



## In Search of Nationhood: Reading Funke Akindele's *A Tribe Called Judah* As National Film

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### Abstract

*Nollywood's unprecedented level of narrative sophistication, coupled with aesthetic and artistic appeal, has initiated a conversation on rethinking the definition of a national film. This study takes a critical look at Funke Akindele's (2023) film, A Tribe Called Judah and attempts to read it as a national film. Set against the backdrop of Nigerian society grappling with the complexities of ethnic disunity and economic survival, corruption and distrust, the film serves as a poignant narrative that delves into the themes of identity, cultural diversity, ethnic dichotomy, family unity and the journey towards national reconciliation. Importantly, the film's narrative structure, character development, and symbolic elements, mirror the challenges and aspirations faced by citizens in contemporary Nigerian society in their pursuit of a cohesive national identity, thus the film could be read as a national film. Employing cultural and post-colonial theories, the study examines the film's contribution to the discourse on nation building and national identity. As a qualitative study dependent on bibliotheca tools, the paper presents the film as a national film that not only entertains but also challenges its viewers to reflect on the essence of nationhood, the value of ethnic diversity and the on-going quest for a harmonious national narrative in an increasingly fragmented world. We therefore argue for more encompassing definitions of national films.*

**Keywords:** Nationhood, National Film, Nollywood, Ethnicity, Identity, A Tribe Called Judah.

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### Introduction

The search for nationhood and identity has become prominent themes in many Nollywood movies. These themes are often explored through narratives that delve into the socio-political and cultural intricacies of society. The connection between nationhood and identity is complex, as individuals often derive a sense of identity from their national affiliation, while nations are built on a shared

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sense of identity among their citizens (Smith, 1991). This mutual influence according to Anderson (1993), can lead to the reinforcement of national identities through cultural practices, symbols, and narratives that serve to strengthen the bond between individuals and their nation. Nollywood is a cultural reflection of nationhood in that it plays a significant role in shaping the nationhood and identity of Nigeria. As one of the largest film industries globally, Nollywood not only entertains but also serves as a powerful medium for expressing and reinforcing Nigerian cultural values, traditions, and national identity. Through its prolific output of movies, Nollywood reflects the diversity, complexity, and dynamism of Nigerian society, contributing to a shared sense of nationhood among its people. According to Inside Nollywood (2023)

One of the unique strengths of Nollywood lies in its ability to portray stories that reflect the diverse experiences of Nigerians. By showcasing narratives from different regions, ethnicities, and backgrounds, Nollywood celebrates the country's rich cultural tapestry. Through these diverse storylines, Nigerians from various regions can see their realities represented on the screen, fostering a sense of inclusion and validation (p.1).

Funke Akindele's *A Tribe called Judah* is a 2023 Nollywood film that has attracted attention for its portrayal of a family's quest for identity, cultural integration, sacrifice, economic survival and nationhood. The film serves as a metaphorical channel through which the theme of nationhood can be examined through the co-existence of different tribes under one roof united by their single mother. This single mother called Jedidah Judah in this study represents the Nigerian nation made up of different ethnic groups. Like the Nigerian State, Jeddah's children did not choose their tribe but became who they are by virtue of their birth. Despite their fathers coming from different tribes and tongues, their mother like Nigeria becomes the unifying factor ensuring that they remain one indivisible entity. This reading seeks to unravel how such narratives contribute to the understanding of nationhood. Falola, (2003) posits that Nigeria's nationhood has been shaped by a complex history of colonization, independence struggles, and diverse cultural influences. Similarly, Nnoli (1980) maintains that the country's national identity is characterized by a rich tapestry of ethnic groups, languages, and traditions. This diversity has both enriched and complicated the process of nation-building in Nigeria.

In the context of *A Tribe Called Judah*; the film can be seen as a narrative channel through which the complexities of nationhood are explored, including the tensions between unity and sacrifice, the individual and community, and the past and the present. Furthermore, the concept of ‘imagined communities’ proposed by Anderson (1993) is crucial in understanding the construction of nationhood in cinema. Anderson argues that members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. *A Tribe called Judah* can be seen as contributing to this imagined community by providing a shared story and cultural touchstones for its audience, thus facilitating a sense of belonging and identity. Moreover, by engaging with Anderson’s (1993) notion of imagined communities, this reading seeks to understand how the film contributes to the “imagining and reimagining of the nation, crafting a collective identity that transcends ethnic, cultural and historic divides” (Castello, 2016; Flohr 2023).

The quest for nationhood and the intricate process of national identity formation are central themes within cultural and post-colonial studies, offering profound insights into how narratives and cultural productions mediate and construct national consciousness. This study situates itself at the intersection, exploring the representation of nationhood within the cinematic experience. This argument is particularly pertinent in the context of post –colonial societies, where cinema not only reflects but also actively participates in the nation-building process (Anderson, 1993; Bhabha, 1994). Films, as cultural artifacts, provide a fertile ground for the negotiation of national identity, embodying and projecting the tensions, aspirations and contradictions inherent in the search for a cohesive national narrative. The film emerges as critical text for this exploration, serving as a channel through which the complexities of national identity can be examined in the post-colonial context. Drawing upon Bhabhs’s (1994) concept of “nation as narration,” this study interrogates how the film constructs a narrative of nationhood that is both inclusive and contested, reflecting the diverse nature of Nigeria’s national identity. This paper therefore examines how Akindele's narrative delves into the search for nationhood, highlighting the struggles and aspirations of the characters. By reading the film through the view of cultural and post-colonial theories, this study not only sheds light on the film’s narrative and aesthetic strategies but also on its significance as a national film that articulates a vision of nationhood resonant with the challenges and possibilities of the post- colonial Nigeria.

## **Conceptualization of Nationhood and National Identity**

The term nationhood and identity have been associated with controversy ever since the idea of national identity became the central focus of collective identities (Hungwe & Hungwe, 2010). This according to Ekeh (2018) is even more problematic in post-colonial Africa, with multiple cases of identity crisis, borne out of slavery, imperialism and colonial induced collective self-alienation (p.416). To understand them involves a conceptual clarification of the terms ‘Nationhood’ and ‘identity’. It is a known fact that Nigeria’s journey to nationhood and identity is multi-dimensional due to her ethnic diversity. Nationhood and identity in the context of this study will be operationalized to drive home the idea of nationhood as exemplified in the film. To achieve this, there is the need to also understand the meaning of nationhood. According to Migration Research Hub, nationhood refers to the status of belonging to a nation (state) or to a national identity. Nigeria’s nationhood and national identity are complex and multifaceted concepts that are shaped by historical, cultural, and political factors especially in the post-independence era. Ekeh (2018) asserts that:

Since 1960, Nigerian leaders have made efforts to manage first, the colonial established nation-state, then, secondly, to construct a cohesive Nigerian nation or nationhood. This task has been arduous, considering the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria’s about 400 ethnic nationalities. The differences in language, ethnicity, religion and culture have posed a major threat to the process of nation-building. This is even more problematic with Nigeria’s postcolonial inheritance of ethnic mistrust and suspicion, resulting to among other things, the intense and fratricidal struggle for political power. Consequently, Nigeria continues to witness the establishment of politically motivated centers of opposition and resistance, which obstruct and inhibit her struggle for genuine nation-building (p.413).

The heterogeneous ethnic groups with different dialects, culture and religion has impeded Nigeria’s journey towards genuine nationhood. This is further deepened by political gladiators who vehemently oppose power rotation thereby causing a feeling of disunity among the other tribes of Nigeria. However, one key aspect of Nigeria's nationhood is the challenge of forging a unified national identity amidst ethnic and religious diversity (Suberu, 2001). Isamah (2023) argues that the proliferation of ethnic identities and the unequal distribution of resources have often led to tensions and conflicts within the country. The notion of nationhood in Nigeria is further complicated by questions of citizenship and belonging (Adepoju, 2012). The historical marginalization of certain ethnic groups and regions has created deep-seated grievances that

continue to impact the country's sense of national unity (Ibeanu, 2008). Despite these challenges, Nigeria's nationhood is also marked by resilience and a shared sense of cultural pride (Nzewi, 2017). Many Nigerians identify strongly with their cultural heritage and celebrate the country's rich diversity as a source of strength and national identity (Otomewo, 2019).

The paper will not examine the complexities associated with Nigeria's journey to nationhood but rather examines the film with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of the inherent factors and opportunities that qualify it as a national film and how it could be employed, to construct nationhood and identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Culture is the backbone of every society and defines how people operate in a given space. The Nigerian nation is replete with different cultures reflecting the different ethnicities and their way of life. In view of this, this study adopted the cultural and postcolonial theories in analyzing how culture like beliefs, tradition, values, and narratives shape individuals and societies, examining how cultural norms, codes and practices influence human behaviour and identity. On the other hand, post-colonial theory underscores the enduring influence of colonial legacies and the resistance against Western dominance in cultural production. Examining the role of the characters in reshaping Nigerian storytelling traditions, would help to highlight the complexities of cultural hybridity, identity, and decolonization in the context of nationhood. Osaghae cited in Chigozie (2019) asserts that Nigerian state like most African states and developing countries is a product of colonialism (p.95). Applying post-colonial theories to the analysis of the film reveals themes of subversion and resistance against colonial legacies. Post-colonial scholars like Said (1979) and Spivak (1988) scrutinize the dynamics of power and privilege between colonizers and the colonized. The film portrays the tribe's struggle against external threats to their lives and internal divisions, mirroring the larger historical context of decolonization. Through acts of defiance and collective resilience, the characters resist the dominant colonial narrative exhibited by C & K Furniture Company and assert their position to shape their own survival strategy and national identity. This is what Spivak (1988) regards as colonial histories and power dynamics that influence the interactions between the characters and external forces. In *A Tribe Called Judah*, one could identify how power dynamics play out between the Boss of C & K Furniture and his staff,

between Collette, the Company Secretary and her junior colleagues, between Emeka and his siblings and between Jedidah and Daddy Michael, shedding light on issues of identity, representation, and resistance in a postcolonial context. All of these issues are incorporated based on the themes of nationhood, cultural theory/heritage, identity formation, and post-colonial perspectives helping to highlight the complexities of the film and its broader socio-cultural implications.

Cultural theory analysis is a reflection of the character's collective identity and the preservation of their cultural heritage. It examines how culture shapes individuals and societies and how identities are constructed and negotiated. In Yoruba tradition like most other African societies, it is a taboo for an under aged girl to get pregnant out of wedlock. Based on this, Jedidah's father had to disown her and she had to go and live with her aunt in Kano from where she met Adamu's Father. It is the same religious and cultural beliefs that truncated the marriage between Jedidah and Adamu's father as his parents vehemently opposed their son marrying a Yoruba single mother. Through cinematography, set design, and costumes, the film visually represents the character's identity, indigenous art forms, and traditional way of life. Cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha examine the complex interplay between culture, identity, and power. This theory encompasses the study of symbolic systems, cultural artifacts, social practices and the production of meaning within societies. In applying these perspectives, the paper reveals how the film portrays the tribe's cultural practices as a source of resilience and identity reclamation in the face of external pressures. This analysis has highlighted the significance of *A Tribe Called Judah* from the perspectives of cultural theory and post-colonial perspectives. The film's narrative structure, visual representation of cultural heritage, and themes of resistance align with discussions surrounding nationhood, identity formation, and the subversion of colonial legacies. No doubt, these theories offer valuable insights into the complexities of national identity and the preservation of cultural heritage in a post-colonial world by analyzing how the depiction of the character's customs, language, and traditions influences their actions and relationships with each other, providing a deeper understanding of the cultural context within which the story unfolds.

The application of the cultural and postcolonial theories to the analysis of the film, uncover layers of meaning related to culture, identity, power, and representation, offering valuable insights into the film's narrative, characters and themes.

### ***A Tribe Called Judah: A Synopsis***

The story centers on a single mother, Jedidah Judah who has five sons fathered by five different men from five different tribes in Nigeria. Each of the sons has unique character traits and identity reflecting their persona. The first son Emeka 35 is of Igbo tribe while Adamu the second son 32, is Hausa. Both are gainfully employed and strive diligently to support their mother who also does her tricycle business diligently. The third and fourth sons Pere 30, is of Ijaw tribe and engages in pick pocketing just as Shina 27, is Yoruba, a tout and always causing their mother pain and embarrassment. Ejiro the last born is 25 years old and of Urhobo tribe. His birth came through a bar romance and a one-night stand during the peak of Jedidah depression. He is an artist by profession but somehow naughty and only cares about his girlfriend, Testimony. Jedidah has so much love for her sons and continues to support and pray for them in spite of their negative tendencies.

Jedidah remains committed to her keke business and even extends financial support to neighbours in need. As a result of her addiction to alcohol, Jedidah suddenly develops a chronic kidney disease, needing ₦18 million to pay for her operation and another ₦400,000 for weekly dialysis. In their effort to raise the money, the first son, Emeka, loses his job at C&K Furniture despite his hard work. When all effort to raise the money required for their mother's treatment fails, rather than let their mother die, they resolve to rob Emeka's ex-boss, who is alleged to be involved in money laundering in order to save their mother's life. However, the robbery operation took a dramatic turn when they encounter another gang of armed robbers at the scene. The ensuing gun duel leads to Emeka's death which put his family in deep misery and in the eyes of the law. As the Police investigate the robbery of C&K Furniture Company, Jedidah and her children with the support of Shina's gang relocate out of town to evade police arrest and avoid further complexities in the robbery operation just as the boss of C&K Furniture is arrested for money laundering.

### **Materials and Methods:**

This study involves a critical reading and analysis of the filmic text in order to explore how the film navigates the intricacies of nationhood, ethnicity, unity, sacrifice, identity and survival, offering a cinematic reflection on the narrative structure, character development to forging a unified national consciousness.



## **Narrative Structure and Style**

Narrative structure and style in film are essential elements that contribute to the overall storytelling and impact of a movie (Bordwell, 2008). It refers to the way in which a story is organized and presented to the audience, including the sequence of events, plot development, and narrative techniques used by filmmakers (Bordwell & Thompson, 2010). The style of a film encompasses various aspects such as cinematography, editing, sound design, and visual aesthetics, all of which play a crucial role in conveying the director's artistic vision and enhancing the narrative experience for viewers (Bordwell, 2012). Filmmakers often use different stylistic elements to create a unique visual and emotional impact, allowing them to engage audiences on a deeper level (Branigan, 1992). In terms of narrative structure, films can adopt different approaches such as linear, non-linear, episodic, or fragmented narratives, each influencing how the story unfolds and how audiences perceive and interpret it (Chatman, 1978). The narrative style of a film, on the other hand, encompasses choices in lighting, framing, camera movement, and sound design that shape the overall look and feel of the movie (Bordwell & Thompson, 2013). The ability of filmmakers to consider both narrative structure and style, enables them to craft compelling stories that resonate with viewers, evoke emotional responses, and leave a lasting impression on the audience (Bordwell, 2006). These elements work in tandem to create a cohesive and immersive cinematic experience that captivates audiences and enhances the storytelling process. It is important to consider how the story in *A Tribe Called Judah* unfolds, and the techniques used by the filmmaker to convey the themes and messages of the film. The movie follows a non-linear path, incorporating flashbacks and good storyline that reveals the complexities of the characters and their interconnected lives. The narrative technique allows the audience to piece together the underlying motivations and relationships of the characters, enhancing the depth of the storytelling.

The film employs a blend of traditional African storytelling elements and contemporary cinematic techniques to create a visually captivating and culturally authentic viewing experience. The use of different locations, tribal dialects of even some minority groups, traditional theme songs, tribal costumes and simple everyday/colourful costumes not only enhances the visual aesthetics of the film, but also serves to immerse the audience in the rich cultural tapestry of the narrative. According to Akindele & Owu, (2023), cited in Lazarus (2006), the film utilizes a familiar yet



effective narrative structure which follows a three-act format highlighting exposition, confrontation and resolution. In the first place, Jeddah is introduced as a strong single mother, with her five sons, endowed with distinct personalities and ethnic backgrounds. This act establishes the central conflict compounded by Jedidah's illness and the financial strain it places on the family. Next, the family is confronted with mounting medical bills, the sons, despite their individual flaws; unite to plan a daring heist (Olajide, 2023). This act builds tension and suspense as the brothers confront the risks and ethical dilemmas of their plan in a climatic denouement. The crisis unfolds with unexpected twists and consequences which could only be resolved with their escape. The film's style is a captivating blend of genres. Akindele and Owu (2023) masterfully weave elements of drama, comedy, and suspense. Lighthearted moments between the brothers provide comic relief, while the looming threat of Jedidah's illness and the danger of the situation create a sense of urgency and tension. This genre-blending approach keeps the audience engaged and interested in the characters' journey.

It is evident that the narrative structure of the film serves as a vehicle for exploring the formation of a national identity. The Judah family is a composition of the different tribes in Nigeria reflected in the identity of her five boys. Also, Jedidah's mother is of Igbo tribe married to a Yoruba man. Even Jedidah's neighborhood and Shino's gang comprises people of diverse ethnicities. There are the major ethnic tribes -Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and also a reflection of the minority group of Ijaw, Urhobo, Efik and Oron. Jedidah's family houses what Sergio Leone 1966 movie describes as; the good, the bad and the ugly. The film presents a diverse group of characters who come together with a common goal of preserving their unity and reclaiming their tribal identity. Incorporating concepts from narrative theory, the film illustrates the struggles, sacrifices, and triumphs inherent in the nation-building process. The film adopts the storytelling narrative technique and flashback. Nevertheless, the narrative structure and style of *A Tribe called Judah* work cohesively to create a compelling and immersive cinematic experience that engages the audience on both an emotional and cultural level.

### **Character Analysis**

There are several characters in the film, but this study concentrates mainly on Jedidah, her five sons, Testimony, Collete and Chidokie, the Chairman of C& K Furniture because these characters

particularly help to advance the reading of the film as a national film. At the heart of the movie lies the compelling story of a single mother Jedidah Judah (Funke Akindele) grappling with five troublesome children in her daily strive for survival. The character of Jedidah portrays a prayerful mother who trusts in God for the protection of her family. Jedidah is a strong woman who works hard to cater for her children and will go to any length to defend and protect her children even at the expense of her life. At one incident, she submits herself to be burnt by the angry mob that threatens to burn her son, Pere for stealing. Jedidah is kind and her kindness are extended to the women in the community through loan advancement to assist them in their petty trading business. Although maltreated by life and lives in a ghetto, Jedidah is a no-nonsense mother and disciplinarian. She corrects, advises and disciplines her children with love. Above all, she is proud of her sons who she describes as “Jedidah five boys” irrespective of their different biological fathers, ethnic background and shortcomings. Her tragic flaw is her addiction to alcohol which affected her kidney and subsequently led to the death of her first son, Emeka and deprived the family of solitude. Jedidah’s motherhood to her children and even those in the neighborhood can be likened to that of the Nigerian state comprising diverse ethnicities and despite their differences in tribe and religion still strive to achieve unity and cohesion among them, fostering a sense of shared identity and belonging among all Nigerians.

The character of Emeka (Jide Kene Achufusi) is that of a responsible young man who believes in himself and what the future holds for him. As a sales representative in a furniture company, he does his work with humility, diligence, honesty and respect to the authorities. He loves and cares for his mother and will do anything except robbery to ensure that his mother recovers from her ailment. He lost his job in his effort to raise money for his mother’s treatment. He is also a disciplinarian and always plays the ‘big brother’ role to his siblings. Emeka is a true reflection of an Igbo youth spirit of resilience, of not giving up even in the face of adversary. He works hard to realize his dream of travelling abroad for greener pastures but which was prematurely aborted. Emeka seamlessly embraces his Igbo identity, adding authenticity to his portrayal of the character.

Adamu (Uzee Usman) is another responsible son of Jedidah who works as security guard in a mall. He shows dedication and commitment to his job and always at his duty post. He is very supportive to his family and at one time tries to inquire from his mother about his root or father’s identity but

his mother will not want to be reminded of her past. For the love of his mother, he did not hesitate to sell the robbery plan to his colleagues and lure his brothers into it as a way to raise money for their mother's treatment. Adamu also embodies his character with unapologetic dedication, a reflection of an educated Hausa youth working hard to earn a living.

Pere (Timini Egbuson) is a habitual pick pocket or better still a thief whose daily life is on the street. He almost lost his life in one of his escapades but for the timely intervention of his mother. He is the brain behind the robbery of C&K Furniture and marshals out the strategies for successful operation. Pere delivers a captivating performance to portray his character as a pick pocket even as this behavior among Nigerian youths is highly condemnable.

Shina (Tobi Makinde), is a school dropout, a tout or what the Yoruba's call 'agbero' who go about breaking into people's shops to loot and destroy. He always smokes weed 'igbo' to the chagrin of his grandmother who threatens to take him and Pere to Aba for proper home tanning. He gets arrested for break and entry but later gets bailed by his mother. Shina, portrays a hoodlum with a comedic touch. His character resonates with many Nigerian helpless youths who do not have education or legitimate source of livelihood thereby exposing their lives to grave risks.

Ejiro (Olumide Oworu) is the last born of the family and somewhat naughty and mischievous. He is a kind of self-centered person whose only interest is his paintings and girlfriend-Testimony. Ejiro, the mischievous last born and lover boy, exhibits passion for Testimony that he could not relocate to Aba with his family without her.

Testimony (Genoviva Umeh) is Ejiro's girlfriend and sticks around him like a leech. She loves Ejiro with a passion and is willing to go extra miles with him to raise money for his mother's treatment including taking her brother's cab known as 'cabu cabu' in the Nigerian context to do transportation or some 'runs' to raise money for Ejiro. She also bravely joins in the robbery operation risking her life for her boyfriend. Her love for Ejiro is that of true and unconditional love.

Beyond the Judah family, is the character of Chidokie (UzorArukwe), the Chairman of C & K Furniture. As the protagonist, he uses his company for money laundering. He is Emeka's boss and

a very shrewd and stingy business man. His portrayal of the loud semi-literate Igbo businessman with struggling English and a perpetually effervescent personality is a true reflection of a typical Igbo business man. He is blunt, insensitive, heartless and wicked business man. However, his ability to inject humour into serious situations underscores the complexity of his character, making him simultaneously entertaining and formidable.

Collette (Ntse Etim) works for C & K Furniture. She is heartless, arrogant and snobbish especially to her junior workers. She cares for none other than her Company. With the power she has, she fires Emeka from the company irrespective of his family predicament. She collaborates with a gang of robbers to rob her boss and pays dearly for her actions.

### **Thematic Thrust of *A Tribe Called Judah***

The film explores different themes such as those of cultural diversity, ethnic dichotomy, family unity and survival, money laundering among others. These themes clearly resonate with the audience and the characters portraying the different roles. However, the themes of unity and identity are central to the storyline of the film exploring how the characters navigate their sense of self within the context of their community and cultural heritage. This could be seen in the scene where Daddy Michael assaults and threatens to beat up Jedidah for allegedly introducing his wife to different men for money. Ejiro puts a call through to his brothers and within seconds they gather in unity from different locations to defend their mother. Another example is when Jedidah is diagnosed of chronic kidney disease. The children rally round against all odds to raise money for their mother's treatment. Again, unity of purpose is exhibited during, before, and after the robbery operation. The theme of unity is clearly depicted through the interconnected relationships of the characters and their shared experiences that bind them together despite their ideological differences. Nigeria has since independence grappled with ethnic divisions, religious bigotry, nepotism and cultural diversity which have further widened the gap of unity and progress in the country. The three major ethnic groups have had cause to clamour for restructuring in order for justice equity and fairness to prevail in the regions. There have been pockets of ethnic violence in the North, South, East and West leading to loss of lives and destruction of properties. But despite their differences, whenever the nation is confronted with international engagements like sports, all

the regions will rise as one nation to celebrate their wins or losses. The film highlights the importance of solidarity and cooperation in overcoming challenges and celebrating the strengths of a united family.

Additionally, the theme of identity is woven throughout the narrative as the characters grapple with their personal histories, cultural traditions, and societal expectations. Jedidah never ceases to remind her children and anybody who cares to listen of belonging to Judah family which is Yoruba. The film delves into the complexities of individual identity formation within the broader framework of community values and collective identity, showcasing the struggles and triumphs of individuals seeking to reconcile their past with their present realities. A typical example is Adamu who requests to know from his mother his father's place of origin in Kano while being a guest to the family of his fiancée from the North. He requires the information to enable him provide answers to the prying questions from his fiancée's father. But Jedidah would not want to be reminded of her ugly past. Through its exploration of themes, the film offers a varied reflection of the ways in which individuals navigate their sense of self within the context of their community, ultimately underscoring the significance of collective identity in shaping individual experiences and perceptions. For instance, in disaster situations, Nigerians have come together to support each other especially during natural disasters, like floods, bomb explosion, victims of insurgency, and even the recent global COVID 19 epidemic. Nigerians sacrificed resources and time to help those affected.

### **Theme of Sacrifice:**

The theme of sacrifice is prominently featured throughout the narrative, serving as a driving force behind the characters' actions and the overall plot development. Jedidah and her sons for instance are depicted making personal sacrifices for the greater good of their family in particular and the community at large, highlighting the importance of selflessness and devotion to a cause. Emeka sacrifices his life for his mother to stay alive, Jedidah sacrifices to keep her family in unity and love. Jedidah also sacrifices by lending money to women in the community to start petty trading and pay school fees at the expense of her little resources. This act of self-sacrifice demonstrates her commitment to the well-being of her community, even at great personal cost. To further

connect this discourse to nationhood and individual sacrifices, instances abound where the Nigerian youths have sacrificed their comfort, lives and time in the service of their fatherland under the egis of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) irrespective of tribal and religious differences all of which is geared towards achieving unity and national development. During election period, many of the youth corps members are used for election duties thereby sacrificing their time and safety to ensure the success of elections even in challenging environments. Also, there is the Military service where Nigerian soldiers risk their lives beyond ethnicity to fight insecurity and protect the country from internal and external threats thereby making the ultimate sacrifices and several other instances which cannot be mentioned here due to space. Furthermore, the theme of sacrifice is also portrayed through the struggles and hardships faced by the characters as they navigate social and economic challenges in their quest for survival. Each sacrifice made by the characters underscores the overarching message of the film, emphasizing the importance of perseverance, courage, and selflessness in the face of adversity.

### **Symbolic Elements and Metaphors in the Film**

Symbolic elements in filmmaking play a crucial role in conveying themes, emotions, and deeper layers of meaning to the audience. According to Murray (2011), these symbols can be visual, auditory, or narrative representations that carry significance beyond their literal interpretation. Filmmakers incorporate symbolic elements to imbue their work with varied, cultural references and universal themes that resonate with viewers on a subconscious level.

Symbolism in film has been studied by scholars such as Pierce (2007) who argue that symbols act as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious realms, inviting viewers to decode hidden meanings and engage with the narrative at a deeper level. Through the use of visual metaphors, recurring motifs, and allegorical storytelling, filmmakers can evoke complex emotions, provoke thought, and amplify the impact of their message (Tomasulo & Lewis, 2018). Going further, Barthes (1977) suggests that symbols in film operate as signifiers that point to broader concepts, ideologies, or cultural norms. These shared cultural codes and visual languages create a rich tapestry of meanings that transcend linguistic barriers and resonate with diverse audiences (Smith, 2009). In the light of the above, symbolic elements serve as powerful tools for filmmakers to communicate complex ideas, evoke emotions, and enhance the artistic experience for viewers.

Several symbolic elements used in the film to add depth and layers to the storytelling include the following:

**Visual Symbolism:** The way and manner the scenes are shot and framed as well as the use of camera angles and movements to create a visual impact goes a long way to talk about the cinematography. Again, the clothing worn by characters and the design of the sets enhance the visual storytelling and create a perfect atmosphere for the various actions. There is also the use of light and colour scheme to create mood and highlight specific elements in the scene as well as contribute to the overall visual aesthetic and convey specific emotions.

**Ritual objects:** This is represented with a bottle of olive oil suggestive of Jedidah's Christian faith. Consecrated olive oil is believed to be sacred and holy. It is one of the icons used by Jedidah to anoint and protect her children against evil forces and harm. This religious object represents her belief in God for protection of her family and for unity and strength of the tribe. This olive oil is depicted to represent a protective charm, a source of guidance, or a marker of spiritual significance for Jedidah and her family. Also, Ejiro's Art works portrays the life of poor and average Nigerians as well as symbolize Nigeria's cultural heritage.

**The Ancestral Spirit:** Jedidah's late father's voice from the past resonates in her dream reminding her of her father's resolute decision to disown her for getting pregnant as a teenager. This symbolic metaphor serves to guide and influence the actions of Jedidah and her children. The voice of her late father represents wisdom, legacy, or the consequences of past actions, shaping the present and future of the tribe.

**The Landscapes:** The film parades table land, forests and the rivers which serve as locations for the various actions in the movie. Nigerian landscape comprises tables land, rain forests and the riverine. This symbolizes various aspects of the characters' journeys, representing obstacles, connections, or the passage of time. Jedidah and her children walk through the bushy local roads via motorcycles to arrive at the harbor. The river landscape mirrors the life of Ijaw (creek) dwellers and serves as escape root for Jedidah and her family to evade arrest. It heightens the characters' growth and external challenges.



**The Colours:** Beautiful and varied colours characterize the film settings that make up the character's costumes especially during the costume party where the Jedidah boys, Testimony and other party guests parade different colourful costumes just as the C&K Furniture's settings and show room carry symbolic meaning of affluence, celebration of life, and vitality. The Police and the robbers' black costumes are also a reflection of the Nigerian Police uniform and those of the men of the underworld using overall and mask to shield their identity.

No doubt these symbolic elements as portrayed in the film enhance its narrative with deeper understanding of the meaning, cultural significance and thematic resonance, inviting viewers to reflect on the complexities of identity, tradition, and culture in the storytelling. Symbolic elements provide a sense of unity like the national flag and anthem, which unite Nigerians across cultural lines.

## **Results and Discussion:**

### **Reading *A Tribe Called Judah* as National Film**

Funke Akindele made a great attempt to present *A Tribe Called Judah*, as a national film by masterfully instilling numerous features that encapsulate people's quest for nationhood, drawing upon language usage, costumes, visual symbolism, and thematic motifs. Through these elements, the film explores the formation of a distinct national identity within a fictional tribal context. Its focus on preserving cultural heritage, overcoming adversity, and asserting sovereignty resonates with broader notions of national cinema. The paper therefore examines the role each of these elements play in categorizing the movie as national film.

**Language Usage:** The film is clearly scripted in both English language and Pidgin English. As a nation, English is the official language spoken across the six geopolitical zones and when dealing with official matters. Aside the official language, every minority tribe in Nigeria including the three major tribes of Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo has its own dialect resulting to the popular slang known as 'WAZOBIA'. 'Wa' is a Yoruba word meaning 'come', 'ZO' is a Hausa word meaning 'come' and 'Bia' is an Igbo word also meaning 'come'. WAZOBIA therefore is a combination of these words. In the movie under review, Funke Akindele effectively laced the English and pidgin languages with Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo languages including Ijaw and Calabar dialects as spoken

by the different characters. The adoption of multiple languages in the movie is a poignant portrayal of the movie as a national film since Nigeria is multilingual nation.

**The Tribal Costumes:** The characters' costumes symbolize their cultural heritage, lineage, and belonging to a specific tribe. For instance, When Adamu visits Halima's parents who are of Hausa tribe, his costume kaftan and embroidered cap clearly depicts his identity as those of his hosts from the Northern part of Nigeria. Their costumes serve as a reminder of their roots and traditions, connecting them to their ancestors and the history of their tribe. Also, Jedidah's mother's costumes made of blouse on wrapper with a head scarf is a reflection of a typical Igbo woman's attire while the Judah household rocks contemporary costumes as suggestive of the gen Z generation. The costume party parades different attires representing the different tribes of the country. There are party guests adorned in Hausa babariga and paired with rich embroidered hats known as fula. For the Fulani females, they appear in zani with matching head tie and shawl. The Yorubas wear agbada and sokoto for the males while the females have buba and iro. The Igbos adore george wrappers and blouses with head scarfs while their men appear in Ishi Agu and trousers with bead neckless. The young maidens appear in short george wrappers tied around the waist and chest adorned with coral beads The Ijaws dress in trousers and long sleeve shirts with a cloth on top and a hat while also capturing contemporary and carnival costumes. All of these costumes crafty deployed at the party clearly portrays the movie as a national film depicting Nigeria's rich cultures and traditions.

**The Music and Drumming:** The film's musical score and traditional drumming serve as symbolic elements, conveying emotions, rituals, and cultural identity. Jedidah in her good mood dances to a Yoruba music before her joy is cut short by the intrusion of Police Officers who come to arrest her son, Shino for being part of a gang that vandalized a truck carrying construction materials to site. The rhythms and melodies underscore key moments in the narrative, enhancing the thematic resonance of the story. Interestingly, these symbolic elements help preserve the history, traditions, music, songs and beliefs of various ethnic groups as well as foster identity by providing a sense of belonging and identity for individuals within their respective cultural groups. In furtherance to that, they promote unity by showcasing the rich diversity of Nigerian music, encouraging mutual respect and understanding, facilitating cultural exchange and learning as well as enriching

Nigeria's culture and language. Ejiro and Testimony during their beggars' day out sing both Igbo and Yoruba version of the same song while achieving their purpose.

All of these indicators work together to create a visually engaging and immersive experience to qualify the film as a national film. The reading of the film in this context becomes evident that the film serves as an essential contribution to the exploration of nationhood and the preservation of cultural heritage within the realm of national cinema.\

## **Conclusion**

No doubt, the film offers valuable insights into the complexities of nationhood and identity within the context of Nigerian cinema. Through a close reading of the film's narrative structure, language, visual imagery, thematic elements, and cultural representations, it becomes evident that the film serves as a reflection of the nation's historical and socio-cultural landscape. The paper's exploration of the themes of unity, sacrifice, and resilience in the movie not only entertains but also prompts viewers to contemplate the significance of national identity in a diverse and dynamic society. Ultimately, the film emerges as a powerful cinematic exploration of nationhood, calling on the people to engage in a thought-provoking dialogue about the multifaceted nature of Nigerian nationhood. The paper therefore recommends a more encompassing definition of national films devoid of every divisive mechanism.

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