizes the population not only the homeless that live at the square (a popular place, in the narrative, where homeless live) but also people from all walks of life. His music gives perspectives to the disenfranchised to act for their socio-political liberation. With Taduno’s art, they find mental strength to no longer view themselves as mere political playthings that can be manipulated by the military and despotic regime. They experience solace, strength and commitment for change through Taduno’s music. They are invited to privilege moral comfort instead of blind search for material comfort. The narrator is more explicit when he states that:

Each time he played, he taught his captors a few things.
He taught them that the quality of life you live is not necessarily measured by the amount of comfort you enjoy.
He taught them that a life lived with honour and courage in a dungeon is more fruitful than one lived in denial in an ivory tower. He taught them that a beautiful smile is worth more than a powdered face. And he told them to always look inward rather than outward. (Atogun 50)

The population, that is the disenfranchised, shift from despair and objectified position to determined and active agents for their own liberation. Taduno and his music embodies the change that they had been longing for. That is why the whole neighborhood is finally in complete solidarity when the need occurred to hide and protect Taduno’s best friend, and music producer TK. For the government, however, there is a permanent mania of control. Media, police, population, everyone and everything is to be manipulated. Therefore, taking control of Taduno and

his music equates with a hold on the whole system that keeps the government's interests.

Taduno's music supports the disenfranchised, and denounces the abuses of the elites. In the narrative indeed, the elite (intellectuals and military men) walks hand in hand with the president-dictator. They are depicted as poltroons and money grabbers that work to maintain the political status quo. Professor Black and Professor Ajao are "intellectuals" that help the president corrupt Taduno. They are not politicians; however, they are involved in state corruption, terror and intimidation. Professor Black, for example, the negotiator defends the interests of the president. He tries to bribe Taduno: 'He (the president) is offering to make you a very rich man if you agree to praise his government with your music. He wants you to name your price, any amount, in addition to having your girlfriend released.' (Atogun 134)

The elite worsens the disenfranchised situation instead of enlightening them on the urgent need for social and political liberation. Taduno's music opens a big gulf between the mass and the few elites. In sum, Taduno's art is not a mercantile profit-oriented music which serves the interest of an elite. The artist is rather magnanimous and focused on the interest of the community, the working class and the outcast.

When referring to Hall's encoding and decoding concept, the message given by Taduno does not fall in the mere logic of singing a song, that is 'sending and receiving' a shared meaning. The narrative shows that, there is a heterogeneous audience. The dominant position (the mass), the negotiated position (the soldiers), the oppositional position (the president and his government) are the main interest groups. Each category of audience is, therefore, clung to its interest. So, the decoding of the message pertains to the defended group interests. The meaning of Taduno's song will consequently fall in the logic of contingency as each group is predisposed to interpret and use that music according to its interest at stake. Critics argue that "where those involved in communicating do not share common codes and social positions, decodings are likely to be different from encoder's intending meaning." (Naru Kang, online)

Taduno's artistic commitment brings about a new way of thinking and acting in the society. People realize that they can take control of their individual and collective destiny. Stuart Hall (1987, online) maintains that, in the perspective of cultural theory, "the question of hegemony, is always

the question of a new cultural order”. Taduno’s art upsets the socio-political orthodoxy and forecasts societal change. Yet, that unshakeable determination to fight for the disenfranchised will lead him to a dilemma.

2. The Dilemma of the Artistic Gift in a Dystopian Environment

The eponymous character is modelled around the late Nigerian musician and political activist Fela Kuti. That later is known for his fierce resistance against the former Nigerian president Sani Abacha. The military power wanted him silenced on people’s predicament. (BBC Sound, 2022, Online) This novel, *Taduno’s Song*, is inspired from that Nigerian socio-political period. Sani Abacha’s power is reported to have been tyrannical. The population had no tranquility and human rights were constantly violated. Odafe Atogun represents that period of uncertainty and drama throughout Taduno’s artistic talent as a critical dilemma.

The socio-political environment depicted in the novel shows that individual and collective freedom are denied. The regime deploys measures to have the population under its permanent control. There is an insidious endeavor to turn everyone into almost automated individuals at the service of the president. The tyrannical government is in the permanent quest to perpetuate its rule. The self-aggrandizement, the dominating and unique presidential thought over the state, the secret political prisons, the endemic corruption, the devoted police and army to the cause of the tyrant, illustrate a dystopian environment. In addition, the population face a precarious life. Medical care, basic needs are scarce. Most of the people fend for their daily bread. They all wallow in poverty. The city of Lagos, as one can read in the novel, is full of homeless hanging around.

The narrative poses then a central question as to the place and role of an artist in African contemporary societies under repressive political systems. The main issue is the relation the artist has with the political power and the population. The reader discovers that Taduno expresses the aspiration of the Nigerian people to see a better society. His art therefore denounces the ugliest features of a Nigeria torn by terror, poverty and illiteracy. Most of the population tend to admit as normal the abuses of the military regime because they are ignorant of their rights.

The population lives in a permanent fear. They murmur their critics against the regime. No outcry is perceptible. The government spies can

show anywhere and anytime. The CID headquarters, where opponents to the regime are kept captives, is feared by the population. The government even spies its own police. The arrest of sergeant Bello for disclosing “political secrets” is a piece of evidence that the regime is ready to perpetuate itself. No one dares confront the regime face to face. In such a socio-political context, Taduno’s art becomes a subtle but virulent and therefore efficient weapon that can undermine the military regime.

Taduno is talented; and no one dares contest that quality. Yet, owing to the impact of his music on the population, and consequently on the influence that it can exert on the political destiny of his country, Taduno is feared by the regime. The narrative discloses a character entangled in a permanent questioning. Should the artist use his talent to serve the regime or to defend the cause of the people? To force him serve the regime, his fiancée Lela is abducted, and secretly kept in custody as a hostage. That imprisonment and the possible murder of Lela has kindled Taduno’s anxiety and hesitation as to the side he should take. The blackmail orchestrated by the regime has deeply impacted him.

The talented musician is in the horn of a terrible dilemma. Neither of the two outcomes is unambiguously acceptable. Choosing his love Lela and sing for the tyrannical regime equates with betraying the people. Singing to denounce the flaws of the regime and therefore serve the aspiration of the people, entails the risk of having his fiancée, murdered. The pressure on Taduno is palpable. The artist was about to abdicate. Yet, Thaddeus, the automobile engineer, now homeless warns him: “When music is silent, you hear the laughter of the tyrant. (Atogun 121) Such a position confuses Taduno.

Should the artist in such a context be clung to his ideal? The narrative unfolds progressively the weight of the dilemma on Taduno’s mind. Should he choose money, the tender and the delicious presence of his lover, the peaceful life in a material comfort offered by the regime? Such a choice involves the betrayal of his ideal. His artistic creation would turn into a praise of the president and his regime. Alternatively, there is a permanent risk of living a life of seclusion, a fugitive life. He can go through the torture of imprisonment in a mental asylum. There is also the possibility to lose his fiancée, and he can even lose his own life, if he stays loyal to his artistic ideals. Taduno’s music would remain therefore a

powerful weapon of defiance. He is aware that he should save his beloved country from total decadence. The dilemma almost bursts Taduno's mind.

The dilemma puts to the fore the integrity of Taduno's commitment. The main character previously portrayed as determined is henceforth trapped by the president's blackmail. Taduno appears as a hesitating, confused and sometimes completely desperate character. He no longer acted but would react. He suffers from self-blaming as, he is unable to set his lover free and play his music without restrictions. The help of his friends Aroli and later TK, the lost and found music producer, did not satisfy his expectations.

The artistic creation is a burning desire that cannot always be controlled. The artist creates his music according to his inspiration. Taduno cannot prevent himself from singing and playing his guitar. In the meantime, his art is to be adapted to his political commitment which involves the risk to jeopardize not only his life but also the life of Lela, his fiancée. How can he reconcile the irrational artistic desire with the rational duty of the citizen to fight for a better society? How can he reconcile the irrational feeling of love he has for his fiancée with the rational commitment to have his society changed? The artist is indeed in a complex situation. Taduno is threatened to tailor his artistic creativity for the comfort of the tyrannical regime. So, he is uneasy not only as an artist but also as a lover and a citizen. That triple discomfort worsens Taduno's dilemma. Each status is interrelated and cannot be dealt with separately. Adasme, a critic, asserts that "Commitment alludes to will and action, to responsibility and duty." (Adasm online) Taduno has therefore a societal responsibility to fulfill; yet, at his own risks.

Taduno's art consolidates the block of subordinate groups and classes that counter the hegemony of the ruling class. His music represents a force, a socio-political dynamism that can overthrow the ruling class. In the logic of the hegemony theory, there is a permanent clash between the ascendant social class and the dominated one. His art becomes the bone of contention between two antagonistic social groups. Each group struggles to have that music serve its interests. That opposition would generate a fragile social and political stability. There is indeed a latent tension that can explode anytime. The narrative depicts a pressure on Taduno to take side for the population and not for the tyrant. TK, the music producer, referring to Sergeant Bello's probable death

sentence for “betrayal” of the regime and Taduno’s hesitation about the side to choose warns: “we must not select those to save and those to condemn to death in the fight against tyranny. We must learn to say “no” to tyrants no matter how much they hurt us. This is the only way tyranny can be defeated.” (Atogun 149) That illustration shows that hegemony is not offered but conquered. Nasrullah Mambrol emphasizes that “hegemony needs to be constantly re-won and re-negotiated so that culture is a terrain of conflict and struggle over meanings.” (Mambrol 2017, Online) Taduno is torn between hope and anxiety.

The social contract is based on force and threat. The relation of dominance constrains each side to remain in its logic of permanent conquest. The tyrant demands a complete subjection of the population. For him indeed, Taduno’s music would convince the population of the good of his regime. His interests would be maintained and even admitted by the population. Whereas, the population expects Taduno’s music to set them free from the yoke of tyranny. The artistic gift becomes problematic because it generates antagonistic interests in a repressive socio-political environment. The question is therefore what the artist should do to set, not only himself but, the population free.

3. Self-sacrifice for Societal Change

Taduno appears as a moral, psychological and political benchmark in a Nigerian society under the yoke of a tyrant. Despite the menace on his own life and the one on his fiancée’s, Taduno is committed to remain loyal to his ideal. The ordeals that he has been through have rather made him tougher. The last turn of the narrative introduces a character acting strangely. Yet his determination to denounce the regime’s inhuman drifts and its obsession for hegemony, remains unchanged. As a committed artist, Taduno would aim at the end of the tyranny. Taduno relegated his personal interests in the background. Odafe Atodun, author of the novel, underlines the importance of the artist’s commitment for the citizenry: “That our individual gift is not meant for our personal glory but for the betterment of society. This is why it is called a gift. A gift is something you use to impact positively, not to feed your ego.” (Shepperd Joye, 2017, online)

Taduno could have indeed surrendered to the president’s proposals and led a comfortable life with his fiancée. He could have enjoyed personal

satisfaction to the detriment of the collective interest. Yet, the narrative is an advocacy of commitment for societal change as the prior concern of the artist. Through his protagonist, the writer infers that art should be connected to a nation's interest. Taduno's self-sacrifice symbolizes the utmost step toward the liberation of the people. Taduno is depicted as a man of value that does not capitulate.

For the author, a bewildered society can only find its way out through men and women of conviction who are strongly attached to their ideal of societal progress. The artist is in this optic, a viable benchmark as his work conveys that ideal to the community. It creates a close link not only between the artist and the community, but also between the people themselves. People represent themselves through the artist and are henceforth convinced that their aspirations are disclosed and are likely to be taken into account. Taduno's art forges a strong alliance of confidence that is susceptible to positively change the Nigerian society. The necessity of that commitment for change is explained in the excerpt below:

The collective interest comes first and all Africans must be willing to sacrifice the personal for the group's interest as shown by the eponymous character in this novel. It is not only stronger institution that are needed, but stronger and more principled individuals are also needed to stem the tide of excesses of political corruption. (Gbolo Sanka et al. 7)

The choice of self-sacrifice projects Taduno as a hero in a corrupt and immoral world. The demise of the hero in the collective memory gives way to societal disorientation. The artist does not, in principle, offer the solution but points at the solution. The murderer of Taduno symbolizes the whole mission of the African artist in the whirl of tyranny. Art should not only be made for fun and selfish pleasure but should trigger collective consciousness on the shortcomings of the society. The death of Taduno paves the way to the liberation of the people. Taduno brought light, strength, unity to a secluded, lost and disarmed people.

Taduno was assassinated because his art is neither compatible with hedonism nor with submission to a tyrant. The African artist, through Taduno, should be a pathfinder that subverts the diktat imposed by a tyrannical political class. His music has the potential to trigger popular uproar for political change. Popular passivity and unconsciousness are turned into active and conscious political strength. In the last turn of the

narrative, Taduno does not only denounce the shortcomings of a political system through his artistic skills; but he is also in the effective political action for positive change of his society. The concert initially dedicated for the glory of the tyrant was turned into a concert against the tyrant. The narrator exposes Taduno's audacity: "And then, addressing the President, he began to sing the last lines of his short song.' So, you see, where there is true love, you can never win against love, you can never win against the people, we will not surrender to tyranny" (Atogun168) Through that sentence, he claimed his faithfulness not only to his love and fiancée Lela, but he also instigates popular and effective combat for liberation.

There is no doubt that for the liberation of an African nation, the artist as one can read in Atogun's novel, should tackle the problems of the society head-on. He has a mission to fulfill. His commitment brings new perspective to the struggle for the liberation of African population. In the narrative, people are united and focused on a unique goal: to overthrow the tyrannical regime. So, the artist generates a new vision by unearthing the truth about the mismanagement of the country. He then impulses real action for the welfare of his community. Stuart Hall (1987, online) writes in this respect that:

there is nothing more crucial, in this respect, than Gramsci's recognition that every crisis is also a moment of reconstruction; that there is no destruction which is not, also, reconstruction; that historically nothing is dismantled without attempting to put something new in its place; that every form of power not only excludes but produces something.

Taduno leaves therefore a legacy to his countrymen. He teaches them that an artist is in a way, a spokesperson that should defend the interests of the population; and if need be, sacrifice himself as a martyr. He has paved the way for a collective awareness and struggled to defy the political class. The challenge is to reject outworn values and beliefs that prevent the population to face tyranny. The death of Taduno is a symbol of a new start in the fight. The gathering at the stadium for the "Great Concert", the live broadcasting of the concert "a Saturday, a day when everybody could watch", (Atogun 165) gave them the opportunity to witness Taduno's ultimate sacrifice for their liberation. That murder in public is a shared experience that marks the collective memory. The narrative gives an account of his murder: 'He saw the black assassin raise

his gun. He reached into his breast pocket and touched Lela's letter one last time. He closed his eyes and begged love for forgiveness' (Atogun 169) That sacrifice would represent the alarm bell for societal change. Taduno's ultimate commitment is a sacrificial seed that can generate the culture of protest within the population.

Atogun calls for a self-criticism, a deep introspection on the collective lethargy and terror that freeze the action for change in the contemporary Nigerian society. The hostile crowd against Taduno's determination to find TK, his music producer, is an illustration of that atmosphere of permanent fear and suspicion in the city. Before the return of Taduno on the public scene, everyone contented himself with the precarious peace and freedom instead of troubles with the government's police. Taduno was warned by the hostile population: "How can any sensible person be rascal with government when government has guns and bombs (...) We want to live our life in peace not in pieces" (Atogun 47).

Fear, ignorance, and political schism, are some handicaps that prevent the population from engaging in the struggle for liberation. In the meanwhile, the tyrannical power is depicted as corrupt, violent, and intransigent toward any attempt at destabilization. The narrative shows that despite those obstacles, Taduno's art is in a subversive dynamism. The author of *Taduno's Song*, infers that in Africa, art should be committed for people's wellbeing. Art should entertain, criticize, educate, unite and gather people around a common societal project.

The novel is therefore an advocacy for social and political justice through the power of art. Taduno's art defies a regime whose leader is inspired from Sani Abacha, a former Nigerian president. It is said that: "He ruled Nigeria with an iron grip and his regime was marred by gross human abuses" (BBC, online) The author refers to real-life event to create his fiction. In the narrative, people are indeed prevented from making their own political decision because their life is controlled by the regime. Taduno proved an outstanding courage by sacrificing his own life for the benefit of the general population. His audacity touched the Achilles' heel of the authoritarian regime. He showed that despite the apparent signs of power, the regime bears a fatalistic weakness. Confronting the regime by popular uproar might lead necessarily to people's defeat. Yet, Taduno's song and music showed to people that art is a powerful weapon in contemporary African societies.

African societies can achieve a veritable renaissance through the involvement of artists and their work. The narrative demonstrates that the development of the African contemporary societies is closely linked to the commitment for justice (through politics) the truth (through knowledge) the good (through moral) and the beauty (through Art). (Memel-Foté, 34). The anthropologist indicates that all those elements are interrelated. It infers that art should convey a social, moral and political function. Taduno's art consequently, upsets the establishment. It even debunks the habit of domination and tends to overthrow the hegemony of the ruling class.

Conclusion

This study based on Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song*, has investigated the capacity of an African artist to dismantle an autocratic political regime. As a cultural artefact, music can influence the society. It changes the mind and behavior of the population and makes them shift from passive and desperate people to active and optimistic agents for societal change. Music gives to the society a new dynamism for change. The Freedom from dictatorship is shown as a possibility.

Such a configuration therefore, generates a binary opposition as to who shall lead the society. There is a conflict of interests. Music brings about a merciless rush for hegemony between the mass and the few elites. Odafe Atogun's novel forecasts the possibility for the population to overthrow the despotic ruling class. Music operates as a catalyst for union, hope and action.

The study has revealed that the artist, in that optic should create not for his ego but for the well-being of the mass. He should have the sense of responsibility and sacrifice. That is why art, particularly in Africa, should not only entertain but should also raise the consciousness of the mass on the flaws that undermine their society. Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's song* is the representation of that political function of art in African contemporary society.

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MLA : M’Bra, Kouakou. “The Role and Place of an Artist in an African Contemporary Society : a Reading of Odafe Atogun’s *Taduno’s Song*. (2016)”. *Uirtus* 2.3 (décembre 2022) : 1-17.