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The Art of Directing in Nollywood: An Examination of Kenneth Gyang's Directorial Style in *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*

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Abstract

The role of the film director in shaping cinematic narratives and aesthetics has been widely acknowledged in film studies. This study examines the directorial style of Kenneth Gyang, focusing on *The Lost Café* (2018) and *Oloture* (2019). The research examines how Gyang's distinctive artistic vision, narrative techniques, and visual storytelling elements contribute to the overall thematic and stylistic coherence of his films. The study is guided by Auteur Theory, which positions the director as the primary creative force behind a film. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing textual and visual analysis to deconstruct Gyang's stylistic choices, including cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing patterns, and thematic preoccupations. Through a comparative analysis of *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, the study identifies recurring directorial techniques such as the use of symbolic imagery, non-linear storytelling, and immersive world-building, which distinguish Gyang's approach from other Nollywood filmmakers. Findings reveal that Gyang employs a socially conscious and visually compelling directorial style, effectively blending realism with stylized cinematography to enhance the emotional and thematic depth of his narratives. His films reflect a strong commitment to addressing social issues such as human trafficking, identity, and self-discovery while maintaining a distinctive cinematic language. The study contributes to the growing discourse on Nollywood film aesthetics and directorial influence, offering insights into how Nigerian directors can shape global perceptions of African cinema through innovative storytelling. The findings underscore the need for further scholarly engagement with individual Nollywood directors to understand their impact on the industry's artistic evolution.

Keywords: Kenneth Gyang, Auteur Theory, Directorial Style, Nollywood, Visual Storytelling.

Introduction

Film, though a relatively young medium compared to literature, theatre, music, and other art forms, has rapidly gained global acceptance due to its unique ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. Through its fusion of visual storytelling, sound design, and performance, cinema has become a powerful medium for entertainment, education, cultural integration, and social commentary. Over the years, scholars have debated the role of the director in shaping a film's artistic and narrative identity, with auteur theory emerging in the mid-20th century to emphasize the director as the primary creative force behind a film. This perspective argues that, despite the collaborative nature of filmmaking, it is the

director who ultimately determines a film's aesthetic and thematic direction. Directors, through their stylistic choices in cinematography, editing, sound design, and character development, imprint a distinct vision on their films, making it possible to analyze their works based on recurring artistic tendencies and thematic concerns.

Kenneth Gyang is one of Nigeria's most distinctive contemporary filmmakers, known for his refined storytelling and innovative cinematic techniques. His works, notably *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, exhibit a unique blend of realism and stylized visual storytelling, addressing complex social themes while maintaining strong artistic integrity. *The Lost Café* explores themes of self-discovery, migration, and identity through a dreamlike narrative structure, while *Oloture* delves into the dark underbelly of human trafficking, using a raw, unflinching visual approach to highlight the exploitation of women in Nigeria. These films demonstrate Gyang's ability to craft compelling narratives that engage both local and international audiences while showcasing his directorial signature—one marked by strong visual composition, evocative sound design, and deeply layered character portrayals.

This study seeks to analyze the directorial style of Kenneth Gyang by examining the creative choices that define his approach to filmmaking. It examines the factors that shape his storytelling, encompassing personal experiences and broader socio-political contexts, and assesses how his films contribute to the evolving language of Nigerian cinema. By focusing on *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, the research aims to establish the defining elements of Gyang's auteurial identity and assess how his directorial style enhances narrative depth, emotional resonance, and social relevance in Nollywood. In doing so, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of the director in shaping contemporary African cinema and underscores the growing significance of directorial vision in the global recognition of Nollywood as a serious cinematic force.

Methodology and Theoretical Underpinning

As a qualitative research, this paper employed content analysis and media and documents as its research instruments. The paper utilized library and archival materials (books, monographs, articles on film, and newspaper reviews). The choice of content analysis was made for this study; hence, its framework best suits the objective of the researcher on the subject matter under review. The works of Kenneth Gyang, specifically *The Lost Café* and *Oloture* (2019), were chosen for analysis and discussion in this research. However, the researcher did not follow any special sampling technique to select the films in question used in the analysis and discussion. The approach employed in the analysis and discussions of this research was text reading and decoding (interpretation), both at the denotative and connotative levels—the preferred and inferred meanings. To successfully decode the content of the films for analysis and discussion, the researcher viewed the films three times and paused them at five- to ten-minute intervals during the third viewing. In the reading and interpretation, the researcher considered all the cinematic elements that reveal style in a film, ranging from the subject matter, cinematography, editing, setting and set design, sound and score, casting and performances, to screenplay and narrative structure.

Auteur Theory, first articulated by critics from the French New Wave, notably François Truffaut, emphasizes the director as the primary creative force behind a film, akin to an author in literature (Truffaut 233). This theory suggests that a director's body of work carries distinct stylistic and thematic signatures, which make their films identifiable regardless of genre or production context. Andrew Sarris further developed this perspective, arguing that an auteur exhibits technical competence, a personal visual style, and thematic consistency across multiple works (Sarris 562). Applying Auteur Theory to Kenneth Gyang's *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, it is clear that his films exhibit a consistent

artistic vision through strong visual storytelling, character development, and immersive settings. Gyang's blend of realism with expressive cinematography, along with his focus on socio-political themes like migration and human trafficking, reinforces his status as an auteur. His use of non-linear narratives and symbolic imagery further distinguishes his work within Nollywood, showcasing how his directorial choices contribute to the evolving aesthetics of African cinema.

Directorial Style at a Glance

A film director is a person who directs the making of a film. Generally, a film director controls a film's artistic and dramatic aspects and visualizes the script while guiding the technical crew and actors in the fulfillment of that vision. The director has a key role in choosing the cast members, production design, and the creative aspects of filmmaking. This is why in some European countries and many others, the director is viewed as the author of the film. Afolabi Adesanya, a filmmaker and critic, defines the director in a unique way. According to him, a director "Is the virtuoso that calls the shots and is responsible for all creative factors that transform a screenplay into a motion picture; guides and inspires actors in interpreting the story; picks his crew heads; is the highest authority on set, and whose requests and decisions are final" (65).

Directors are responsible for overseeing the creative aspects of a film under the film producer. They often develop the vision for a film and carry the vision out, deciding how the film should look; in other words, they make their vision come to life. They are responsible for turning the script into a sequence of shots. They also direct what tone it should have and what the audience should gain from the cinematic experience. Film directors are responsible for deciding camera angles, lens effects and lighting with the help of the cinematographer, and set designer with the production designer. They will often take part in hiring key crew members. They coordinate the actors' moves, or blocking, and also may be involved in the writing, financing, and editing of a film.

The director works closely with the cast and crew to shape the film. Some like to conduct rigorous rehearsals in pre-production, while others do so before each scene. In either case, this process is essential as it tells the director, as well as other key members of the crew (director of photography, stunt choreographer, hair stylist, etc.), how the actors are going to play the scene, which enables them to make any necessary adjustments. He or she works with the editor to ensure that the emotions of the scene and the close-ups, mid-shots and wide or long shots appropriately reflect which character is driving the narrative. The director also advises on the (color) grading of the final images, adding warmth or frigidity to the composition of the shots to reflect the emotional subtext of the character or environment. The director will sometimes participate in the sound mix and musical composition of the film.

Film cannot be achieved without the role and contributions of the director because film directing entails a great deal of professionalism and creativity. Most of the time, the very best quality film is achieved by the standard of the directing input made by the director of the film. The essence of directing cannot be overemphasized because it is one of the major roles of filming and it is the measurable factor that every film producer considers before venturing into the business of film production. When a film is considered good, the first things film experts look for are the director's style, quality, and standard before making any other assessments. Though other factors must be put into cognizance, such as lighting, editing, cinematographic work and sound mixing, all of these are attributed to the film director as the maker and coordinator of the entire film production, as he/she is seen as the boss of the film production. The director's responsibility is such that when the film goes

wrong, they are held accountable because they control every other department within the film production.

Moving forward, there are several techniques that directors utilize to obtain a visualization of a script on screen. These techniques of interpretation differ from director to director as it is determined by certain factors, but revolve around individual personality differences. In other words, every director has a distinct personality that makes their work different from that of others. Yet, for the fact that it is the director's job to translate the script to the screen as he directs the array of people working under him on how to best capture his artistic vision for the film; the director's personality inadvertently plays out in the finished product, resulting in what is referred to as film style, otherwise the director's style.

Thus, directorial styles are recognizable film techniques used by filmmakers to give specific changes or value to their work. This can include the way and manner in which they manipulate all aspects in making a film: sound, mise-en-scene, dialogue, cinematography, editing or attitude. One may boldly say that every established director has a distinctive filmmaking style that differs from those of other directors, much like an author's own unique writing style. Through the analysis of film techniques, differences between filmmakers' styles become apparent. There are many technical possibilities to use in a film. As a result, no single film can have every single technique. Historical circumstances limit the choices for the director. During the silent film era, filmmakers were unable to use synchronized dialogue until sound technology became feasible in the late 1920s.

Films before the 1930s had to be black and white; now, directors have the choice of shooting in colour tints or in black and white. There are many techniques that a director has to choose which ones to use and which ones not to use. One of the most noticeable ways to adjust film style is through mise-en-scène, or what appears on the screen. Lighting, costumes, props, camera movements, and backgrounds are all integral to the mise-en-scène. There are countless ways to create a film based on the same script simply by changing the mise-en-scène. Adjusting these techniques creates meaning and highlights similarities in the narrative. Many filmmakers will relate the overall film style to reflect the story.

The astute film scholars and renowned writers on film, cultural and media studies, Bordwell and Thompson, in their very essential and influential classic, crystallize this concept of the director's style thus:

> Every film develops specific techniques in patterned ways. This unified, developed and significant use of particular technical choices we will call style...we'll see how each filmmaker creates a distinctive stylistic system. The use a film makes of the medium—the film's style—cannot be studied apart from the film's overall form. We will find that film style interacts with the formal system. In a narrative film, techniques can function to advance the cause-effect chain, create parallels, manipulate story-plot relations, or sustain the narration's flow of information. But some uses of technique can call attention to patterns of style (Bordwell 117).

According to Bordwell and Thompson's submission above, film style therefore refers to the unified, developed and significant use of particular technical choices (and values, or better still, elements) to create a distinctive cinematic pattern or system. He goes ahead to discuss the four cinematic techniques, two of which are of the shot, mise-en-scene and cinematography, the technique that relates shot, editing and the relation of sound to film images (117). In the same text, they proceed to elaborate on the various techniques

mentioned above, pointing out the respective technicalities about them that, when put together, culminate in a particular style.

In a similar vein, Boggs and Petrie in the fifth edition of their influential book, *The Art of Watching Films*, term the foregoing "The Director's Style"; they aver:

> A director's style is the manner in which the director's personality is expressed through the language of the medium. Every element or combination of elements may reveal a unique creative personality that shapes, molds, and filters the film through intellect, sensibility, and imagination... Thus, almost everything directors do in making a film is a part of their style, because in almost every decision they are in some subtle way interpreting or commenting on the action, revealing their own attitudes, and injecting their own personality indelibly into the film (Boggs and Petrie, 308).

Furthermore, earlier in their introductory position in the book on the director's influential role among the collaborative team found on a typical film set, which results in the end product being referred to as the director's style, is captivating. In their own words, they explain:

> A motion picture, then, is always a cooperative effort, a joint creative interpretation of many artists and technicians working on diverse elements, all of which contribute to the finished film. Because of the technical and physical complexity of filmmaking and the large number of people involved, it might seem misleading to talk of any single individual's style. The director, however, generally serves as the unifying force and makes the majority of the creative decisions, so it is perhaps proper to equate the film's style with the director's style (307).

Boggs and Petrie, like Bordwell and Thompson, also proceed to enumerate and examine the various elements that reveal style in a film. But for the duo, whether a film is intellectual and rational or emotional and sensual, cool and objective or warm and subjective, truthful and realistic or romantic and idealized, logical and orderly or irrational and chaotic, etc, the director is entirely responsible. An accurate assessment of these values is a good first step toward an analysis of the director's style. According to them, a complete analysis must examine his or her treatment of subject matter, cinematography, editing, and other individual film elements (309).

Drawing from the foregoing, it is evident that a film director serves as the creative force behind a motion picture, which shapes its artistic and dramatic vision through deliberate choices in mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound. Every director has a distinct filmmaking style influenced by personal experiences, cultural background, and creative vision, which manifests in the unique way they interpret scripts and orchestrate film elements. Based on these established perspectives on film style and directorial influence, Kenneth Gyang's directorial style is interrogated through an analysis of his films *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*. This paper examines how Gyang's artistic choices shape the cinematic experience. By analyzing his approach to mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and narrative construction, this study highlights how Gyang's work navigates themes of cultural hybridity, identity, and social issues. Through these case studies, the research situates Gyang's directorial vision within the broader discourse on Nigerian cinema and contemporary filmmaking.

Vol. 2, No. 5, 2025, ISSN: 1595-9287

Kenneth Gyang and His Directorial Style

Kenneth Gyang is a young filmmaker from Nigeria, born in Barkin Ladi, Plateau State, Nigeria. He studied Film Production at the National Film Institute in Jos and Screenwriting at Gaston Kabore's IMAGINE in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. His short film, *Game of Life,* was selected for the Berlinale Talent Campus 2006 and the other, *Mummy Lagos,* was well received as an official competition entry. *Mummy Lagos* was also selected for the Sithengi Talent Campus as part of the Cape Town World Cinema Festival in South Africa. His film *Omule* won Best Documentary Film at the 1st Nigerian Student International Film Festival in 2006. *Mummy Lagos* won Best Film at the Nigerian Film Society Awards, organized by the German Cultural Center, Goethe Institute in Lagos. In 2006, he was profiled by the influential UK-based BFM magazine as the youngest film director in Nigeria. Kenneth has worked with the BBC World Service Trust, directing their highly acclaimed TV drama *Wetin Dey,* which was presented at the International Emmy World Television Festival in New York City.

He has also worked with Communicating for Change as an Associate Producer on Bayelsian Silhouettes—a series of seven short films on HIV/AIDS. His most recent work is *Finding Aisha*, a TV series he co-wrote, produced and directed for the Nigerian production company Televista. In 2013, his debut feature film *Confusion Na Wa,* produced by Tom Rowland Rees, won the top gong - Best Film - at the Africa Motion Awards in Bayelsa. Kenneth also won "The Future Awards" 2013 Prize in Arts & Culture. He directed the AMAA award-winning film Blood and Henna about Meningitis in Northern Nigeria. Kenneth's feature film *Confusion Na Wa* was highly acclaimed and went ahead to win the AMAA Awards 2013 for Best Film and Best Nigerian film. Also, the film went ahead in 2014 to win the Nollywood Movie Award for Best Cinematography (Yinka Edwards) and the Nollywood Movie Award for Best Director (Kenneth Gyang).

There are many styles and identities in the world; thus, it becomes imperative for each individual to carve out their own niche and stand out from the crowd. Many scholars believe that quantity has replaced quality in filmic output in the Nigerian film industry and creativity is required to provide some variety and balance. Despite the numerous limitations and challenges facing the industry and its practitioners, certain directors and producers have been able to create aesthetically acclaimed works for their audience. Some of these individuals include Kenneth Gyang and Tunde Kelani. However, because they are not grounded in theory, it would be difficult to pin them to particular styles; thus, the professional consciousness that underpins their films as well as the subtextual and intersexual analysis of their works would be used in adjudging their individual aesthetics. The artistic consciousness that permeates the works of these directors would be investigated and an empirical comparison of the overriding technical tendencies would be carried out against some of the world's established film directing conventions.

Thus, the working philosophies of each of these filmmakers will be evaluated to see what has made them some of the industry's most admired in the country. Kenneth Gyang's overriding directing style is realism. This view is deduced from a thorough investigation of his films, reviews of his films by journalists and other researchers and from personal interviews held with him and some persons who work with him on his set. He embraces contemporality. Kenneth fiddles with current materials in dealing with topical issues which are germane to the growth and development of society, a trend observable in all his works from *Blood & Henna* to the most recent one, *Oloture*. In *The Lost Café*, he deals with the issue of dark family secrets, heartbreak and culture, and coming of age. He drew society's attention to the ravaging effects of keeping secrets and cheating. In *Blood and Henna,* Kenneth Gyang outline the devastating effect of corruption. He always uses metaphors to

avoid being too confrontational with his viewpoints. This inclination to a realistic depiction of life invariably influences the use of language, music, the camera point of view, the nature of storytelling, costume, acting and every other aspect of the aesthetics of her movies. He strives to present events as they happen in real life; more so, his approach bears resemblance to Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre because he believes that every film should be didactic; it should teach a lesson or at least push for a change in society or start a revolution.

In the opening scene of the movie, one could feel the rush of beauty from the cultural display of the costumes, traditional tunes, and the dialogue where Hakeem meets Ose and tells her, "To the most beautiful lady who makes eating swallow and soup so sexy." The aesthetic display can be seen and felt in other works by Kenneth Gyang, such as *Confusion Nawa* (2013) and *Blood and Henna* (2012). *Confusion Nawa* is great fun to watch, a blast of fresh, keen air in Nigerian filmmaking and out of the ordinary in several dimensions. His films are a revelation of what can happen to the Nigerian film industry in terms of aesthetics and philosophy, showing that there is room for intelligent, edgy experimentation and the sensibility of the new generation and the untapped beauty of our cultural and human resources.

Kenneth Gyang's Directorial Style in *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*

The Lost Café, a collaboration between Nigeria and Norway, starring Tunde Aladese, Belinda Effah and Ann Njemanze playing alongside Norwegian cast like Terje Lien, Jenny Bonden and Anders Lidin Hansen; *The Lost Café* is an uplifting story about a girl's decision to rise above dark family secrets and culture shock to live her dreams abroad, finding the most unusual answers to her troubling questions somewhere in Drammen where she meets the half blind, strange owner of a quaint coffee shop that serves the best coffee in the world. While battling depression in Norway, a young Nigerian woman decides to pursue her dreams in Norway, where she makes an unexpected connection with the owner of a quaint coffee shop; it is an uplifting story about a girl's decision to rise above her dark family secrets, heartbreak and culture shock to live out her dreams abroad.

Òlòtūré, on the other hand, tells the story of Òlòtūré, a young journalist who goes undercover as a prostitute in Lagos to expose the complex layers and actors of the multi-billion-dollar prostitution and human trafficking rings. She quickly discovers a complex transnational web of violence, transactional sex, corruption, and rape. The mostly female cast of the movie does an excellent job enthralling the viewer in their portrayals of various Nigerian women desperate to make it to the "next level" in Europe, where they think life will be better and their prostitution more lucrative–something easier said than done. What awaits them is a harrowing journey through the underworld of Lagos filled with unbridled exploitation, madams, politicians, people smugglers, and murder.

Story and Narration

Kenneth Gyang often plays an active role in the writing of his films, and even when he does not personally write the screenplay, he carefully selects stories that align with his creative and thematic vision. His storytelling approach is distinctive, blending realism with social consciousness and often reflecting Neo-realist tendencies. A recurring feature in his films is the exploration of pressing social or economic issues, positioning him as one of the few Nigerian filmmakers deeply committed to tackling such themes. In *The Lost Café*, Gyang challenges the prevailing stereotype that all Nigerian women who migrate to Europe do so for prostitution. The protagonist, Ose, who travels to Norway after experiencing heartbreak in Nigeria, refuses to succumb to societal pressures or the stigma placed on Nigerian women abroad. Even when her Norwegian roommate unfairly assumes she is involved in sex work, Ose remains steadfast in her pursuit of self-discovery and personal growth. Through her journey, Gyang subverts expectations and offers a more nuanced

representation of migration, identity, and resilience. Similarly, *Oloture* delves into the dark underbelly of sex trafficking, providing a raw and unflinching look at the exploitation of women in Nigeria. The film follows Oloture, an undercover journalist who infiltrates a human trafficking ring, only to become entangled in the brutal realities of the world she is investigating.

While *The Lost Café* presents an alternative narrative of migration, *Oloture* exposes the harrowing truth behind many women's experiences, offering a stark contrast between choice and coercion. Both films, however, share a thematic concern with female agency, societal expectations, and the consequences of systemic failures. Structurally, Gyang employs an episodic plot structure, reminiscent of Bertolt Brecht's approach, but with his own unique interpretation—what he terms the multiple-story plot. This technique allows him to weave together parallel narratives, exploring different but interconnected experiences within a single film. In both *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, multiple storylines unfold simultaneously; highlighting contrasting realities—hope versus despair, independence versus oppression, and survival versus exploitation. His mastery of the continuity-narrative style, combined with skillful use of suspense and the elements of surprise, ensures that his films remain engaging while provoking deep reflection on the social issues they address.

Character Creation and Acting

Kenneth Gyang's casting approach tends to favor known faces in the Nigerian film industry, making his films feel somewhat anticipated due to the audience's familiarity with the actors. While this may contribute to the accessibility of his works, it also limits the element of surprise in character portrayal. In his defense, Gyang has stated that he does not typically hold auditions for his films but instead relies on type-casting and stock characterization when selecting his cast. For stunt roles and minor characters, he recruits Corps members and IT students from his company and other training institutions, primarily due to budget constraints. Introducing new actors, he argues, is a financial risk that many producers and marketers are unwilling to take, a factor that ultimately influences the aesthetic choices in his films.

In *The Lost Café*, Gyang's casting choice of Tunde Aladese as Ose and Norwegian actor Anders Lid as Oscar reinforces the cross-cultural dynamic central to the film's narrative. Aladese delivers a nuanced performance, embodying a character caught between personal healing and cultural displacement, while Lid's role as the café owner adds depth to the story's themes of solace and destiny. The performances in this film lean towards subtlety, mirroring the introspective nature of the story. Conversely, *Oloture* demands a raw, emotionally charged style of acting, and Gyang's decision to cast Sharon Ooja in the lead role proves effective. Ooja's portrayal of an undercover journalist navigating the treacherous world of sex trafficking is both intense and immersive, bringing a sense of urgency and realism to the film. The supporting cast, including Omoni Oboli and Beverly Osu, contributes to the film's gritty and unsettling atmosphere, reinforcing the harrowing realities the story seeks to expose.

Gyang's use of realism extends beyond casting choices to how his actors perform on screen. He encourages naturalistic movements and reactions, ensuring that characters behave in ways that reflect real-life situations. This commitment to authenticity is further evident in his use of improvisational dialogue. Both *The Lost Café* and *Oloture* feature scenes where actors engage in spontaneous, unscripted exchanges, making their interactions feel organic and believable. While *The Lost Café* uses this technique to enhance the personal and reflective nature of its storytelling, *Oloture* employs it to heighten the tension and

unpredictability of its dangerous world. Through these stylistic choices, Gyang reinforces his commitment to realism while allowing his actors the creative space to bring their characters to life in compelling and impactful ways.

Spectacle

One of the defining aspects of Kenneth Gyang's aesthetics is his meticulous use of color. He understands that color is not just a visual element but an essential storytelling tool that influences perception and mood. His films exhibit a deliberate and intelligent application of color, ensuring that the settings, costumes, and makeup enhance the overall visual appeal and thematic undertones of the narrative. Bright and contrasting colors frequently appear in his work, adding vibrancy while also reinforcing the emotional and cultural context of his stories. In *The Lost Café*, color plays a significant role in shaping the film's dreamy, reflective atmosphere. The wedding scene, for instance, is visually striking, featuring rich and well-coordinated hues in the decorations and costumes. This scene exemplifies Gyang's commitment to using color to evoke emotions, with the celebratory palette contrasting with Ose's personal struggles, subtly highlighting the film's themes of identity, displacement, and resilience. His attention to detail extends beyond color, as every costume choice appears intentional, ensuring that characters are dressed in ways that authentically represent their backgrounds and personalities.

In *Oloture*, however, Gyang's use of color takes a different turn, aligning with the film's gritty and unsettling tone. The color palette is deliberately muted and shadowy, reflecting the dark reality of sex trafficking. The dimly lit brothels, the stark contrast between the bright city lights and the characters' grim circumstances, and the earthy tones used in interior spaces all contribute to the film's raw and unfiltered aesthetic. The visual contrast between the illusion of glamour and the grim reality faced by the characters reinforces the film's central themes of exploitation and survival. Beyond colour, Gyang's commitment to authenticity is evident in his choice of real-life settings, which enhances the believability of his narratives. Both *The Lost Café* and *Oloture* rely heavily on location shooting to ground their stories in reality. *The Lost Café* features picturesque Norwegian landscapes and a cozy café setting that symbolizes comfort and escape, while *Oloture* immerses viewers in the chaotic and dangerous streets of Lagos, heightening the sense of entrapment and desperation. This use of actual locations not only strengthens the realism of his films but also deepens audience immersion, making the stories more relatable and emotionally resonant. Through his careful manipulation of spectacle—color, setting, costume, and attention to visual detail—Gyang crafts compelling cinematic experiences that are both aesthetically pleasing and thematically powerful.

Music

Film sound and music play a crucial role in shaping audience perception and emotional engagement with a story. Kenneth Gyang is particularly meticulous in his approach to film music, ensuring that it is not just an afterthought but an integral part of his storytelling technique. His music choices are carefully crafted and arranged to align with the film's plot, mood, and themes. Unlike many Nollywood films that rely on familiar or mainstream tunes, Gyang avoids overused soundtracks, instead opting for original compositions and unconventional musical styles that complement his narratives. In *The Lost Café*, the music is designed to evoke a reflective and almost dreamlike atmosphere, aligning with the film's themes of self-discovery, healing, and cross-cultural encounters. The theme song itself is an artistic composition that adds an emotional layer to Ose's journey, enhancing the film's introspective quality. The soundtrack is subtle yet deeply expressive, serving as an emotional guide for the audience without overpowering the storytelling. In contrast,

Vol. 2, No. 5, 2025, ISSN: 1595-9287

Oloture employs a more intense and evocative soundscape to heighten the tension and sense of urgency within the narrative.

The music in this film is less about soothing the audience and more about immersing them in the brutal realities of human trafficking. The soundtrack features haunting melodies, percussive beats, and atmospheric sounds that enhance the film's dark and suspenseful tone. Strategic silences are also used effectively, amplifying moments of fear, danger, and emotional distress. Where the plot allows, Gyang is known to incorporate extended musical sequences into the chronological flow of his films, as seen in *Confusion Na Wa*. While *The Lost Café* uses music as a gentle storytelling companion, *Oloture* employs it as an unsettling force that underscores the harsh realities the characters face. In both films, Gyang's sound design reflects his directorial intent—whether to comfort and inspire or to disturb and provoke thought. Through his deliberate and innovative use of music, he deepens the emotional impact of his narratives, ensuring that sound serves not just as background noise but as a vital storytelling device.

Camera Frame of View

Kenneth Gyang's commitment to realism is evident in the cinematography of his films, as he carefully crafts his camera work to immerse the audience in the characters' experiences. His storytelling is shaped mainly by a first-person perspective, allowing the spectator to witness events as the protagonist perceives them. This approach fosters a deeper emotional connection between the viewer and the characters, as it limits the narrative to what the characters themselves see, hear, and feel. Unlike some directors who experiment with omniscient viewpoints, Gyang rarely employs third-person perspectives or surreal storytelling devices such as dreams, trances, or visions. His stories unfold in real time, keeping the audience grounded in the immediate reality of the characters. In *The Lost Café*, the cinematography enhances the film's introspective and personal nature. The camera frequently lingers on Ose's expressions, capturing her moments of contemplation, pain, and self-discovery. Close-up shots are particularly effective in portraying her emotions, while medium and long shots are used to establish her surroundings—whether the cozy café in Norway or the bustling streets of Nigeria. The smooth and deliberate camera movements mirror the film's reflective tone, reinforcing the themes of identity and healing.

Conversely, *Oloture* employs a more dynamic and urgent visual style to match the film's gritty and suspenseful atmosphere. Handheld camera techniques and tight framing create a sense of claustrophobia and anxiety, making the audience feel as trapped as the protagonist. Gyang utilizes shaky, documentary-style camerawork in critical moments to heighten the realism, giving the impression that the viewer is not merely watching a film but witnessing an unfolding reality. The strategic use of long shots also helps to contrast the illusion of freedom with the harsh confinement faced by the characters. In both films, Gyang makes optimal use of primary shots—close-ups, medium shots, and long shots—while ensuring that the spatial movements of the camera serve the narrative rather than being merely aesthetic choices. Whether through the calm, reflective framing in *The Lost Café* or the intense, immersive angles in *Oloture*, his camera work remains a fundamental tool in shaping the audience's engagement with the story. Through his meticulous shot compositions and movement choices, he reinforces his commitment to realism, ensuring that each frame aligns with the emotional and thematic essence of his films.

Editing

Kenneth Gyang's editing style plays a crucial role in shaping the narrative structure of his films, compensating for what is left out in camerawork. He employs elliptical editing, a technique that condenses time by omitting unnecessary details while preserving the

narrative's essence. As defined by Bordwell and Thompson, elliptical editing "presents an action in such a way that it consumes less time on the screen than it does in the story" (283). This technique enables Gyang to streamline his storytelling, ensuring that only the most essential moments are presented to the audience, while omitting extraneous details that could slow down the pacing. In *The Lost Café*, Gyang strategically omits certain events, such as the specifics of how Ose's father acquired the camera for her or the details of her travel preparations before leaving for Norway. Instead of dwelling on these backstory elements, he drops hints and allows the audience to piece together the narrative. This creates an air of mystery and intrigue, keeping viewers engaged while maintaining the film's dreamlike and introspective quality. The transitions between scenes are smooth, often blending past and present events to highlight Ose's emotional journey.

Similarly, in *Oloture*, Gyang uses elliptical editing to intensify the film's tension and urgency. Rather than showing every step of the protagonist's descent into the dark world of human trafficking, he selectively presents key moments that drive the narrative forward. The film jumps between different phases of Oloture's undercover journey, often cutting abruptly between scenes of danger, survival, and fleeting hope. These jump cuts and time compressions heighten the film's emotional impact, reinforcing the unpredictability and peril of the protagonist's world. Gyang also makes effective use of juxtapositions in his editing, arranging his shots in ways that enhance the overall message of his films. In *The Lost Café*, he contrasts the warmth and serenity of the café with Ose's internal struggles, using editing to highlight the stark differences between physical space and emotional state. In *Oloture*, he juxtaposes moments of apparent normalcy with sudden bursts of violence and despair, creating a jarring yet powerful storytelling rhythm. Through his mastery of elliptical editing and seamless transitions, Gyang crafts narratives that are both engaging and thought-provoking. His editing choices serve not only to maintain pacing and suspense but also to enhance thematic depth, ensuring that his films remain visually compelling and emotionally resonant.

Cultural Inclination

Kenneth Gyang's approach to cultural representation in his films is distinct from that of filmmakers like Tunde Kelani, who focus on traditional Nigerian heritage. Instead, Gyang celebrates a hybridized, modern Nigerian culture, one that blends indigenous traditions with foreign influences. His films explore contemporary Nigerian society, where global and local cultures coexist, creating a unique cultural identity that resonates with modern audiences. Rather than being bound by personal cultural experiences, Gyang strives to make his work universal, addressing themes that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries. In *The Lost Café*, this cultural duality is evident in the protagonist Ose's journey from Nigeria to Norway. The film juxtaposes the experiences of a young Nigerian woman navigating a foreign land with her deep-rooted connection to her homeland. Ose's struggle with identity, belonging, and societal expectations reflects the experiences of many young Nigerians caught between local traditions and global aspirations. The café itself, a mystical space run by a wise old woman, serves as a metaphor for cultural fusion—a place where past, present, and future converge. Through this setting, Gyang subtly emphasizes how cultural influences shape personal growth and self-discovery.

In *Oloture*, Gyang tackles the dark side of cultural hybridity, particularly the consequences of globalization and economic desperation. The film explores the grim reality of sex trafficking, a transnational issue rooted in both local socio-economic struggles and global exploitation. While the story is firmly set in Nigeria, its themes of migration, survival, and the commodification of women are universal. Gyang portrays a Nigeria where Western aspirations and materialism clash with harsh socio-political realities. The young women in

the film, including Oloture, are driven by the dream of a better life abroad, but this pursuit is tainted by deception and exploitation. Despite addressing serious socio-cultural themes, Gyang neither romanticizes nor demonizes either Nigerian or foreign cultures. Instead, he presents an exploration of how modern Nigerians navigate multiple cultural influences, sometimes embracing them, sometimes struggling against them. His storytelling reflects a Nigeria that is evolving, neither fully traditional nor completely Westernized, but a complex intersection of the two. Through *The Lost Café* and *Oloture*, Gyang highlights the fluid nature of cultural identity, demonstrating how personal and national histories intertwine with contemporary global realities.

Conclusion

Kenneth Gyang's directorial style in *The Lost Café* and *Oloture* exemplifies the evolving artistic and technical sophistication in Nollywood. His approach to storytelling, visual composition, and character development demonstrates a commitment to elevating Nigerian cinema beyond its traditional limitations. By employing a mix of realism and stylized cinematic techniques, Gyang crafts narratives that are not only engaging but also socially and emotionally resonant. His films stand out for their strong thematic depth, exploring issues such as migration, identity, exploitation, and systemic corruption with a distinct visual and narrative flair. As Nollywood competes on a global scale, directors like Gyang showcase how innovative filmmaking techniques, compelling narratives, and strong thematic depth can redefine the industry's artistic identity, positioning it as a formidable force in world cinema.

Gyang's work highlights the importance of directorial vision in shaping film aesthetics and audience engagement. His use of cinematic language, from carefully composed shots to nuanced performances, reflects a dedication to storytelling that resonates both locally and internationally. Through his meticulous attention to framing, lighting, and sound design, he creates immersive cinematic experiences that draw audiences into the emotional and psychological worlds of his characters. Moreover, his ability to blend traditional African storytelling elements with contemporary cinematic styles underscores the potential for Nollywood to forge a unique artistic identity that strikes a balance between authenticity and global appeal. As Afolabi Adesanya and other industry stakeholders have emphasized, the future of Nollywood depends on continuous refinement in production quality, narrative depth, and technical execution. The success of films like *The Lost Café* and *Oloture* underscores the need for Nigerian filmmakers to embrace meticulous directing, well-balanced cinematography, and authentic storytelling to position Nollywood on the global cinematic stage.

While external funding and collaborations can provide opportunities for distribution and exposure, Nollywood must remain self-sustaining to preserve its creative autonomy. The case of Francophone African cinema serves as a cautionary tale, where over-reliance on foreign funding has often dictated the kind of stories told and the manner in which they are presented. Gyang's directorial choices serve as a model for how Nollywood can achieve excellence through visionary leadership, technical mastery, and culturally grounded narratives. Rather than seeking external validation, Nigerian filmmakers should explore local funding opportunities, private investments, and strategic industry collaborations to maintain ownership over their creative expressions. Furthermore, partnerships for distribution, rather than production control, as seen in Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace* (2006), provide a sustainable path forward. As the industry moves forward, fostering directorial innovation, investing in high-quality productions, and strengthening local industry structures will ensure Nollywood's continued relevance and growth in the global film landscape.

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