

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Jelili Atiku is one of the prominent Nigerian performance artists and a multi-media kineasthetician known for his work, which is both intellectually challenging and visually exciting. Performance art is a non –traditional art form often with political, social, topical or conceptual themes that typically features live presentation to an audience or onlookers (as on a street) Merriam-Webster, (2026). Performance art is different from performing art which involves theatre and character representation. Jelili’s works have addressed traditional, environmental, global, socio-political and cultural issues. He uses different forms of art, such as site-specific installations, sculptures, video art, and live performances, to engage with and stimulate discussions on these topics.

One of the leading figures in this new wave of African visual culture is Jelili Atiku. Anchored in Yoruba culture and tradition, replete with social and historical undertones, his works are brimming with cultural symbolism, which he endows with deep messages throughout his performances. Often, one sees Atiku using creative possibilities or activist art realized through performances to express his discontent at the numerous abnormalities of our society. The themes of inequality, economic, political, and social breakdowns that define our modern society richly deepen or energize his understanding of the components and symbols used in his activist-based performances. This study explores the cultural symbolisms in the artistic performances of Jelili Atiku and their meanings in carrying out a social and political messages. Dictionary.com (2024) defines kineasthetics as movements or sensations especially within the body. As a kineasthetician Jelili understands how to position and use his body as an evocative multimedia conveyor that creates visually engaging forms in motion/action. As a multimedia artist all

categories of art practice falls within his purview as instruments of enactments and show. It is very important to know the contexts of the cultural symbols he uses which are making huge impacts on spectators and critics alike.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

A performance is an act of staging or presenting a play, show, concert or other forms of entertainment to an audience or onlookers. Jelili Atiku's works garners various areas of art into all his performances. This has not only raised questions from outsiders but has also titillated admiration from art industry professionals. Osaigbovo (2019) states that “the kinaesthetician is not just a performer, but also an art critic, an illustrator, a social critic and a social commentator who puts all paraphernalia of art to bear in his performance”. Performance art or artistic performance is an artwork or art exhibition created through actions executed by the artist or other participants. Visual artists use their bodies and presence to create dramatic works, often blending theatre, music, dance and visual art. It may be witnessed live or recorded and it is presented to the public in a fine art context in an interdisciplinary mode. Atiku’s delivery styles has continued to employ theatrical techniques of performance, as evidenced in the music, dance, sound effects, costume, drama, sculpture. His outlandish techniques are also showcased in his created props, installations and images, paintings; as portrayed in his body decorations and space colourings. He promotes culture; by exhibiting symbolic cultural elements and beliefs in his acts of social activism; as illustrated through mind blowing enactments on the streets, campuses, conferences, exhibitions and Humanity campaigns. Cultural symbolism is the use of shapes, colours, images, words, behaviours e.t.c which are essential elements within a culture that represents shared meanings, values and beliefs of members of such group to communicate identity, express intangible concepts of spirituality or tradition.

Jelili Atiku is a performance artist, known for the use of cultural symbolisms for his thought-provoking and visually engaging performances, delving into various socio-cultural issues. He has said on many occasions that the “core mission of his performances is to cause global and local peace, unity, progress, rule of law, justice, freedom, humanity, and happiness in people at large. One prominent show in point is his staging of “*Àràngàmàgò Will Rid this Land of Terrorism*” performance. Atiku responded to a disturbing and unfortunate incident that occurred in Ejigbo, his hometown in Lagos in 2016. Three women were accused of stealing pepper from the community's market. After being detained by self-described local king security men, they were tortured, molested, and sexually assaulted, including having a mixture of strong local liquor and chili powder injected into their private parts. Thus, the concert served as a protest against both internal and foreign terrorism. He used Yoruba motifs, including *Ofo/Àyájo* (holy, charged Yoruba phrases), *Ère Ibejè* (a wooden sculpture depicting a departed twin), a gong, and the colors black and red to emphasize the shy characters. More precisely Yoruba elements provided by the director consist of *Ofo/Àyájo*, sacred and charged words in Yoruba, big deity figure, *Èrè Ìbejì*, a wooden figure representing a deceased twin, a gong and the use of black and red cloth, apart from the procession mentioned which had *Orìta-Mwíta Ojú-Olúwa*, also known as the "Crossroads of God's. He called the king a domestic terrorist, so the king was not happy as a result. The king quickly ordered law enforcement to the site, gave misleading information, and demanded the arrest of Atiku, his relatives, and even the attendees.

The authority of the king was challenged after he was referred to as a mastermind of domestic terrorism at home, locally and internationally. In response, the authority released false reports to trap Atiku and his supporters. For a few days, there were incriminated detainees in one of the most notorious prison of Lagos-Kirikiri. They were subjected to gross, illegal persecution

by the local authorities for half a year, but at last, local and international advocacy and artistic groups, having intervened, the charges were dismissed.

To achieve such purposes, Atiku makes use of performance art as a tool, which prompts the viewer to take a critical look at the cruelties of the common man, to provoke someone to act, or to make an individual more aware of the negative impacts that society brings, to remind the authorities of their duties, and to challenge various governments. This is opposed to the performing and theatre arts, which strictly focus on entertaining, educating or both. Although performance art it is not a completely new concept in Nigeria, performance art has long been associated with theatre arts for too long (Atiku, 2024 oral interview). The history of performance art as a visual art form began in the early twentieth century on a global scale but began locally in Nigeria with the exploits of Taiwo Olaniyi, popularly known as Twin Seven Seven, in the 1960s, Jerry Buhari and Jacob Jari, in the 1990s (Janson and Janson 2002, Chilvers 2004). Performance art has faced low promotion over the years due to Africans' tendency to seek approval outside themselves, hence performance art low inclusion in Nigeria tertiary level visual art curriculum.

His works are chock-full with cultural symbolisms that reflect the simplicities of Yoruba traditional religion and culture as juxtaposed with the superficial complexities of local and global societal issues. This study therefore, explored and analyzed the cultural symbolisms embedded in his artistic performances in a bid to discover the deep rooted meanings and references of his works thereby correcting ill-informed public perceptions of his visual expressions. These cultural symbols are detectable through motifs, themes, work titles, contexts, words, traditional, and sacred elements engaged in his artworks and performances.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The study is set out to fill an observable gap in the comprehensive analysis of the cultural symbolisms in some of Jelili Atiku's performances. While his works have garnered attention for

its provocative stance, visual impact and thematic depth, there is a need to delve deeper into the cultural references, symbolisms and meanings embedded in his art to correct misconception. Misguided and ill-informed public perception of Jelili's subject context and thematically infused visual performances has led frequent misunderstandings (including his physical attacks, public revulsion and his arrests).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

1. Who is Jelili Atiku?
2. What is Jelili Atiku's performance philosophy and techniques?
3. What are the impacts of his performances on his audience perceptions/interpretation?
4. What are the cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's artistic performances?
5. How have these cultural symbols provoked social and political commentaries in Jelili Atiku's artistic performances?

### **1.4 Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine the cultural symbolisms of Jelili Atiku's artistic performances. The specific objectives include the followings:

1. To clearly identify who Jelili Atiku is
2. To determine Jelili Atiku's performance philosophy and techniques.
3. To highlight the impacts of his performances on his audience perceptions/interpretation.
4. To analyze the cultural symbolisms present in Jelili Atiku's artistic performances.
5. To clearly state the meanings/references of these symbolisms in provoking social and political commentaries.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it adds to the scholarship on contemporary African art history and cultural studies through a critical analysis of the cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's performances. This research study shall reflect upon what these symbols mean and imply, hence offering insights into the richness of Nigerian cultural and religious ideologies, and how art functions as a potent tool for social commentary, protest and cultural expression.

### 1.6 Scope of the Study

Precisely, this present study took a closer look at some selected Jelili Atiku's artistic performances from year 2014 and the cultural symbolism they portray: meanings, iconography, interpretation, and significances from the point of view of the artist and the Nigerian culture. Studying his works from few performances within this context would give deep insights for this study. Cultural references making up some cultural symbolisms expressed within his performances shall be discussed.

### 1.7 Operational Definition of Terms

**Artivism:** projecting social cause engaging visual art expressions or performances as a form of protest.

**Ase-** in Yoruba language *ase* stands for power and the vital force that makes things happen usually through proclamation and repeated utterances.

**kineasthetic,** relating to a person's awareness of visual beauty, positioning and movement of parts of the body usually through performances or forms of gymnastics..

**Ori-** The human head and head of all animals which represents the seat of wisdom and destiny

**Orisha:** Deities in Yoruba traditional religion; gods or goddesses

**Jelilism-** This covers all style and techniques employed by Jelili Atiku along with sculptural objects and installations in his live visual performance art.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with the review of related literature. The review was carried out under the following sub-headings:

- Introduction
- Theoretical frameworks
- Brief History on Jelili Atiku (Background and Identity )
- Jelili Atiku Performance Theory and Themes
- The Theory of Symbolism
- cultural symbolism and Traditional Religion
- Symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's Artworks
- Cultural Symbolisms in Atiku's Performances
- Some of Jelili Atiku's historical performances
- -Artivism performance
- Viewers Perceptions/commentaries

#### 2.0 Introduction

The historical and contemporary Nigerian visual arts forms have had multiple functions which include religious, festive, prestigious, educative and entertaining functions, before the further specialized development of dominant painters of the present day Nigerian Art space (Akenzua 2010, Erediauwa 2007, Eyo 1990 and Trowell in Willett 2000). Undoubtedly, Jelili Atiku is one of the contemporary Nigerian artists who expand the conventional utility of art as the tool of protest and human rights activism.

According to Eyo (1990), the visual arts were established for higher reasons other than those mentioned earlier. In Recent years, particularly in the last 10 years, Nigerian visual artists have adopted activism in the creation of works that are interrogative of several socio-political realities. Nigerian art of the present period has turned into an influential and outspoken voice of protest

and a vehicle of political advocacy in the face of tyranny, human rights violation, graft, and pollution of the environment. Nigerian contemporary art, best described as an expressive art form, has evolved into icon of political dissent and social commentary. It forms part of contemporary global process where art and activism intertwine to amplify a voice, foster reflection, rebellion, and change, (Olorunyomi, 2021).

Artist in Nigeria extend understanding of national and international concern through their artwork in performance, painting, video and installations (Adebayo, 2023). In two decades of art, Atiku has shown a good commitment to fighting social justice issues at the national and international levels. Often, the topics of his works are related to freedom of speech, violation of human rights, political processes. For instance, Atiku has been very instrumental in using performance art to explain structural issues involving audience in a manner that boosts the impact of the message (Atiku, 2024). For example, “Sacred Noise” as the performance protest focuses on the transformative gestures to raise awareness about the struggles of the marginalized; “The Right to Be” as the protest performance targets the Nigerian government as an ill-protected population (Idris, 2021).

Apart from being a protest art, Atiku’s art can also be seen as an art of or for liberation as well as an art of enlightenment. His engagement with people, which use to assume forms of performance art, ranging from installations to the live street performance, demonstrates how art can make the audience to think and possibly to act (Okoro, 2023). This study shall discuss Jelili Atiku and how his work embodies cultural icons, African culture trends and general aspects of arts in regard to social change with emphasis on transformation for political change in the face of restrictions and censorship.

## 2.1 Theoretical frameworks

**Performance Theory:** This theory builds on Turner’s concept of “communitas” which states that performance creates bonds, and on Schechner’s proposition that performance is beyond mere representation. Moreover, Dwight Conquergood (1985) argues that performance is indispensable to an actualization of activism/and cultural expression.

Other studies which offer an expanded investigation of performance in relation to social dynamics includes Fischer-Lichte (2014). In her paper, *Theatre Performance, and the Cognitive Strangeness of everyday Life* in the *Routledge Companion to Theatre and Performance Studies* in which she collects her more recent essays on affect and cognition. Through analyzing these theoretical frameworks, Atiku’s works represents how performance art can be employed for identity discovery and creative opposition. A feature of Atiku’s performances is that it incorporates the audience in more than one ways – the audience is majorly part of his performance. This strategy is supported by tenets of the performance theory, where relation aspects of performance are emphasized. His art is clearly based on socio-political concerns of the world; though, he portrays his subjects with elements of Yoruba traditional culture e.g. egungun dramatically.

### 2.1.1 Protest Art and Visual Activism

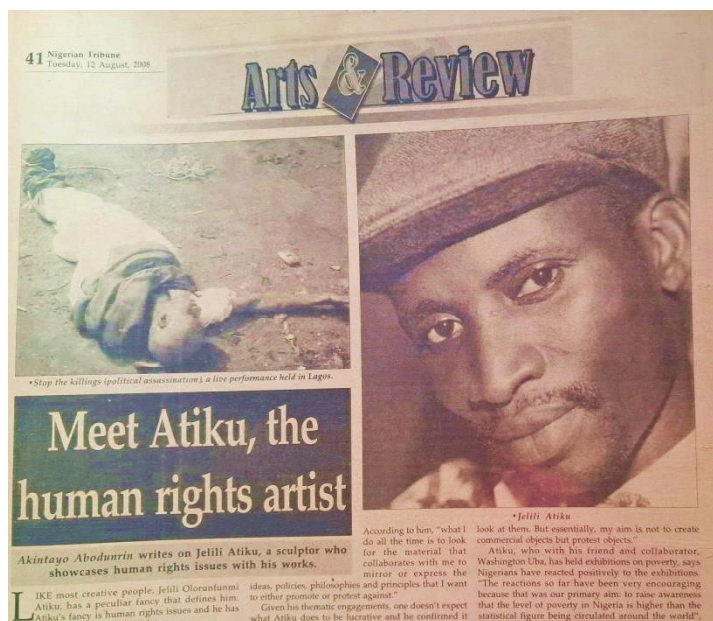
Visual activism has slowly grown to be an accepted part of the general theme of contemporary art, where art is both used for aesthetics as well as for fighting social injustice change, or for political statement. This framework counters the thinking that art as a “non-political” object that can be consumed independently of the major questions of social justice, fairness, and action (Baker, 2022). Consequently, visual art activism is based on the assumption that artwork can

directly engage socio-political discourse to raise awareness and trigger activity, which the stylized ordinary language communication may not (Chakravarty, 2021).

Art activism received a lot of attention in the last decades of the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries, this is because a vast number of postmodern artworks challenged and questioned socio-political dominant paradigms. Previous art activist movements like the woman art movement, black power, and green movement have described how art making can inspire change in voicing the voiceless and transform societies oppressive systems. For Example, Judy Chicago and Guerrilla Girls feminists artists of 1970 employed art as tool for negation of women position in the society, also to question of women marginalization in the art space (Miller, 2023). Like the politically conscious musicians of the current era, artists have also employed Art performances in advancing their political intents by addressing social matters including racism, gay right, and environment conservation (Mendes, 2022).

With specific reference to African and Nigerian art, the issue of activism in visual art entails a plethora of activities in dealing with relevant social political questions. As seen in figure 1 below. Nigerian artists including Jelili Atiku have employed performance art and multimedia installations as ideas of resistance against governmental suppressive rule, police brutality and other forms of injustice and human rights abuses (Adebayo, 2023). These artists want to stir up people and make them think about what they do in changing the world around them and themselves. The idea also stems from the activism of visual art, specifically from African art traditions where artists have for a long time incorporated art into an artistic community or political statement, cultural identification, social injustice, political malpractice, and corruption (Oluwaseun, 2021).

Figure: 1



**Artist: Jelili Atiku Title: Newspaper Publication/Nigerian Tribune at Lagos Book & Arts Festivals, Year: 2008, Location: Nigeria, Photo credit: Arts & Review-Nigerian Tribune**

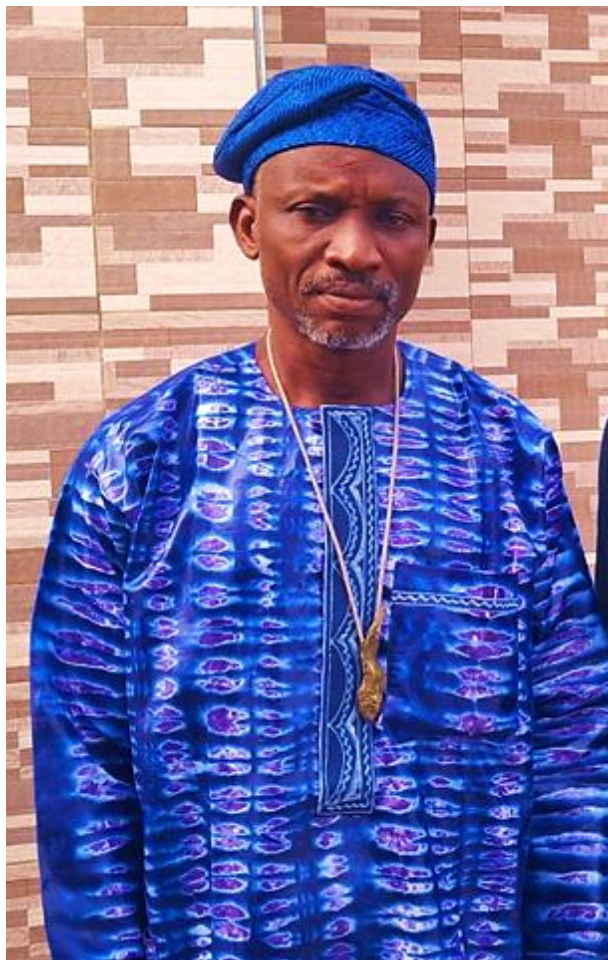
As such, the visual art activism aims at responding to the various injustices in society while anchored on the theoretical framework that believes art can change social perception to trigger intervention. This framework does not alleviate art as practice but as an agent which play an active role in the social and political change. It is so true that jelili has applied this concepts in his exhibitions Protest, Live performances just like Ai Weiwei of Beijing, Banksy a mysterious street artist from United kingdom and other artist of the world and history artists have used their creative nature to fight for social and political issues of their concern. Mysterious street artist from United Kingdom and other artists from different parts of the world and throughout history have used their unique creativity to stand up for social and political issues that matter to them and their communities.

Art protest and visual activism aligns with social media to produce a louder voice especially for multimedia artists such as Jelili Atiku with efficient mastery of social media skills seeking to

turn the social media platform into active stage. This is to say that “artivism” movements, and their creations are now a click away, to an international community, via hash tags, for example #BlackLivesMatter; uses artivism to express strong messages on racism.

## 2.2 Brief History on Jelili Atiku (Background and Identity)

**Figure: 2**



**Name:**Portrait of Jelili Atiku at his Hometown Residence in Ejigbo-Lagos, **Year:** August, 2024, **Location:** Ejigbo-Lagos Nigeria, **Photo credit:** Babatunde Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Researcher’s Collections

Figure 2 above is the portrait of Jelili Atiku, a Nigerian multimedia artist, a sculptor, installations and performance artist whose work deals with matters of social justice, global peace,

human rights and political concerns. He is the Chief Executive of Ateckhu Forms Limited, executive president Movement for Creative Drawings Nigeria, Director-General Society for Better Community Nigeria, both being non-governmental and non-profit making organizations as well as the founder of Jelili Atiku Foundation. For more than two decades now, Jelili has applied his arts to the causes and interests of the contemporary age, especially those problems which endanger the existence of everyone and which endanger the sustenance of our universe. What they hold in these concerns extending from the psychosocial and emotional consequences of the unpleasant occurrences such as violence, war, poverty, corruption, climate change and so on that are connected with our war prone world have dominated his artistic creations. Figure 3 is an image of the artist and the researcher.

**Figure: 3**



**L-R Title:** Jelili Atiku & Researcher at his Hometown Residence in Ejigbo-Lagos, **Year:** August, 2024, **Location:** Ejigbo-Lagos Nigeria, **Photo credit:** Babatunde Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Researcher's Collections

### 2.2.1 Early childhood and Education

Jelili Oluronfunmi Atiku was born on Friday the 27th of September 1968 in Ejigbo (Lagos), Nigeria by a soldier prince who died while his mother was still pregnant of him. He attended Muslim mission primary school in Mushin Lagos, from 1975-1977, Ejigbo Model primary school, Lagos from 1977-1982 and Ejigbo High school, Lagos from 1982-1988. His Grand Father; His Royal Highness Alhaji Atiku Adisa OLuronfunmi was the regent (Adele-Oba) of Ejigbo as well as the head of the ifoshi/ojomo royal chieftaincy family from the 1960s to 1998. Jelili Olorunfunmi Atiku was the first and only child of his father-an acclaimed musical leader in Ejigbo community. Growing up Atiku was exposed to traditional ceremonies, music, religion and communal leadership having being born by a local prince. Though raised as a muslim with Arabic trainings, the traditional Yoruba religious practice was still observed within the Ejigbo community and as such influenced Atiku's beliefs and subsequent delve into Traditional Yoruba religion and cultural practices.

### **2.2.2 University Education and Career**

Atiku received his Tertiary art training at Ahmadu Bello University Kaduna- Zaria, Nigeria and University of Lagos, Nigeria where he was awarded Bachelor of Fine Arts and Masters in Visual Arts between 1991 – 1998 and 2003 – 2006 respectively. He is the project leader of Art Africa Forum, the Artistic Director of AFiRIperFOMA a collective of writers, African performance artists; and he is the Chief Coordinator Advocate for Human Rights through Art (AHRA). From 2018, Atiku occupied a visiting assistant professor position at Brown University for full academic year. He currently serves as a Professor and faculty member, Department of Africana studies at Brown University, Providence Rhode Island United States. (Jelili, 2024 interview; Osaigbovo, 2019; brown.edu) where he created two new courses: CRN-17880, Decolonized Bodies, Spirit Bodies, (AFRI-1040)-Tracing the Indigenous Knowledge of Africans. He had taught both in Lagos State polytechnic, Ikorodu – as a part

time lecturer, University of Lagos – as Graduate Assistant and as an art Teacher in a secondary School.

### **2.2.3 Awards and Recognitions**

Prince Atiku is a recipient of numerous honors, he has won over 17 awards and accolades; they include: Prince Claus Fund award in 2015 in recognition of his unique efforts in culture. Jelili is an active member of 17 professional/ social organizations; has visited over 80 countries / cities; has engaged in numerous Performances/ exhibitions/ talks in Lagos (Nigeria), Tokyo(Japan) Gunpo (South Korea) Austin (USA) Vancouver BC & Victorial BC (Canada), Paris(France), Berlin (Germany), Madrid (Spain); Copenhagen (Denmark), Malmo and Jarna (Sweden),morocco, Israel, Denmark, Netherlands, Egypt etc.

### **2.2.4 Performances and Exhibitions/Workshops**

Jelili has held over 160 performances as a performance artist, staged 7 solo visual art exhibitions, 4 four-man art exhibitions, 100 group art exhibitions, 15 residency/collaboration shows, staged 35 workshops, taken part in 90 conferences, seminars, symposia and talks, produced one master of Arts thesis, written 8 books and monographs. Similarly, he has published 17 articles and written 7 unpublished articles, created 3 monumental sculptures, 5 Brands logo designs, 2 book illustrations, participated in 5 film projects, 14 curatorial services and has juried in 3 art competitions (Atiku, 2024; Osaigbovo, 2019)

### **2.2.5 Techniques and Concepts**

As a global artist, Atiku’s portfolio is strictly on commitments to the social political problem and the crimes being waged against human lives. He has been through series of performances, Installation Sculptures, drawings, photography, and video art relating to life and freedom; and directing the attention to human values of life, freedom and human rights. Jelili belief that having watched his creation, a viewer shall engage in the process of ‘visual learning

and convincing to create popular attitude that will culminated in improvement of the society. By doing so, according to Atiku “his performance affects the whole personality/body (physical, mental, and spiritual) of the viewers, for better future actions or decisions.”

### **2.2.6 Religion and community Engagements**

Atiku holds various key position in his Locality/home Town Ejigbo-Lagos as head of various committees and chairman of different political, social and spiritual Associations one of which is the Isese welfare Association (OdunYemoja).He is an Isese-follower and worshipper/devotee of Yemoja (a female yoruba Traditional /deity in the Ifa religion). He is the vice President of Awori Welfare Association of Nigeria, the Community Development Committee (CDC) Chairman of Ejigbo LCDA, President of Ejigbo Indigenes Forum (Olori Oniyemeja Ejigbo) Jelili permanently resides in his indigenous Home town Ejigbo with his wife and six children one of which is Babtunde Jelili Atiku a research Assistant (photographer) in this study.

### **2.2.7 Philosophy and Discoveries**

Atiku states that it was through research that he discovered how we as Africans and Nigerians had relegated our own culture, because he was trained in the Arabic way of life, and also grew up in an Islamic way. But years later, the dissention in him kept asking self-questions that needed identity answers like; “I am a Yoruba person? And when I want to pray to God I do it in Arabic? He lamented that he did not understand much of the things he said in Arabic, and that gave him a sensitivity of being a very low human being; so he asked himself “what am I doing here”? Atiku disclosed that throughout his University days, he kept asking himself these questions; what is the pure artistic form in Yoruba? And it was that research that brought him fully into performance art, Yoruba traditional religion and cultural practices.

For instance, Atiku took a look at the *egungun*, its gears, poems, the dance; and everything put into the body, and the body is put into the community, and it turns out to be so powerful that it influences life and controls anything. And he decided to do the same with his own body as an art material.

**Figure: 4**



**L-R -Title:**Researcher and Jelili Atiku at his Hometown Gallery in Ejigbo-Lagos, During an Interview Session with the Artist **Year:** July, 2025, **Location:** Ejigbo-Lagos Nigeria, **Photo credit:** Babatunde Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Researcher's Collections

So that, same power experienced through *egungun* can be spread across all and people can feel same power and energy, including foreigners who collected our ancestral masks and masquerades art forms for keeps in their museums/galleries abroad. He revealed this during an interview session with the researcher as seen in the image in figure 4 above and 5 below.

**Figure: 5**

**L-R -Title:**Researcher and Jelili Atiku at his Hometown Gallery in Ejigbo-Lagos, after an Interview Session **Year:** July, 2025, **Location:** Ejigbo-Lagos Nigeria, **Photo credit:** Babatunde Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Researcher's Collections

### 2.2.8 Mentors and Associates

Jelili expressly state that, it is the Yoruba culture that is his mentor. He claims Yoruba culture is the only mentor he had had emphasizing that there is no performance art in its contemporary way in Nigeria. However, he mentioned the likes of Jerry Buhari and company who did some performance art show in ABU Zaria after he had graduated, but at that time he didn't understand what they were doing. He also mentioned Marcia Kure who also had a performance where she was robed in black, and at that time it didn't mean anything to him. It is at the present that when he reflects back, he is awed at the impacts of these performances, as they remained ground-breaking.

### 2.2.9 Relationship with Art Schools in Nigeria and outside

Atiku recounts that the inability of Nigerian universities to integrate practical content from those practicing in the community into the theoretical concepts they teach students is a

major drawback on Performance art and many other courses. He has visited several European universities abroad including Amsterdam, Rotterdam, United Kingdom, and Brown University in the United States, Paris in France where he held master classes on African Art and Performance Art and has created aspects of their curriculum.

Atiku whines that here in Nigeria, None of the Universities have called him one day for anything, including “University of Lagos and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (his own universities) have never invited me for a workshop or collaborations” but he leaves Nigeria to teach people abroad about the awareness of what communal performance is, because he believes that when you are a performing artist, that performance is not for the artist alone, it’s for the entire humanity, and the public. He encourages Nigerian Art schools to develop their own curriculum on performance art. He also opines that interacting with community must be integrated into that curriculum for it to be effective. He continues to Advocate for a university curriculum in which community interfacing must be part of it. As Art schools teach and train students on both theory and practical students should also learn the practice through expositions from real life practitioners.

### **2.2.10 Misunderstandings and Community Conflicts**

Due to Jelili Atiku’s unconventional Artistic practices and performances many locals and established authorities within and outside his immediate environments tend to get provoked and offended which has led to insults, name calling, physical attacks and even arrests on different occasions.

One notable conflict occurred in 2016 between Jelili Atiku and the traditional ruler of Ejigbo Town who happens to be his Cousin when Jelili staged a performance that involved masquerade-like (*Egungun*) costumes, sacred elements, deities, traditional priests and symbolic gestures. The allegations relate to a performance called “*Aragamago* Will Rid This Land off Terrorism”, that took place on 14 January 2016. In the performance, the human rights defender condemned domestic terrorism, the usurpation of land and appropriation of cultural patrimony by Ejigbo's authorities. Some prominent members of the community with the King accused him of practicing

witchcraft or occult rituals, which led to tension, threats, and even his brief arrest. These misunderstandings reflected a clash between contemporary art practices and local cultural perceptions, where symbolic actions could easily be misread as spiritual or political challenges.

Other types of nuisance have also been experienced by Jelili Atiku and his family members. On 18 December 2015 nine policemen paid a visit to the dwelling of the human rights defender in his absence and threatened the arrest of the family members. Before that on 30th December 2014, five old chiefs of the Palace of the King of Ejigbo visited the house of Jelili and torched his painting, artworks and defied his room in a blatant effort to threaten him and criticize his art.

Through these clashes, Jelili Atiku still manages to stay and create art in Ejigbo his home town as a way of initiating dialogue, addressing injustice, and pushing the limits regarding cultural performance art as a legitimate art form in Nigeria.

## **2.3 Some Jelili Atiku Performance Theory Themes**

### **2.3.1 Identity and Personification**

As noted by Turner (1982), performance creates liminal stage which allows social re-valuation of responsibilities and identity. Consequently Atiku utilizes this in his performance. For instance, in the performance image in figure 6 below, he uses himself (his personae) as an object to address an unfair bill in process of enactment in a bid to secure public awareness and sensitization which would eventually stand against its endorsement.

**Figure: 6**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku **Title:** NGA Bill-Kill me the more at LABAF, **Year:** 2010, **Location:** Lagos, Nigeria, **Photo credit:** Gabriel Thomas, **Source:** Jelili Atiku Archive

In figure 7 below Atiku uses himself and another young star as a personification to address a case of a political elite called senator Yerima. This he did using respected royal attire and costumes of the royal class.

**Figure: 7**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Senator Yerima's Wedding with 13yrs old Rafiat Azeez*, **Year:** 2013, **Location:** Lagos, Nigeria, **Source:** Jelili Atiku Archive,

### 2.3.2 Socio-political discourse and Artivism

The social themes Atiku portrays in his artworks include advocacy within contemporary socio-political discourses such as corruption, post-colonialism, governance and erasure of culture. In his Performance “Lord Lugard Sings Blah, Blah-Green Sheep (Manifesto I) 2014, figure - he voices the battered people, lost heritage and embodies a sense of collective memory and responsibilities’. This multi dimensionality in execution is in agreement with Lizbeth Conquergood (1985) idea that performance as a form of activism, it provides a platform for the oppressed voices to be heard. figure 8 below he uses himself as a Nigerian tree with numerous branched placard outlining the major social ills and corruption prevalent at the time. Advocating against them. While figure 9 is a metaphoric representation of Nigeria and the United Kingdom.



### 2.3.3 Community Engagement and Participation

Another very important aspect is that most the works done by Atiku, is highly participative of the communities. In a performance created for his Ejigbo community, *Aragamago* ( will rid this land of terrorism) (2016), he lured the viewers/participants in and captured the attention of the king in reaction to the kings wicked judgment on his subjects. Social issues were brought to the fore to challenge tyranny and cultural misrepresentation. Mostly through the use of indigenous and traditional art forms which are associated to reality. This collaborative mode refers to Turner’s (1982) notion of “communitas” – when the act of performance gives rise to an idea of community or collective meaning. Figure 10 is an image of this communal performance.

**Figure: 10**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title of Performance: Aragamago will rid this land of Terrorism, Year: 2016, Location: Ejigbo-Lagos, Nigeria, Photo credit: Laffat Bahiru, Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

What makes Atiku's work special is that he breaks with the traditional guidelines of art, by actually bringing people to their feet and turning a venue for performances into an area where shared experiences are entered. Using a performance based practice, akin to the principles of Performance theory his work is deeply rooted in concepts addressing identity and culture embed with social commentary, informed by community participation. With his work, Atiku does not only critiques global concerns, but also encourages the audience to question their own place within these stories. Through locating his work within performance theory, Atiku highlights the agency of performances as acts resistance and cultural articulation. This thesis shall show Atiku's engagement with of performance art at a critical level and his important contribution to broader contemporary expressions pointing him as one of the active visual performer who continue that performance art discourse.

#### **2.4 The Theory of Symbolism**

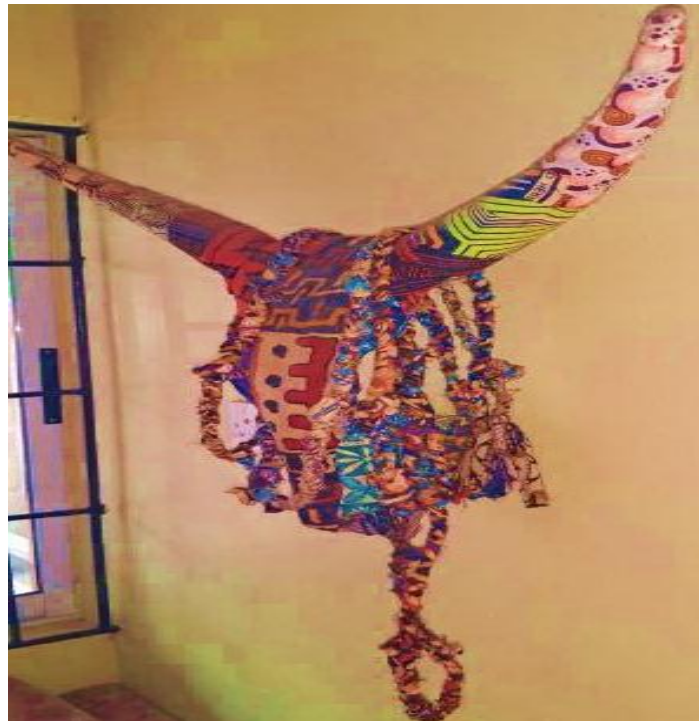
Symbolism was developed as the movement in literature and art at the end of the nineteenth century, in France. It was a response to the rigid outlines, and the dry principles of Romanticism and Realism respectively. Symbolism practically discarded the concept of mimicking reality and aimed at producing feelings, tones, and looks as they appear. The features of the movement was defined by the philosophical syntheses which included Nietzsche and the metaphysical poets Charles Baudelaire (Bate, 2013).

Symbolism as the cultural movement started in the 1870's and has a distinctly articulated expression in poetry, primarily French, before extending its area of influence across Europe. It played a special role in the formation of such directions as modernist literature, and had an impact on the future of the art of the twentieth century (McGann, 2019).

### 2.4.1 Impact Symbolism on Literature and Art

Symbolism influenced such further trends as Surrealism, Modernism and, at least to some extent, Expressionism. It inspired numerous writers and poets such as T.S Eliot, James Joyce, and Guillaume Apollinaire. It has become possible in the sphere of visual arts, painting, for instance, the art of Odilon Redon and Gustave Moreau. Symbolisms as a theoretical framework *is* a measure of stylistic analysis wherein symbols are used to express complex concepts, or concepts beyond the mundane, spiritual or sentimental components, this is in contrast to the appearances of things (Wölfflin, 1915). Symbolism in visual art can be used to express the concern of the artist either personal or social, and may convey themes on identity, culture, politics and life (Gupta, 2011). In figure 11 below, Atiku uses the bull head representing a godly force in india as symbolism in his performance there.

**Figure: 11**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: Bull Mask Symbol, Year: 2014, Location: India, Photo credit: Jelili Atiku, Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

**Figure: 12**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title Title: Amazigh Tribal diamond Symbol, Year: 2014, Location: Morocco. Photo credit: Jelili Atiku, Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

#### **2.4.2 Symbolism in Jelili Atiku's Artworks**

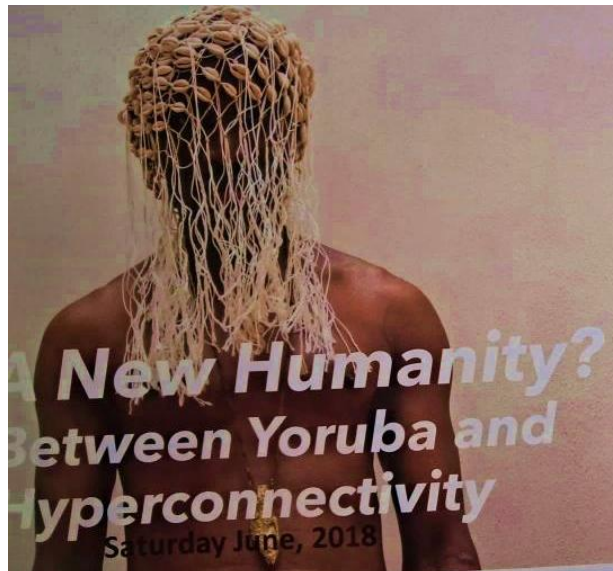
1. African Identity: A lot of the works of Atiku showcases the mask, traditional clothing and allusions to the African spirituality and myth (Atiku, 2014). Figure 12 above, figure 13 and 14 below exemplifies ethnic and cultural symbols. These symbols are not simply ornamental, they represent real culture and are symbolic in values and used as instruments to send out certain spiritual, social, historical and individual messages.

Figure: 13



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: Covid-19 Solution Symbol mask, Year: 2020, Location: Lagos, Nigeria, Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

Figure: 14



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: cowries Mask Year: 2018, Location: Palermo, Italy Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

**2. Masks and Identity:** Masks remain focal in Atiku's performances as these media can best be described as the mask as the screen or the focal social self. Masks in many African societies are believed to express the presences of spirits and ancestors, and masks are intermediaries between the two worlds (Fagg 1970). These symbols in Atiku's performances serves to point out how our subjectivity is formed by forces outside of self, politics, culture, history (Olu Oguibe, 2012).

**3. Political and Social Symbols:** Occasionally, Atiku uses emblems associated with resistive African liberation movements and the experience of colonialism, flags, and write ups. As seen in figure 15, 16 and 17. These symbols are lined with universal global themes of oppression, liberation, as well as struggle for justice. For example, in the performance *Rising*, (2010) Atiku is used some representations and the concrete image of the body chained to discuss issues of contemporary slavery and post-colonial traumas (Adams, 2014). In figure below he used the performance *Oginrinringirin* to addresses several global issues using flags, skeletons, etc. as symbols.

**Figure: 15**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title of Performance:** Ologbere (Oginrinringirin II) **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Sweden. **Photo credit:** Chelsea Coon, **Source:** Jelili Atiku Archive

Figure: 16



Artist: Jelili Atiku , Title: Amazigh (Star of David) Symbol, Year: 2017, Location: Telviv,Israel. Photo credit: Jelili Atiku , Source: Jelili Atiku sketchpad

Figure: 17



Artist: Jelili Atiku Name: Yaz (Amazigh symbol of Identity & Freedom) Year: 2014, Location: Marakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku’s sketchpad, photo: Researcher

**4. Traditional and Contemporary Symbols:** As it has been established in many of his works, Atiku tends to blend pre- colonial African symbolism with modern and post -modern popular culture. In his work, Atiku uses what can be accredited to the historical period (for example, using ethnicism, certain colors have a specific meaning, etc.), as well as the present allegories that reflect the geopolitical battles and imperial subjugations taking place today Schroeder, 2013. Figure 18 below is one of such symbolic performances using the British flag.

**Figure: 18**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku , Title: Do Not Resuscitate, Year: 2011, Location: Lagos, Nigeria., Photo credit: Charles Okolo, Source: Jelili Atiku Archive**

Symbolism enables Atiku to negate and dismantle the colonial and the postcolonial systems that persistently impact African countries. His works raise the question as to how these systems of power impinge on the subject and on community. The receivers do not merely read or view the symbols deployed by Atiku, but the symbols are mobilized as a manner of posing questions that imply criticism of power relations in different contexts or periods.

The features in his work are not just ornamental but informative and invitational, calling on viewers to be involved in social-political questions that dominate his creations (Atiku, 2015).

Atiku incorporates African cultural motifs with issues of international politics into his artwork; his work combines the postmodern theme of multiple identity on the African continent with the universal theme of human experiences.

## **2.5 Cultural symbolism and Traditional Religion**

Yoruba is among the most colourful and oldest cultures in West Africa, situated mainly in Southwestern Nigeria, but also in Benin and Togo. The origins of the Yoruba can be traced back to the ancient city of Ife, which is often considered the spiritual and cultural center of the Yoruba people from around 500 BCE, and it holds a significant place in Yoruba cosmology (Fadipe, 1970). The Yoruba social cultural life boasts of cultural arts and crafts, Music and Dance drama and history, myths and legends, and Yoruba traditional religion. They have a high degree of social integration with a hierarchy of chieftainships, and the Yoruba are also highly communal, were expected to honor the elderly and possess a set ethical system emanating from family ties.

Yoruba is a Niger Congo language; it is one of the most popular languages in Africa since it has millions of speakers around the globe. It has many dialects; proverbs, idioms and other passing word patterns are freely used which are good parts of the culture as well as interaction. Yoruba is the third type of tone, and is used in different forms of writing, music, and worship (Adedeji, 2018).

A prominent feature of tradition Yoruba culture is the practice of religion, commonly referred to as Ìṣẹ̀ṣẹ or Òrìṣà religion. This religion has evolved over the past two thousand years in tandem with Yorùbá political, economic, cultural, and social history with an amazing cut of the people believing in traditional African religions, Christianity and Islam. Yoruba indigenous beliefs are polytheistic; they believe in a number of gods who are collectively called Orishas, and who preside over all segments of the natural universe and existence. They worship these gods and goddess through ceremonies, hymns, chants and offerings. However, Christianity or Islam has replaced the traditional religions in most Yorubas today; the traditional religions are still influential in the Yoruba society both in Africa and in diaspora (Falola & Genova, 2005).

Princ Jelili Artiku is a Yoruba and is grounded in this complex system of cultural beliefs, including a reverence for ancestors, deities, and a connection to the divine world. The Yoruba people practice various forms of religious rituals, including the worship of Orishas (deities), who represent natural forces and elements. These spiritual practices are closely tied to their daily lives and are expressed through music, artworks, dance, performances and festivals (Obayemi, 1976). Furthermore, Yoruba culture is deeply rooted in a sense of community, as exemplified by Prince Jelili Atiku, the Yoruba family structures, language, and social norms, all of which emphasize respect for elders, unity, and collective well-being (Bamikole, 2009).

## **2.6 Cultural Symbolisms used in Atiku's Performances**

Cultural symbolism may be defined as the use of symbols reflecting on the beliefs, values and practices in a given culture. These symbols can be color, an act, an object, and even an utterance and help to give voice to collectively shared ideas and feelings. They assist the people within a society in making the “sense “of the culture, meaning the roles of the people within the society and how they relate with one another (Miller, 2021). As Taylor and Park pointed out in

2020, cultural semiotics (local symbolic elements) has an important function both in preserving and shaping perspectives within a given society. Cultural signs and symbols are always semantically dynamic, and can contain additional meaning that will directly or indirectly affect the social relations between people. In this respect, cultural symbol brings society together and enable the teaching of cultural values from one generation to the other as pointed by Jones, 2023. Study.com, 2024 offered the following explanation for cultural symbolism as a physical object which is an embodiment of a given culture, believe system or which carries meaning in a given culture. Religious or spiritual symbols can represent a particular culture, the culture's ideology, philosophy, language, values, and norms. Cultural symbols are such things as signs and significations, emblems, gestures, flag, animals and many others.

In continuation of Jelili Atiku's firm belief in the development of the native Yoruba egalitarian community, human effectiveness /happiness, survival of native African knowledge, religion as well as African traditional /indigenous human values based religion (Atiku, 2024). He employs Yoruba language, culture and the traditional Ifa religion as symbolisms in most of his performances/ exhibitions. This has given very rich and deep insights and significance to his works.

However, in as much as Jelili's cultural symbolic infusions are pan African, they span across Africa and all the continents/ nations as per his projects. In the context of Performance, visual Artist can investigate the record and culture of any portion of the world and from that structure create an idea that could incite performance art on that theme 'Performance Art' (Osaigbovo, 2019). The sources of Atiku's beliefs and philosophy are based on the Yoruba ethnic mythology, fable, language, pantheon, Legends, gods and the traditional ifa religion Especially the Egungun

(masquerade) concept (Osaigbovo, 2019). These help him project his identity, and natural artistic consciousness. Some of the cultural symbolisms present in his works include the following:

### **Masks**

**Meaning:** the Yoruba rites involved wearing masks that were made during ceremonies as images of ancestors, spirits, or gods. Atiku also wears masks, includes shared memories, his personal philosophy, and spirits of his ancestry, and is therefore concentrated on the connections to ancestry and his identity.

The second direction is to invoke the presence / personality of known ancestors so as to forestall the projected biases/ prejudices by on lookers.

### **Traditional Attire**

**Meaning:** Atiku continues to use the traditional Yoruba dress, the agbada and buba, to symbolically present pride in his culture. The garment itself represents the richness of the Yoruba tradition and as an identity.

### **Adire Cloth**

**Sense:** Narratives and belonging the deep blue cultural meaning of this indigo-dyed cloth is traditionally related to stories and identify. This is used during scenes to convey information on heritage, strength, and stories on cultures.

### **Ritual Objects/paraphernalia/**

**Significance:** Like most of his works, objects like cowrie shells, calabashes, and other ritualized items are perceived to signify good things, spirituality, ancestors, and connections with the ancestors according to the Yoruba cosmology. *Opon-Ifa* and *Iroke-Ifa* (Yoruba divination tray and wooden device to *Oba-kwa-Pina*), water (cola-nut) and water (salt) calabash bowls of *Ile* (soil), water (*Omoli*), cola-nut (*Obi*), bitter cola (*Orogbo*), salt (*Iyo*),

### **Symbolic Gestures**

**Significance:** To convey familiar heritages and local beliefs, Atiku incorporates a number of movements and gestures typical of the traditional Yoruba religion.

### **Chanting and Songs**

Significance: Yoruba chants and songs would lead to greater identification of the individual performing them and create a link of community by connecting people to a shared lineage.

### **Spiritual Elements**

Meaning: active and filled with the subject of, *ase* (the ability to enable things to happen), Atiku underlines on the spiritual source of power, act and on the connection between material and spiritual space.

### **Color Symbolism**

Meaning: Colors in Yoruba culture have certain meanings (blue is a calming color, red is power color). Atiku manipulates the use of color (costumes and visuals) to tell emotional and cultural stories.

### **Yoruba Gods (spirit-entities, Orisha)**

Meaning: Mentions to *Orisha*, *Irunmole* (spiritual energies and beings) or Yoruba gods, in his shows are the symbol of unity between spirituality, nature and the human experience and depict how significant Yoruba religion is.

### **Collective Memory**

What matters: In most of his performance art, Atiku appeals to the collective racial memory of the past (e.g. colonialism, civil upheaval) as a kind of introspection regarding their impact on their own current identity and their society.

### **Community Participation**

Significance: While Atiku constantly reaches out to his audience during his performances, he is concerned about the communal aspect of the Yoruba culture where the action of the large masses and their participation in enriching the social structure is paramount. It is everybody that contributes to the success of the society.

### **Nature and Environment**

Significance: elements of nature (e.g., earth, water, fire, air) are used by the Yoruba culture to identify with spirituality and connect to forces.

### **Figurative incantations**

Significance: they are used to appease, summon, request and venerate spirit entities and nature.

### **Bare skin and barefoot**

Significance: this introduces an openness and physical contact with nature (water, earth, air etc) to discharge their energies and co-operate with man.

### **Performance/ Exhibition Titles and themes**

Very high percentage of all works by Jelili are titled in Yoruba language or in pidgin e.g such as: *Ogirinringrin (and.egungun-Alabala Mandela, Ologbere,)* I,II,III, *E wa wo, Araferaku, Alaraagbo, Omobowale, Agbo Rago, Awarawa, Oseniejire, Riri Aiye, Aragamago Will Rid This Land of Terrorism, Alaraagbo* etc. This goes to support the symbolisms of the Yoruba culture.

### **Pouring of libations and Sacrifices.**

Significance: Some elements of Jelili works that honour the appearance of the traditional religious forms to provoke blessings, wisdom, assists and directions to the ancestors. *Irubo* is taking things that fish can feed and human beings can feed, and then taking them as a gift that you put into the water.

### **2.7 Some Jelili Atiku's Historical Performances**

Atiku's debut as a performance artist was with *E wa wo: Awaiting Trial Persons*, a campaign against prison congestion, re-enacted at the Visual Arts Unit, Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Akoka, in 2004 (interview). The performance had the artist stooping on all fours, as seen in the image in figure 19 with head drooped and making inscriptions on the sand within a space enclosed by improvised metal barriers. The intention, it appeared, was to create an image of a helpless prisoner, lost in deep thoughts behind bars as seen in figure below.

**Figure: 19**



**Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title of Performance: *E wa wo - The Nigerian Prisoner*.** Performed at the Visual Arts Unit, University of Lagos, Akoka, **Year: 2004, PhotoCredit: Nkeiruka C.Nzejama. Source: Online Journal**

*E wa wo: The Nigerian Prisoner* was a “campaign against the practice of ‘holding charge’ in the Nigerian Justice Administrative System”( Guardian online, 2004). The Holding Charge, states Yusuff, is “an obnoxious practice in Nigerian criminal justice system which permits the remand of criminal suspects in prison custody indefinitely” (Guardian online). Nigerian prisons, observes Atiku; “Lacks almost every international recommendation for that institution. It lacks both deterrent and reformatory values... It has become very costly for the economy. It is physiologically, psychologically and emotionally destructive. It is no longer a correctional facility but a destructive yard (Atiku, 2024).

Figure: 20



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title of Nigeria:** Mama Say Make I Dey Go 1, She Dey My Back  
**Soure:** (<https://vimeo.com/218780807>), **Media:** Installation/Performance with 72 women  
**Date/Year:** first performed at the 57th Venice Biennale on May 12, 2017

Figure: 21



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title of performance:** Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back,  
**Media:** Installation/Performance with 72 women, **Date:** first performed at the 57th Venice  
**Soure:** (<https://vimeo.com/218780807>) Biennale on May 12, 2017

Figure 20 and 21 above are images of *Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back* performance, that was initiated by the eve of the 2016 United States presidential campaigns and has been repeated severally. The campaigns depicted problems to do with misogyny, sexism, extreme disrespect and objectification of women's bodies hence very relevant to the promotion of equality. One of the personalities that exercised influence in the symbolic actions that structured the interaction and confrontation of the feminine with the masculine energy is revealed in a piece of the Washington Post of October 8, 2016, by David A. Fahrenthold. The problem in the Washington Post publication was that a "70-year-old was heard using vile and sexually predatory language to boast about groping and attempting to have sex with women, including those who are married. That this discourse touched on the upheavals of modern day is worrisome, on the other hand it is positive to note the introduction of positive feminine input in the order.

The above context, therefore, gave spirit and context to the enactment of the performance/installation, *Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back* by Jelili Atiku. Through this performance and the ontology of the contents in presenting an existential solution to the present status of human violence in the world. By promoting some attempt at positive dialogues that aims to redefine the value of women for the benefit of humanity, the performance intended to open up the viewer's mind to embrace the values of natural feminine power and its ontological contents. This would serve as an alternative solution to the present human conditions created by acts of violence in the world. Also by creating or instigating platforms of positive discussions to re-think the essence of women for the wellbeing of humanity, the performance sought to create a

paradigm shift in consciousness towards the direction and adoption of the values of natural feminine energy.

## **2.8 Viewers Perceptions/Commentaries**

Due to the critical observations collectively conferred on Jelili Atiku's imposing performances /installations, lots of reactions, commentaries, scholarly articles, praises, criticisms, outbursts and even blatant violent physical attacks /resistances have followed people's perception of his work.

According to Dr. Osaigbovo (2019), "using dancing and breathing techniques, optimistic and enchanting dressing, shocking and arresting gestures, and quite often, horrifying backdrop like bones, skulls and cultish images carved on his body"

Janine A. Sytsma, Ph.D of the Arts of Africa and the African Diaspora School of Art, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville in her article *Performing Counter Hegemonic Narratives: Jelili Atiku's Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back* represented Nigeria at the 57th Venice Biennale 2017. Says that in premise of Biennale the work of Atiku "may be seen as a counter narrative feminine energy has been thus invoked as an instrument of geopolitical re-mapping"

Anogwih (2011:15) holds that :

*It is routine for Jelili Atiku to express his discontent with the multidimensional anomalies of our society through creative prospects or activist-art realized through performances. His understanding of the elements and symbols used in activist-based performances is deeply enhanced or charged by recurrent subject matters of inequality, economic, political and social melt downs that characterize our contemporary society.*

In their article titled; *Artistic Activism in Nigeria Art: A Course, a Cause* John & Johnson opined that "The fear perhaps, is that these performances go beyond mere entertainment in the eyes and minds of the politicians as the poor governance continues to rise (Otu, John & Johnson, Oladesu 2015).

## **CHAPTER THREE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter deals with the entire tools used for the research process under the following :  
Research Design of the study, Sources of data, Method of data collection, Method of data analysis, Sample and sample technique

### **3.0 Research Design**

This study is a qualitative enquiry, using historical research design approach to examining the cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's visual performances. Art history research design is the framework for approaching the analysis of meaning, history or significance of art. It includes formulation of an efficient and comprehensive research question; identification of proper methods for collection of both primary and secondary data to be used in supporting the analysis. Green and Lee (2022) views such choice of research question or hypothesis to be among the major elements that require formulation in the research design of art history. Besides delimiting the object of investigation, this question also determines the methodological plane, which can vary from math to social history (Walker & Rodriguez, 2023). Art historians could use several methodologies like iconography, semiology, formalism etc. as well as scrolling techniques to analyze how works of art convey meanings through image and text (Schmidt, Harris, 2024). To support this, Scott and Zhang (2020), in their article on methodology in the field of art history also argue that insights from sociology, anthropology and philosophy should inform the art history discourse to gain a nuanced better understanding of art's societal function. This is to say "art historical research is multidisciplinary" (Odiboh, 2023).

### **3.1 Sources of Data**

Informative Materials sourced from both primary and secondary sources were used to support the analysis. These include contacting the artist himself, studying published articles,

newspapers, journals, consulting with Academics from different art schools, professors. Sources from online and social media uploads were also utilized.

### **3.2 Method of Data Collection**

The researcher has employed varied methods in carrying out this exercise so as to produce well executed study. These methods include; Recorded personal oral interviews with the Artist, phone calls, participant observation, Whatsapp chats, photographs, note-taking, field research, (Travelling/trips) to the Artist studio, museum, home and workshops.

### **3.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

Sampling is a way of identifying objects that meets the requirements for possible research inquiry. Simple random technique has been used to select performances of the Artist that contain Cultural symbolisms that could be studied and their significances unraveled.

### **3.4 Method of Data Analysis**

The following methods of critical analysis have been combined in this study for comprehensive historical analysis. They are; Iconography, Contextual Analysis and Expressionism.

#### **3.4.1 Iconography**

Erwin Panofsky (1962) clearly defined iconography as the branch of art history concerned with the subject matter or meaning of a work of art, as opposed to its forms. He described it as a method for identifying the themes, symbols and motifs within an artwork by applying prior knowledge of the works cultural context. He further defined iconology as the basis for deeper symbolic interpretation. The subsequent interpretation step which analyzes the deeper significance by exploring the underlying cultural, philosophical and historical principles that shaped the artwork. Although, other definitions of iconography abound, one of the most satisfactory is Jan Bialostocki's (1963) succinct formulation which states Iconography applies to the descriptive and classifactory study of images with the aim of understanding the direct or indirect meaning of the subject matter represented. The three stages procedure of description,

classification and interpretation of themes and motifs in works of art corresponds to that prescribed by the most influential modern art historian, Erwin Panofsky, in what has become a key text of iconographic methodology. Panofsky distinguished three levels of understanding an image, each successive level requiring a deeper knowledge of the cultural milieu in which the image originated namely: pre-iconographic description, iconographical analysis and iconological interpretation.

In art and art history, iconography refers to interpreting symbols, motifs and images in art for meanings usually having to do with the work's religious, political, or cultural context. This approach is different from looking at an artwork from a formal perspective because it seeks to understand what the images used represent, and how messages are conveyed. According to Lopez and Zhang (2021), iconography assists scholars in interpreting the semiotics of art, and decodes the aesthetics of the audiovisual images that might inform the philosophical meaning and the cultural discourses of the societies. For example, some of the figures, like religious ones, which have special meanings associated with cult, was associated with certain cultural historical backgrounds. The current art scholarship has placed a lot of emphasis on iconography and how it will help the art viewers as well as the artist or creator of a work of art to fully understand the work. In Miller's view (2023), iconography can tell about artists' adaptations of modern traditions, hierarchies or powers. This approach is particularly useful when assessing art from cultures where representation was heavily intertwined with cultural mores, more specifically during the reformation, renaissance or baroque periods. This way, scholars are able to see how artists and writers implemented symbols and their meanings in works in order to convey a concept or to comment on a social issue Taylor and Roberts, (2022).

Iconography remains a useful approach to understanding the meaning of a work of Art though scholars such as Harris have suggested in their recent research that iconography should be used in partnership with other methodologies like context or form. Nevertheless, it is still an essential

method for art history in terms of the de-masking of the message hidden in culture (Lopez & Zhang, 2021).

### **3.4.2 Contextual Analysis**

Contextual analysis is a research paradigm that involves the study of artworks based on the context that surrounded their creation; social, political, cultural and historical. The technique for this approach is challenging because it does not just describe objects but also relates the art in the environment and conditions of its production. As Turner and Lee (2023) explain, contextual analysis allows for understanding how the artwork copes with other examples of the same historical period or represents the context that, may be, is not seen when using the formal or iconographic approach. For instance, the appearance of social power in a particular artwork can be explained in relation to political power within a painting or the subject matter in a piece of work can be an indication of religious power within an artwork (Smith, 2022).

In addition to this, contextual analysis often incorporates cross-disciplinary features and it incorporates the use of history, sociology, and even economics to open a packed vision of art in culture. For instance, by uncovering the political economy that shaped the creation of art in renaissance, historians can explain anew how systems of patronage particularly shaped visual culture (Harris, 2023). Last, contextual analysis offers richness and broad explanation of artworks, enabling art historians to explain how art interacts with its context (Turner & Lee, 2023).

### **3.4.3 Expressionism**

In art history research context, Expressionism is used as a methodology to appreciate how artists portray the experience of emotions through style deformity, vibrant colors, and extensiveness of lines with approaches that assert knowledge representation to the forefront of consciousness, expressionism is very much preoccupied with emotions within the artist and the

audience. Miller (2023) says that this method analyses signs employed in art to elicit feelings rather than to represent reality as it is. By identifying the topics expressed in such sentiments of the human soul, the scholars have an incomparable opportunity to determine how the principles of expressionism reflect upon the cultural and psychological states, especially during the critical epochs of social change.

Expressionism has also recently been considered not only as the movement in art and culture, but also as the perspective for decoding the specific historical epochs in terms of mental subjects' emotional experiences. According to Taylor and Roberts (2021), expressionism dealing with expressionist art could be traced back to the onset of the modernity post the industrialization process and the two World Wars. Consequently, this analytical method is used in mapping psychological impacts of such historical events reflected in art.

Therefore, expressionism as a technique is also utilized in this analyses. To help readers understand how Jelilism expresses such realistic invisible impacts of societal occurrences and cultural memories. According to Harris (2022), expressionism should not be interpreted as focusing on the artist herself and her emotions but also on how these become mediated by cultural and political conditions.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PERFORMANCES, CULTURAL SYMBOLS AND ANALYSIS

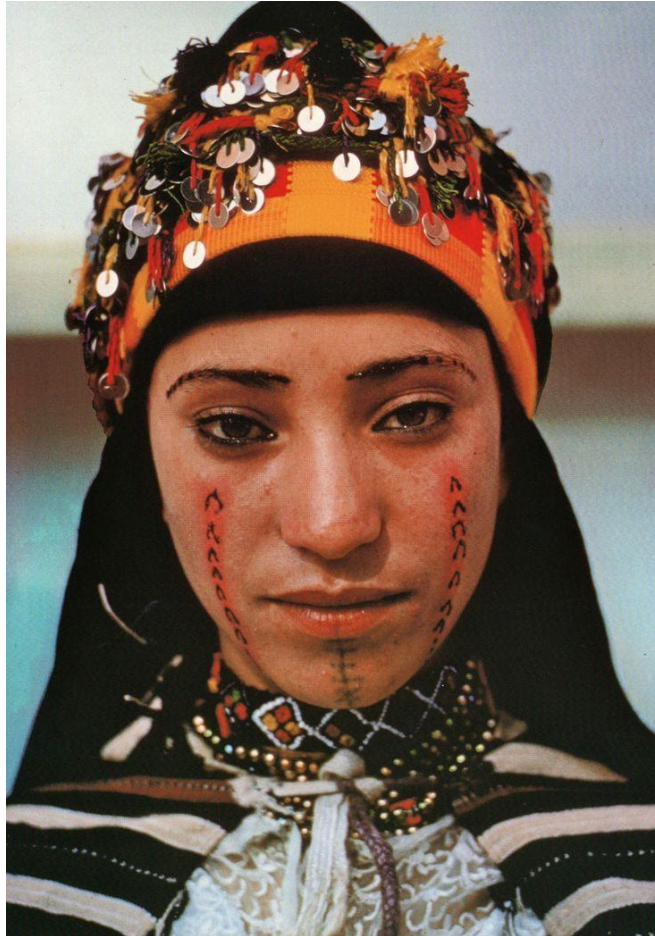
This chapter employs iconographic and contextual analysis to describe, identify and interpret cultural symbols present in Jelili Atiku's live performances as outlined by Erwin Panoffky. The researcher has noticed that the artist undergoes intensive research on any of his subject matter prior his exhibitions, installations and performances. Through thorough researches he identifies cultural patterns, traditional history, religious motifs, social and political references connected with narratives to offer his spectators a deep and richer cultural symbolism. These forms bases for critical discourse and engagements towards humanity's healthy advancement. Several Cultural Symbols used by Jelili Atiku are analyzed below.

#### **4.0 Amazigh People and Their Cultural Symbols**

The Amazigh people are the indigenous natives of an ethnic group spread majorly in Morocco and the Maghreb .They are also spread all over other countries within Northern Africa e.g. Algeria, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Tunisia etc. Their deep history and cultural origin dates back to the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century before the Arab conquest of the 7<sup>th</sup> century and predates the arabization, islamization and modernization of present day Morocco. The Amazigh people or Imazighen are also called "Berbers" a name they consider pejorative and derogatory but prefers to be called 'Amazigh'-the free people (Williams, 2020). They speak languages traceable to ancient Phoenicia, middle-east, Asia and Egypt called Afroasiatic Languages which has been modernized and standardized officially as Tamazight. The Amazigh people have continued to pursue for their cultural recognitions, identity distinctions through serious rights activisms and movements against every colonial subjugations. By projecting their deep cultural heritages through their arts,

writings, crafts and creativity seen through their attires, body markings, and socio-cultural symbols like yaz (✘) – which symbolizes the –“Amazigh the free people”, and the star of David in morroccan national flag.

**Figure: 22**



**Name:** Amazigh woman: **Year:** 2025, **country:** Morocco, **online Source:** [www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)

#### 4.1 Tifinagh- Amazigh Official Scripts

The Amazigh letters or Tifinagh dates back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE from the old Phoenician scripts. It is also used by the Tuaregs and entire Berber's tribes and throughout North Africa (Claudot-Haward, 2011). The Tifinagh letters were modernized and standardized officially in 2003 through the activisms of the Amazighs movements from the 1960s into what is now called Neo-Tifinagh letters for the Tamazight language in schools all over Morocco and Algeria (Soulaïmani, 2016). Figure 23 below is the official scripts of the Neo-Tifinagh.

Figure: 23

ⵢ	ⵝ	ⵎ	ⵎⵔ	ⵏ	ⵉ	ⵓ	ⵏ	ⵏⵓ
ya	yab	yag	yag <sup>w</sup>	yad	yaḍ	yey	yaf	yak
a	b	g	g <sup>w</sup>	d	ḍ	e	f	k
[æ]	[b]	[g]	[g <sup>w</sup> ]	[d/ð]	[d <sup>s</sup> ]	[ə]	[f]	[k/ç]
ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ	ⵏⵓ
yak <sup>w</sup>	yah	yaḥ	yaε	yax	yaq	yi	yaj	yal
k <sup>w</sup>	h	ḥ		x	q	i	j	l
[k <sup>w</sup> ]	[h]	[ḥ]	[ʔ]	[x]	[q]	[i]	[ʒ]	[l]
ⵎ	ⵏ	ⵓ	ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵓ	ⵏ	ⵏ
yam	yan	yu	yar	yaṛ	yagh	yas	yaş	yac
m	n	u	r	ṛ	gh	s	ş	c
[m]	[n]	[u]	[r]	[r <sup>s</sup> ]	[ʎ]	[s]	[s <sup>s</sup> ]	[ʃ]
ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵏ	ⵏ			
yat	yaṭ	yaw	yay	yaz	yaz			
t	ṭ	w	y	z	z			
[t/θ]	[t <sup>s</sup> ]	[w]	[j]	[z]	[z <sup>s</sup> ]			

Name: Amazigh Neo-Tamazight symbol/Letters: Year Retrieved: 2025,  
country:Morocco, Online Source: [www.omniglot.com](http://www.omniglot.com)

## 4.2 Cultural Symbols in “I will not stroll with Thami El-Glaoui” Performance

**Figure: 24**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** I will not stroll with Thami El-Glaoui” Performance  
**Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marrakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku archive

This chapter focuses on detailed analysis of cultural symbols employed by Jelili Atiku in his performances starting with his famous performance in Marrakesh Biennales 5 titled “I will Not Stroll with Thami El-Glaoui held February 26-28<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Figure 24 above, is a landscape image of the processional performance. This performance is a very sensitive and critical performance carried out by Atiku after an extensive research into the political, cultural, social and traditional Moroccan history dating back to the pre-islamic era of the Imazighens. That is before the islamization and arabization of the indigenous natives of Morocco called the Amazighs part of the ancient Berber nation symbol.

The performance draws attention to the current reality of the Amazigh socio -politically, economically and religiously as opposed to their ancient status and history. In the performance, He poses as El-Glaoui popularly known as Thami El-Glaoui or Feudal Warlord along with fifty (50) clothed rams used as a metaphor to create a political narrative of leadership and followership of the Amazigh tribe. This performance is a major highlight of Atiku's artistic Creative narrative with a foreign or non-Nigerian cultural symbolisms and attire. In the performance (figure 24) Atiku wore a big flowing akhnif (native royal gown), riding on a horse drawn carriage (caleche) followed by 50 rams clothed in fabric material bearing Amazigh cultural symbols. The artist made several allusions to Philip Keller's statements e.g "a good Shepherd and the sheep, all my strength, all my energy, all my vitality was poured into my flock in Philip Keller: The inspirational writings (keller, 1993, pp408-409)

Imazighens (plural for Amazigh citizens) or Berbers over thousands of years had developed rich cultural symbols, patterns and motifs. These patterns do not only serve as aesthetic but filled with deep cultural meanings of identity, origin, tradition, values, family, spirituality and serves variety of functions. This cultural quality is connected with the people's ability to create beautiful handcrafted art pieces laden with deep cultural symbolisms not commonly understood, such as: carpets, tattoos, jewelries etc. Each Amazigh or Berber nation has their tattoos that they use to preserve their origins, ward off evils, attract men, goodluck, and used for identification. Most of the ethnic native tattoos are made of geometric shapes/patterns which have evolved or have been adapted over the years from ancient civilization and backgrounds originating from the Middle East nations, Europe and North African continents. Below are the Amazigh cultural symbols displayed by the clothed rams in figure 25, 26 and 27 in

their progressive applications as portrayed through the artist performance, their contextual analysis and embedded interpretations.

**Figure: 25**



**Name:** 50 Amazigh Symbols on Fabrics, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marrakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku archive

**Figure: 26**



**Name:** clothing of Rams, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's archive

**Figure: 27**



**Name:** 50 clothed/Symbolic Rams, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** Atiku's archive

**Figure: 28**



**Name of Symbol:** Lion's Paw {Afouz Izam –Aghilas), **Year:**2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

The figure 28 as shown above is called the lions paw with several variations and redesigns. It basically possesses a diamond or trapezoid outlook with smaller diamond shape at the four points. This particular one by Atiku is rendered in red with a shape of a ram underneath while green is used for entire background. Red represents the Alawite monarchy and the blood of fallen ancestors/soldiers, while the green represents hope, islam and the bountifulness of Moroccan vegetation which makes up the national colour of morocco. The symbolisms projected by Atiku with this symbol is that of charisma, strength of personality and protection. It encompasses an insurmountable force of the Amazigh people/culture .It projects the indomitable human spirit of the people and their culture to which their resilience to exist and remain a known identity is a testament.

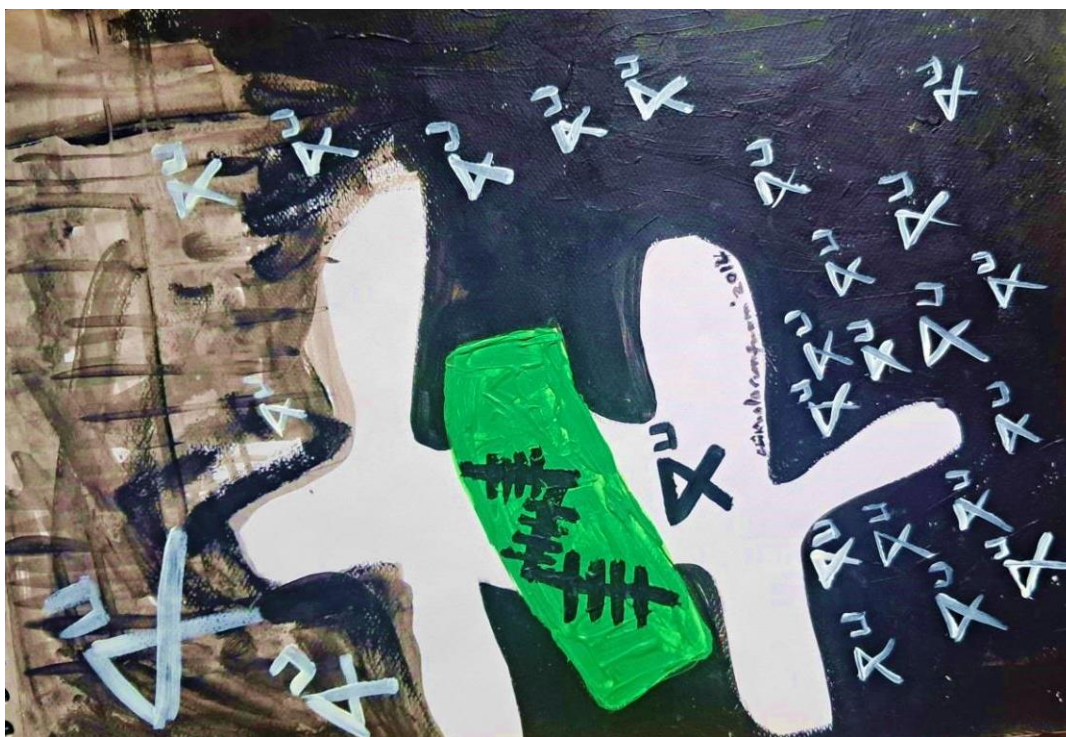
**Figure: 29**



**Name of Symbol: Fish Spine (Ighs ouslm,Salsoul Ihol), Year: 2014, Location: Marrakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher**

This symbolic artwork in Figure 29 is a form of a regular fish spine in black colour on top of a yellow rectangular shape which is laid across the figure of a white ram shape. Within the posterior and anterior of the ram shape are four “Yags” or “g” Letter of the Tifinagh symbols , two on each side making up a total of four “yags” all centred on a blue background. The symbolism projected through this artwork by Jelili is of a bright, snake-like, Life, presence of springs and valleys in the primitive life of an Amazigh woman while the ”yag” letters depicts her pure fertility. It signifies the unstoppable nature of seemingly weak amazigh mothers who have remained fertile, strong and have continued to give birth to (new lives) both male and female gender that keeps the Amazigh culture and identity alive. The blue stands for her spiritual connection to the universe (cosmic nature).

**Figure: 30**



**Name:** Saw and g<sup>w</sup> (L'menchar/ yag<sup>w</sup>), **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Figure: 30 above is a symbolic artwork by Jelili depicted as a saw like movement in zig-zag lines on a green rectangular plane across the white sheep figure. A singular Yag ”(g<sup>w</sup>) is inscribed within the posterior of the white sheep while many of the letter is spread at the outside of the sheep with a darker background. The white sheep symbolizes the pure Amazigh breed and original identity. The L’menchar Saw, denotes tools used by the Amazigh nomads during their primitive lives to chop wood, symbol of strength, as creative elements of survival while the “yag” denotes connection of the fertile Amazigh woman to earth and her environment represented by the dark colour of the background.

**Figure: 31**



**Name:** Taburquist Rose, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku’s sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Figure: 31 above is a horizontal diamond shaped artwork by Atiku .It is made up of a black cross on top of the smallest orange diamond bounded by another black lined diamond and

finally by an orange bordered diamond with extended whiskers. The whiskers are randomly placed within the orange border and white background are nine yaz (ⵝ) letters in black pigment. The symbol above is called the “Taburquist Rose” which has been adapted in countless variants with mixtures of other Amazigh cultural letters and symbols. It signifies the beautifully bounded love and natural relationship between free and independent Amazigh souls (man and woman).

**Figure: 32**



**Name of symbol:** Aqeeqah (Joy and beauty), **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku’s sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

This symbolic artwork as shown Figure 32 above, is a form of a bold English letter H in thick black outline crossed at the top and bottom rather than the middle. It is embedded on rich splashy red, surrounded by some upturned V-like symbols selectively placed at the white background. This Amazigh symbol is called “Aqeeqah” (Joy and Beauty) while the overturned V called ‘Chevron’ and letter “d” (yad) in Amazigh letters (Tifinagh). As captured, this combination symbolizes the progressive nature of the Amazigh woman and her womanhood as endowed with joy, beauty and blood flow which signifies her ability to give birth in the face of all

adversity in advancing the Amazigh race. These symbols are commonly tattooed on a woman's forehead or chest from the pre-islamic era.

**Figure: 33**



**Name of symbol:** Hourglass and “yaf” (letter f), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku’s sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

The figure: 33 above, is a graphical painting showing two apex touching yet overlapping triangles. It shows one triangle on top of the smaller one, the (X) symbol is called an hourglass symbol with the Ǝ ”yaf” (f) inscribed all over the background of some ancient Islamic buildings portrayed in orange pigments. Atiku used this combinations contextually to symbolize the resilience of the amazigh race over time, their flexibility to survive all wind or harsh environment created by religion, imperialism and politics (Ǝ represents winds of change). This additionally depicts the culture ability to adapt and withstand to cycles of their life and still remains a balanced people despite unkindness.

Figure: 34



**Name of Symbol:** Amzough Oulyamo, (ljam) and X, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Fig: 34 above shows a yellow background with four lined up equilateral triangles touching their bases with their apexes pointed towards the left from the middle right edge of the background. These linked up geometric shapes are further surrounded with eight X (cross) Symbols or yax letter of the Tamazight at top and the bottom starting from the right edge to the left. The yellow background represents the arid or desert land , sun energy of North African region, while the triangle's called Amzough Oulyamo and X cross show connections. As combined these images symbolizes the deep rooted connection of the amazigh people naturally to their land, ancestors, brotherhood and the protection they enjoy from their sources of life (earth and ancestors). These symbols are among the most common motifs in Berber tattoos, It's often used to invoke good fortune, luxurious and comfortable life, or ward off evil spirits.

Figure: 35



**Name of symbol:**. Anf, Tafanzart with Yad (E), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:**2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher

The symbolic figure 35: above is a dominant outline of two apex touching equilateral triangles with a vertical lines drawn to the width of the triangles base which is slanted diagonally. Around the touching apexes are seeming randomly inscribed E letters (yad) of the Neo-Tifinagh at both top and bottom. The hourglass looking outline is called Anf or Tafanzart in the amazigh language while the E letter is yad a variant of the symbol  $\xi$  . The dominant figure is a customary amazigh symbol used in the official dress for Amazigh brides (the Handira also called Tamizart-is a wedding blanket) representing a new era of womanhood while the E letter represents the masculine strength and power of the groom around his bride. In combination these symbols depicts the sanctity of Amazigh marriage, unions and copulation under the sun represented by the yellow background.

Figure: 36



**Name of symbol:** Laanibra (Horse's Eye) and yak(k), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:**2014, **Location:**Marakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

The image above as shown on fig:36 consists of a dominant diamond shaped outline in black with a centered dot inside the diamond. It depicts extended vertices with double crossed lines surrounded by Yak Letters in varying sizes over an orange coloured background. The dominant shape is alternative of the Horse's eye while the yak is the 9<sup>th</sup> letter of the Amazigh alphabet (Tifinagh). In combination the symbols suggest the ability of the precious people of amazigh to ward off detected evils through their natural strength /Energy from Nature as compared to that of the horse's eye and the sun.

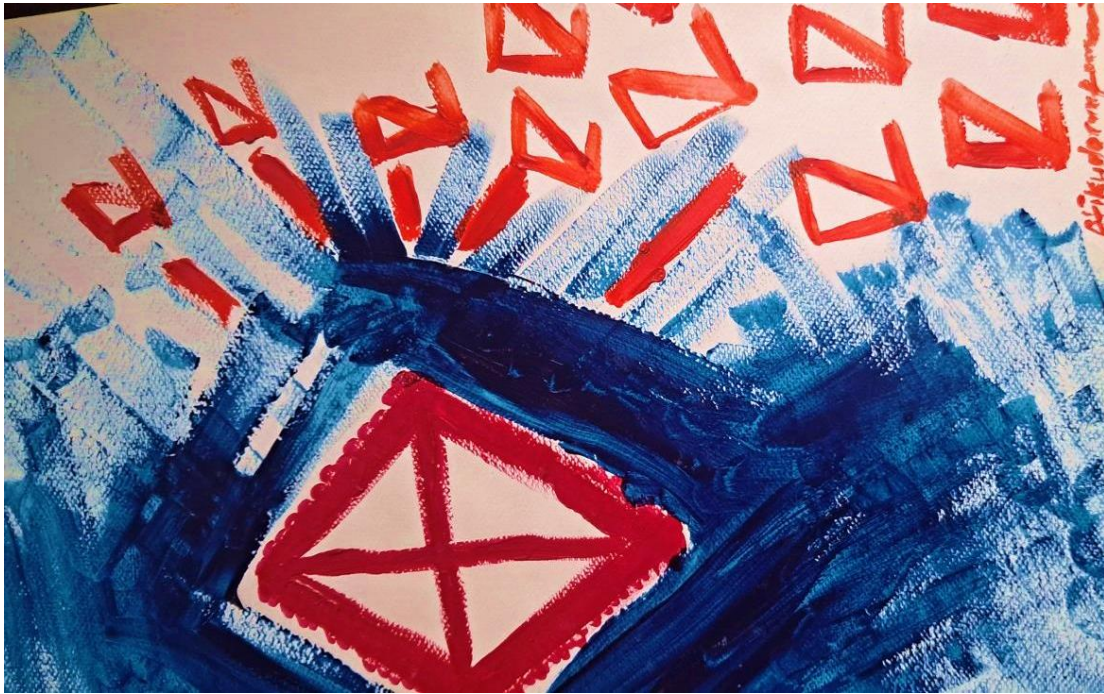
Figure: 37



**Name:** Veil, Amulet Chain with Tifinagh symbols (yak<sup>w</sup>), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku **Year:** 2014,  
**Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher

Figure: 37 above is a symbolic image containing a prevailing chained or interlaced diamond shaped outlines on the top of a yellow background surrounded by the yak<sup>w</sup> symbol. The diamond chain is called veil or amulet chain while the yak<sup>w</sup> symbol is the 10<sup>th</sup> letter of the Tifinagh. In analysis this combination represents the Chain of Solidarity between Amazigh tribes during hardship powered by the resilience of the Femininity/fertility of womanhood with earth's sun energy.

**Figure: 38**



**Name of symbol:** Taburquist, Rose with Yaq(q), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure:38 above, consists of a diamond outline with straight cross touching all vertices (edges) inside out in red pigment, engulfed in a bluely fading background surrounded by the yaq letter on one side on a whitish background. The diamond symbol is called Taburquist or Rose while yaq is the 15<sup>th</sup> letter of the Tifnagh which also stands for the male seed. In the Amazigh cultural context the Taburquist Rose symbolizes the relationship between a man and woman a while **■** (yaq) stands for the seed, that germinates from such relation with the support of spiritual forces which the blue hue represents.

Figure: 39



**Name of symbol :** Patridge\_Eye (𐵜), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco , **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure: 39 above, shows an intricate rectangle of squared patterns in vibrant blue colors diagonally laid on one side of a yellowish background. This is accompanied by lined up pattern of the tfinagh letter (𐵜) yah on the larger part of the background within some white patches. The squared pattern is called the Patridge eyes while (𐵜) yah symbol is the 12<sup>th</sup> letter of the Tifinagh which represents the eyes. In combination contextually, this symbols stand for the timeless beauty of diverse aspects of the amazigh people which can be seen externally and internally. In particular, this symbol calls for the appreciation of the amazigh race beauty beyond the surface but rather in all its facets .

Figure: 40



**Name:** Tazerzit, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

The image on figure: 40 above is a red outline of a dominant inverted triangular shape possessing a reversed C with a line vertically drawn across it, like a currency line (\$). It also has below it a horizontally positioned oval attached to the triangles upturned apex. This symbol is placed amid a green background surrounded by same letter of the Tifinagh in three places below. The shield like looking shape is called Tazerzit while the x like letter is 'yax' the 14<sup>th</sup> alphabet of the Amazigh Tifinagh. The Tazerzit is symbol of Self-defense which signifies that the people defends themselves naturally from all internal or external adversity targeted at subjugating or wiping them out and still the people flourish like healthy plants.

**Figure: 41**

**Name:** Tafanzart, **Year:**2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

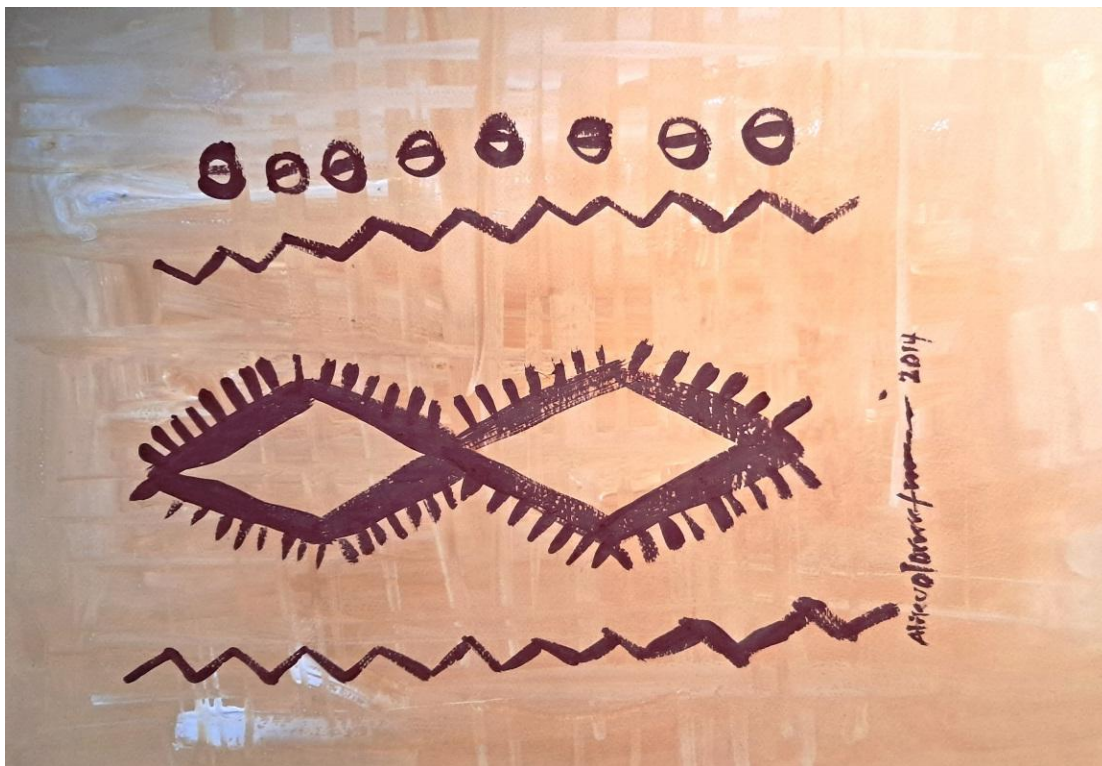
The figure: 41 above is a dominant outline of a variant of two apex touching but base broken equilateral (here looking like an X) triangles with a vertical line drawn to the width of the triangles base which is slanted diagonally. Around the touching apexes are seemingly randomly inscribed U-like letters (yam) of the Neo-Tifinagh around. The hourglass-looking outline is called Anf or Tafanzart in the Amazigh language while the U-letter is yam the 19<sup>th</sup> letter of the Tifinagh. The dominant figure is a customary Amazigh symbol used in the official dress for Amazigh brides (the Handira) representing a new era of womanhood while the U-like letter represents the feminine strength and fertility of the bride. In combination these symbols depict the power of Amazigh woman in the midst of adversity confronting Amazigh landscape.

**Figure: 42**

**Name:** Baraka (divine blessing), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher

Figure: 42 above is a red outline of a cross like shape created by the intersection of two rectangles, creating a total of six boxes: three vertically and three horizontally. At one end of the shape is the I-like outline, which is one of the Tifinagh letters. The above symbol is called Baraka (divine blessing) while the letter I is called “yaj” the 17<sup>th</sup> letter of Amazigh alphabet. Symbolically, in this context it represents the divine blessing of the almighty upon the amazigh people.

Figure: 43



**Name:** Hadda Ouakki, with yab (b), **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher

The image on Figure: 43 above, illustrates two horizontally lapping diamonds with thin line extensions looking like eye lashes all over the diamonds. Above the diamonds are eight inscriptions of same letter of the tifinagh followed by a zig-zig line beneath. This symbol is a variant called Hadda Ouakki while the alphabet is called yab, the second alphabet of the amazigh Tifinagh. Contextually, this fused symbols stands for hope for liberty, forced amalgamations/unions by foreign powers on the amazigh culture and the progress of the people as long as life continues, flows and grows.

**Figure: 44**



**Name:** Dama (Eye of the partridge) with 𐵓 (Gh), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marrakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** Atiku’s sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

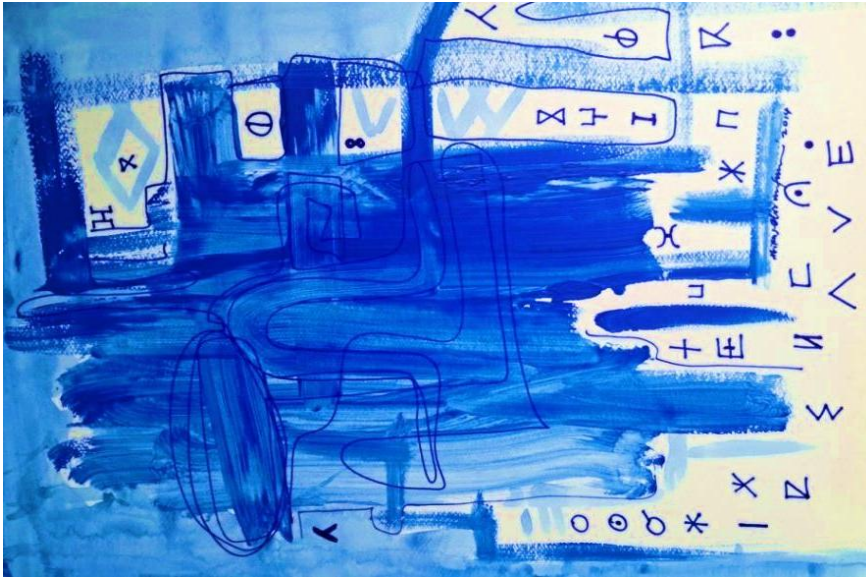
Figure: 44 above, is a water colour wash expression depicting human forms in outlines, along with outlines of old traditional Arabian building structures. Encapsulated in this composition are two rectangular patterned boxes in black outlines surrounded by a letter (𐵓) of the Amazigh alphabet. The rectangular patterns are called “Dama” while the letter is called “yagh” 24<sup>th</sup> letter of the Tifinagh. Contextually, this combination symbolizes the transformative wisdom, intelligence, and creativity of the Amazigh race which in turn guides and protects them.

Figure: 45



**Name:** Croix/Chevron/Milipede/yal, **Year:** 2014, **Location:**Marakesh-Morocco,**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Figure: 41 above is a water wash representation showing brush lines in orange, light green, red and yellow with inscriptions in black pigment of some Tifinagh letters and amazigh symbol that looks like a fish spine. The bright colours are the amazigh cultural colours, the X or croix is symbol of preservation, the millipede connotes slow and steady movements, and the chevron represents progress/growth while the inverted N stands for 18<sup>th</sup> alphabet of the tiffinagh. Contextually, these symbolizes the slow but consistent growth of the amazigh people through major effort of the women in the midst of harsh and adverse environment of the Amazigh Terrain.

**Figure: 46**

**Name:** Tifinagh, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

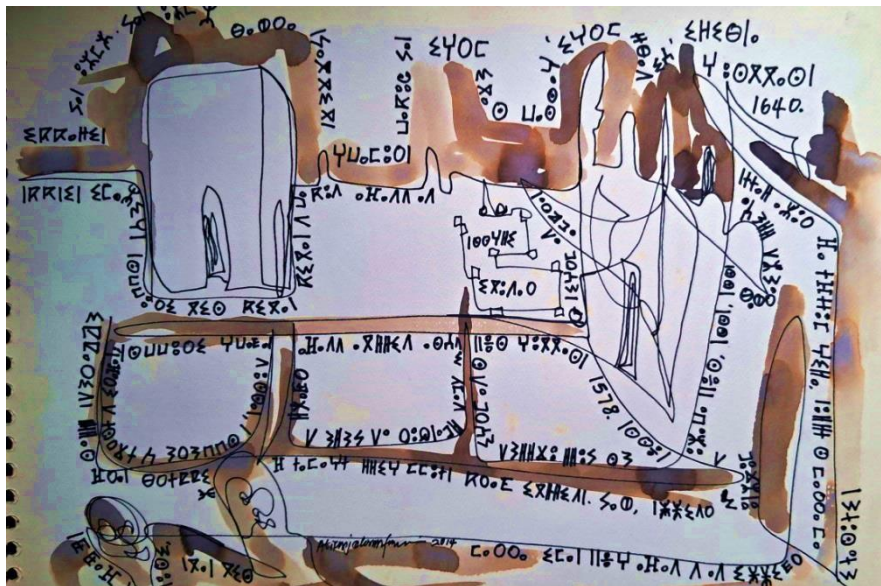
The expression in Figure: 46 above is an abstract expression in sky blue and white background depicting incoherent structures, lines brush marks and inscriptions of almost all the alphabets. This symbolizes the interconnections within the amazigh race, tribes, countries their communications and the spiritual force of nature.

**Figure: 47**

**Name:** Yaz & Lozenge, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher



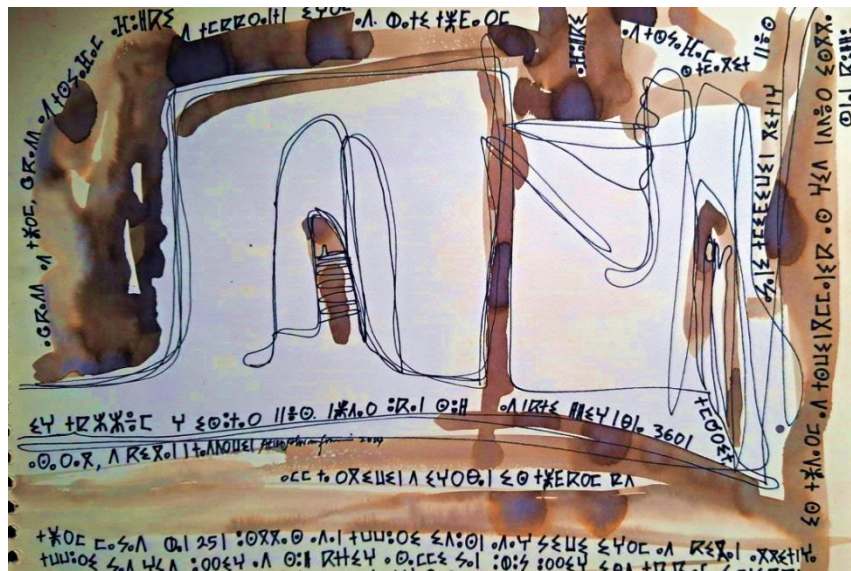
Figure: 49



Name: Amazigh script lines, Year: 2014, Location: Marakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure: 49 above is an abstract/ diagrammatic history of the Amazigh people written in Tifinagh script symbolically depicting a nation built on native structures.

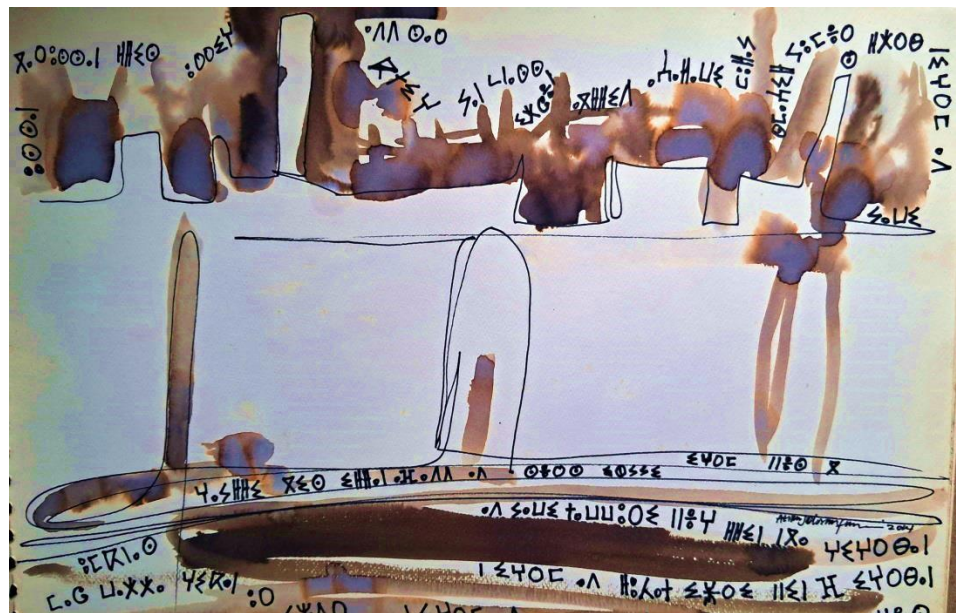
Figure: 50



Name: Amazigh wall wash, Year: 2014, Location: Marakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure: 50 above is a sketchy description of the amazigh peoples. Produced in lines and wash monochrome using statements written in tifinagh letters. It depicts walls and human form in unbroken lines.

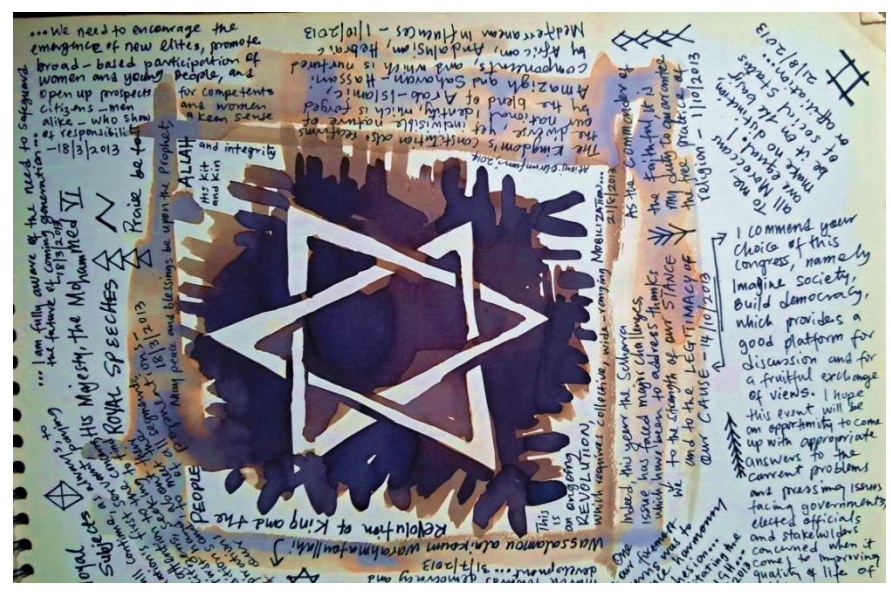
Figure: 51



Name: Line Landscape/doors, Year: 2014, Location: Marakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku’s sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure: 51 above illustrate paths and open doors in single line movements of wash monochrome embedded with significant letters and sentences in Tifinagh alphabet. The image represents open access to goods, well-meaning people, and resources in and out of the Lands of the amazigh people freely.

Figure: 52

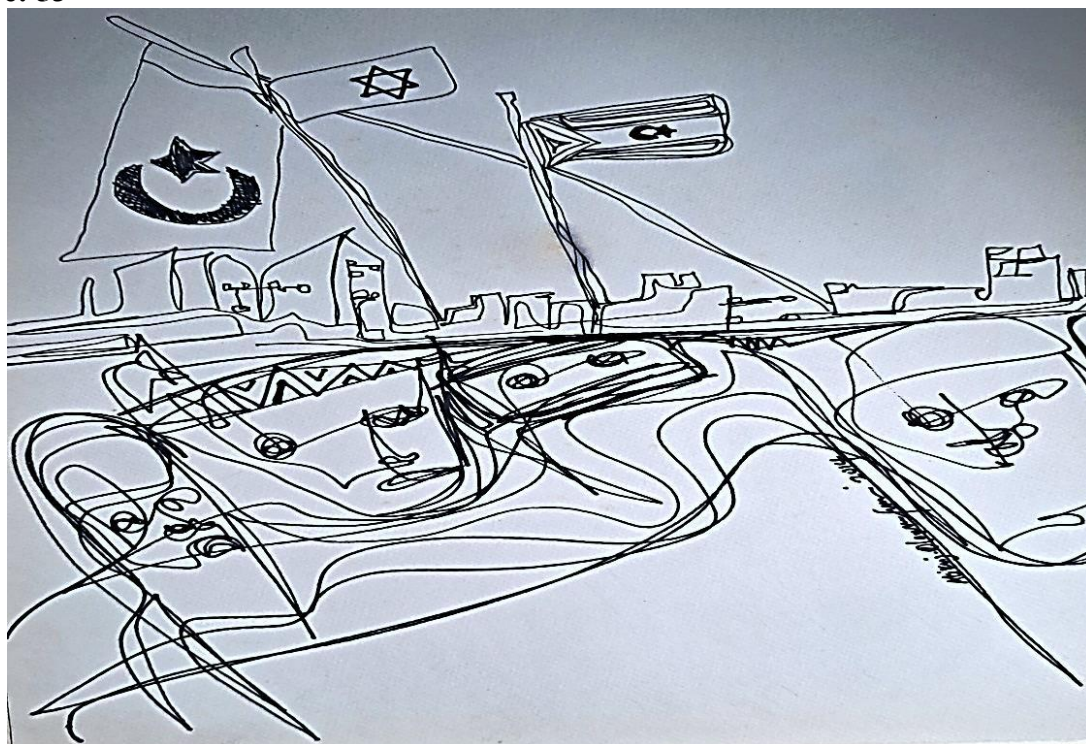


Name: Revolution of King and the People, Year: 2013, Location: Marakesh-Morocco, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku’s sketchpad, photo: Researcher

**Name:** Itr: Star, (star of David), **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku,  
**Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, photo: Researcher

Figure: 52 above consist of prominent positioning of the Star of David rendered in black monochrome centred in an irregular diamond. Inscribed all over the background are excerpts of written speeches of global leaders, presidents, royalties and advocacy from the Artist. Atiku-addresses royal subjects, the amazigh peoples(imazighens),participants and performance audience who could see and view the display. Also captured in the composition is the collection of several symbols of the amazigh culture. This symbolizes an affinity and the Amazigh shared history with Israel in descent and history/ anti-semitic voices .

**Figure: 53**



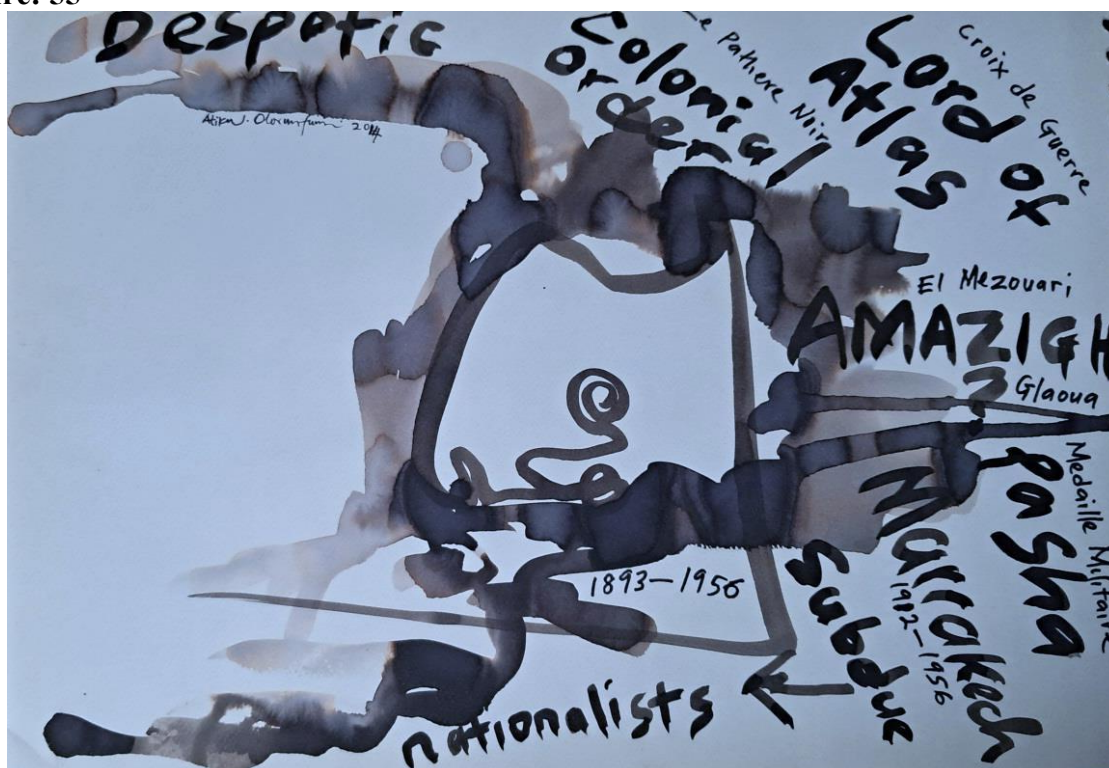
**Name:** The 3 Big Influencers, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku,  
**Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **Photo:** Researcher

Fig: 53 above is a graphical capturing of three faces and line of structures that shaped the contemporary Moroccan history and amazigh culture. It captures three holstered flags, four



places, personalities and possible words connected to the Amazigh culture. This shape is known as the popular yaz symbol used by the Imaghizen, to represent their origin and identity. It symbolizes national freedom, celebration to the amazighs and it is central in the amazigh flags. The yaz is also the 32<sup>nd</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Letters of the Tifinagh ( Amazigh Alphabet)

**Figure: 55**

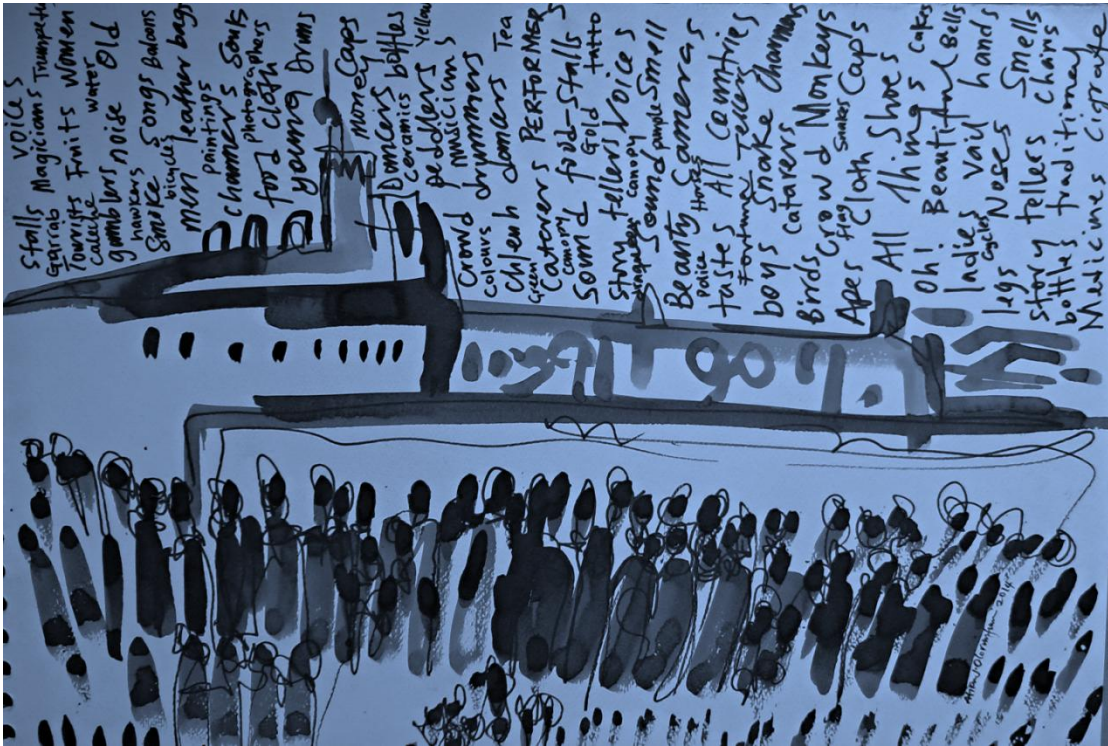


**Name:** Amazigh Nationalists, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Fig: 55 is a combination of texts and sketch, in an illustrative historical in black ink. This expression reflects names of rulers, leaders, their types of governments and personalities, the seat of power like “Pasha marakash” and dates of conquest, revolutions and reigns. Overall, the artwork is a minimalist representation of explicit dates, names and faces in sketchy abstraction.



Figure: 57



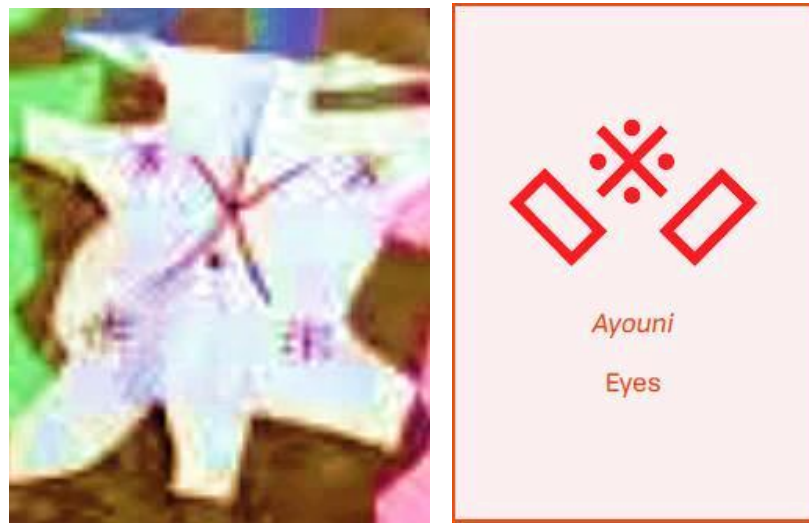
**Name:** Amazigh All and sundry, **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** Atiku's sketchpad, **photo:** Researcher

Figure 57 above is an image used to represent all possible issues and resources in the Amazigh territory. The image outlines comprises crowded human population watching a path like arena with supposed hopes of future transformation of the territory.

**Figure: 58**

**Name:** Ahjam Yenner (Forehead tattoo), **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Source:** facebook/online, **photo:** Acharaf Bendaoud

Figure 58: above captures two pair of diagonal lines crossing at equal interval to create a perfect square/diamond. A dot is appended at the posterior angle of shape formed. It's a common symbol used for forehead tattoo by Amazigh women .It symbolizes motherhood and fertility.

**Figure: 59**

**Name:** Ayouni (Eyes), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakesh-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook, **photo:** Acharaf Bendaoud

The image on Figure:59 above depicts two diagonal lines crossing at the middle with four dots at the four sides of the intersections similar to the four cardinal poles. Slightly Below the X shape on the image are two slanty rectangles on the left and right. This symbol is called Ayouni and stands for the eyes that can see everything from the four cardinal points (North, East, West and South). Contextually, this image stands for the peoples grace to see, discern and decode from all sides.

**Figure: 60**



**Name:** Takezrant (Fly), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **photo:** Acharaf Bendaoud/ Dina Benbrahim

In Amazigh (also known as Berber), the word “Takezrant” and its image as shown in figure: 60 above refers to a fly—the insect, Takezrant is the “feminine noun” for "fly" in many Tamazight dialects. Symbolically, the fly is used derogatively to put down the seemingly weak front of the feminine energy projected by the natives. However, it also used to depict adaptability, persistence, survival, renewal, resilience, rebirth and transformational nature of the amazigh people in face of diverse harsh realities they have survived in spite of their size or number

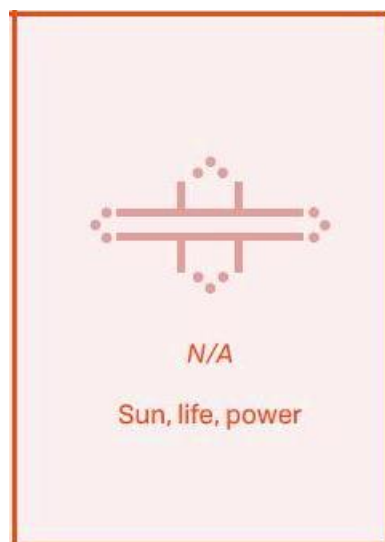
**Figure: 61**



**Name:** Crescent with three Dots, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **Design:** Dina Benbrahim

Though no direct references pinpoints the symbolism of a crescent with three vertical dots. An analysis or inference can be made by a study of the related amazigh motifs and nuances. In amazigh culture the crescent is connected to feminity,cycles, fertility and regenerative change while the dots usually stands for seeds,leanage and journey of life. When combined this symbol simply represents the symbol of change, growth and revival of the amazigh in the midst of all odds against them.

**Figure: 62**



**Name:** unknown, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **photo:** Acharaf Bendaoud/ Dina Benbrahim

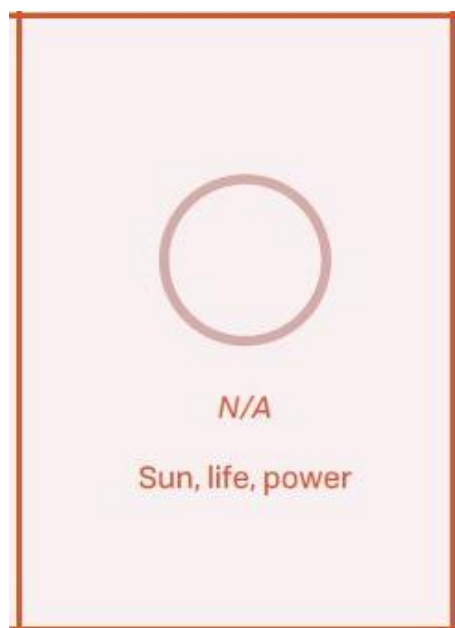
The image in figure 62 above comprises two horizontal lines with three dots (at the beginning, middle and end) is very ancient geometrical sign in the Amazon motif. This design is used in many layers of meanings in Amazigh visual use (tattoos, weaving, pottery, jewelry).

The dots may represent the shift of the sun sunrise (starting), zenith/noon (middle) and sunset (end). This cycle is flanked by two horizontal lines which put some accent on order in the cosmos.

The movement of the sun through the day is directly connected with life itself. also gives life, fertility and pulse to life. The sun is the giver of life cycle and life to the Amazigh people.

Given that the sun is the boss of growth, warmth, and survival in the hostile Maghreb terrain, the symbol also represents strength, resilience, and power of nature. It may be a charm representing power and safety.

**Figure: 63**

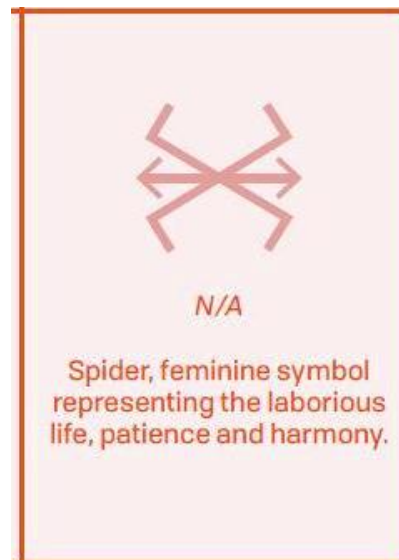


**Name:** perfect Circle, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **photo:** Acharaf Bendaoud/ Dina Benbrahim

As in other cultures, geometric shapes, in this case a perfect circle as seen in Figure :63 have deep symbolic value within the Amazigh culture, as it refers to the cosmos, daily activities,

and spirituality. Closest to the circle is the sun, its vital because it increases life in the deserts of North Africa. It stands for time, cycles, warmth, and the sun in its fullness. The circle is conjugate to the symbol of universal balance, life without ceasing. It is a widely held belief in Amazigh society that the circle is widely represented in their jewelry, ceramics, and tattoos. A perfect circle is symbolic of immortality, eternity, and the life-death cycle which is the absence of start and head. Circular patterns can also be found in the zawiya households of the Amazigh as a symbol of the unbroken line of generations.

**Figure: 64**



**Name: Spider, feminine symbol, Artist: Jelili Atiku , Year: 2014, Location: Marakech-Morocco, , Source: facebook/online, photo: Acharaf Bendaoud/ Dina Benbrahim**

The spider image as shown in figure: 64 is an icon to the Amazigh (Berber) people, as it is believed to be a symbol of survival and imagination since it constructs the webs which are supposed to trap evil. The webs are made by spiders, thus they are perceived as home protectors. Also, according to the rural tradition, they were considered guardians of women. This impacts

the direct impact on the Amazonian women since it set the owners of weaving traditions (carpets, embroidery) and social fabric.

**Figure: 65**



**Name of Symbol:** ahjam oudmr wachm (chest/healing Tattoo), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **photo Design:** Dina Benbrahim

‘Ahjam ouddmr wachm image’ in figure: 65 is a special healing or treatment tattoo in the Amazigh culture- a tattoo or mark which is more than a decoration or symbol containing great therapeutic meaning, spiritual and protective. A chosen design or symbol. It is believed that these tattoos may assist in physical healing and protect a person against ill forces. This tradition brings out the beautiful effects of the Amazigh in the healing art and spirituality. Tattoos are an attraction in the day-to-day traditions of the culture to the Amazigh, it is a form of whole body medicine.

**Figure: 66**

**Name of Symbol:** Dots and saw-like triangles), **Artist:** Jelili Atiku , **Year:** 2014, **Location:** Marakech-Morocco, , **Source:** facebook/online, **photo Design:**Dina Benbrahim

Figure: 66 above is Dots and saw-like triangles flanking a central linear “eye” design .A central motif in Amazigh art, the eye is often stylized as a diamond or circle with a dot—this symbol and motif serves as a powerful talismanic protector commonly used to ward off the evil eye and negative energies. It symbolizes vigilance, spiritual awareness, and defense. In combination when the protective eye motif is framed by saw-like shapes, it layers two protective elements: spiritual (the eye) and physical (the saw). Together, they create a reinforced amulet motif—a merged visual language of safeguarding from both seen and unseen threats.

#### **4.3 Cultural symbols in Alaagba Performance**

Jelili Atiku attempts using “Alaagba” performance as means of probing into the socio-political space of the African continent following the economic and political desecration of the continent through the activities of the transnational corporations and colonial powers from 1840s to the 1950s. The economic success experienced first by the portuguese propelled other western

powers to pounce on the virgin African continent for economic and political exploitation. Having abolished slavery in the 1880s Africa became the new land for cheap labour, raw materials, colonization in the wake of the the industrial revolution. At the departure of the colonial powers in the 1950s from the continent there seemed hope of real independence and liberation. However, Africa has remained perpetually repressed, undeveloped and broken owing to the legacy of colonization and neo-colonialism. This performance was aimed at steering discussions around all these issues while engaging the spectawtors/viewers on current post colonial socio-political situations of Africa. Alaagba was performed on the 24<sup>th</sup> may, 2014 at Richardplatz Neukolin an inner City locality in Berlin Germany. It was a processional performance along the street of Neukolin where locals were viually engaged in the ritualistic movements, demonstrtion and process of “etutu ritual” cleansing . Atiku masked in the calabsh/mirror headgear pulled along the spherical baskets which has within it stringed ankara folds. The artist featured Anne Letailleur who carried a plastic water container from which Atiku springled with a white painted local broom which he also swept the street as a cleansing ritual.

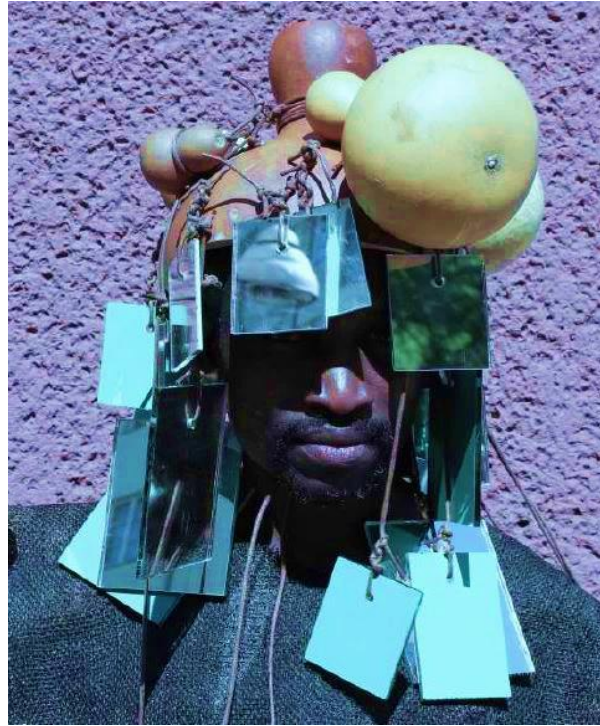
#### 4.4 Elements/Objects of Art used in “Alaagba” Performance

Figure: 67



**Name: Black Gouche Paint, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur)**  
**, Title: Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY**  
**Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, Date - May 24 2014, Copyright Jelili Atiku, 2022.**  
**Photo Credit : Chiara Cartuccia**

Figure: 67 is a Black Gouche painted body of Jelili Atiku in “Alaagba Performance” black Gouche was painted all over the artist bare body in the image above. The artist used black colour to say that black dominates. Black is not inferior “Put black in anything, it dominates because it is a strong colour” (Atiku, 2025). The night is black-the most important energy of creation manifest at night and night is dark colour. Black initiates while white is also sign for a state of enlightenment and sacredness of the body.

**Figure: 68**

**Name: Gourd headgear/ Mirrors**, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur)  
**Title:** Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY  
 Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, **Date** - May 24 2014, **Copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2022.  
**Photo Credit** : Chiara Cartuccia

In every culture every object worn as adornment or ritual headgear carries deep symbolic meanings, especially when used in festivals, ritual performances, or masquerades. In figure: 68 both the calabash and the mirror have incusted cultural and spiritual symbolism when placed on the head. The calabash (gourd) is one of the most sacred and symbolic objects in Yoruba thought. It stands for Cosmic Symbolism: The calabash represents the universe itself, often described as two halves (upper and lower world). When placed on the head, it connects the wearer to both the spiritual and earthly realms. Fertility & Nurturing: As a vessel that holds food, water, palm wine, or medicine, it is a symbol of femininity, fertility, abundance, and sustenance. A calabash headgear can thus signify the bearer as a custodian of life-giving power. As a mystical Container: It is also believed to be a vessel of ase (spiritual power/authority) Wearing it on the head symbolizes carrying wisdom, power, and ancestral presence. In masquerades and priestly

contexts, a calabash headpiece can suggest the ability to act as an intermediary between worlds—head (orí) being the seat of destiny. Together, they suggest the wearer is both a holder of hidden wisdom and a revealer of divine truth. Such a headpiece would mark the wearer as someone who stands at a powerful spiritual crossroads mediator between seen and unseen worlds, protector, and custodian of ase (power/authority of the gods/goddess).

**Figure: 69**



**Name: Jute-bag material sleeveless, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letaille), Title: Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, Date - May 24 2014, Copyright Jelili Atiku, 2022. Photo Credit : Chiara Cartuccia**

The jute material clothig is a less factory processed fabric that is closer to nature considering its raw source .It is also an ancient fashion and clothing style. Contextually, this half open top represents a call to the old ways of African living, though looks black its suggest strength, wealth and abundance.

**Figure: 70**



**Name: 58 strings made out of Ankara (Dutch wax) , Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letaille), Title: Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, Date - May 24 2014, Copyright Jelili Atiku, 2022. Photo Credit : Chiara Cartuccia.**

The 58 strings in Figure above are symbolic ropes and threads which represented the foreign/colonial masters cords attached to the people and the African continent economically, politically, socially, spiritually and educationally with which Africa and other developing countries are pulled to any direction they so wish at all times. This shows how the people inside the countries have little or no control at all on their existence and general living,

**Figure: 71**



**Name: 58 circular baskets with ankara balls inside them**, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur), **Title:** Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary **Location** Berlin, Germany, **Date** - May 24 2014, **Copyright** Jelili Atiku., **Photo Credit** : Chiara Cartuccia

**Figure: 72**



**Name: Plastic container (for sprinkling)** , Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur), **Title:** Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary **Location** Berlin, Germany, **Date** - May 24 2014, **Copyright** Jelili Atiku, **Photo Credit** : Chiara Cartuccia

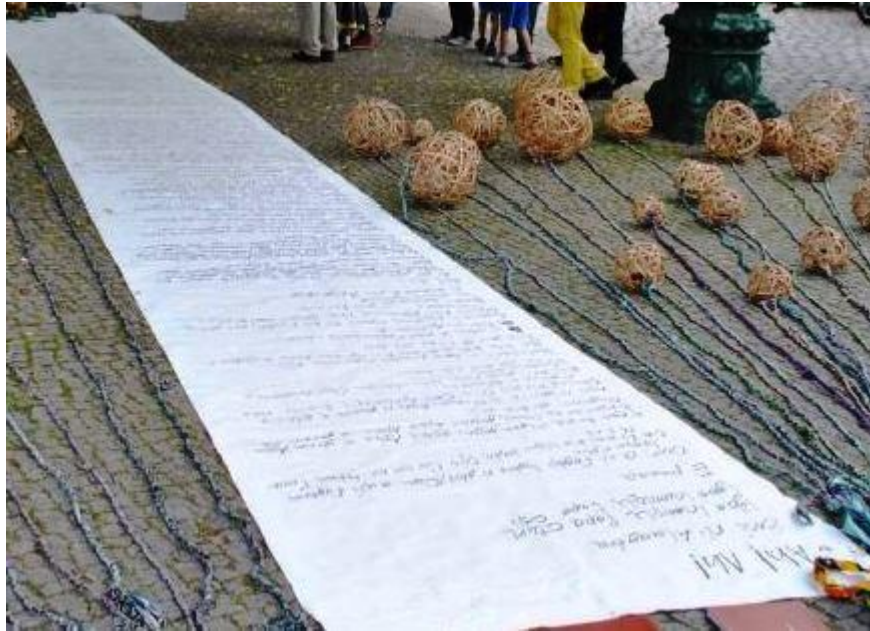
This contains nature's cleanser and neutralizers of water and herbs that purifies, heals and brings good fortunes to the humanity and lands. This symbolises the power of water as a natural cleansing element.

**Figure: 73**



**Name: White painted local broom, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur), Title: Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, Date - May 24 2014, Copyright Jelili Atiku., Photo Credit : Chiara Cartuccia**

Figure: 73 displays the white broom used in the performance which symbolizes an enlightenment, pure and natural cleansing powers –used to wipe out the contaminations, corruption and evil in the land. Hence, the sweeping of the street. These contaminations are in form of spirits, beliefs and thoughts that has created more problems in history and all over the world and must be wiped from their lands of origin.

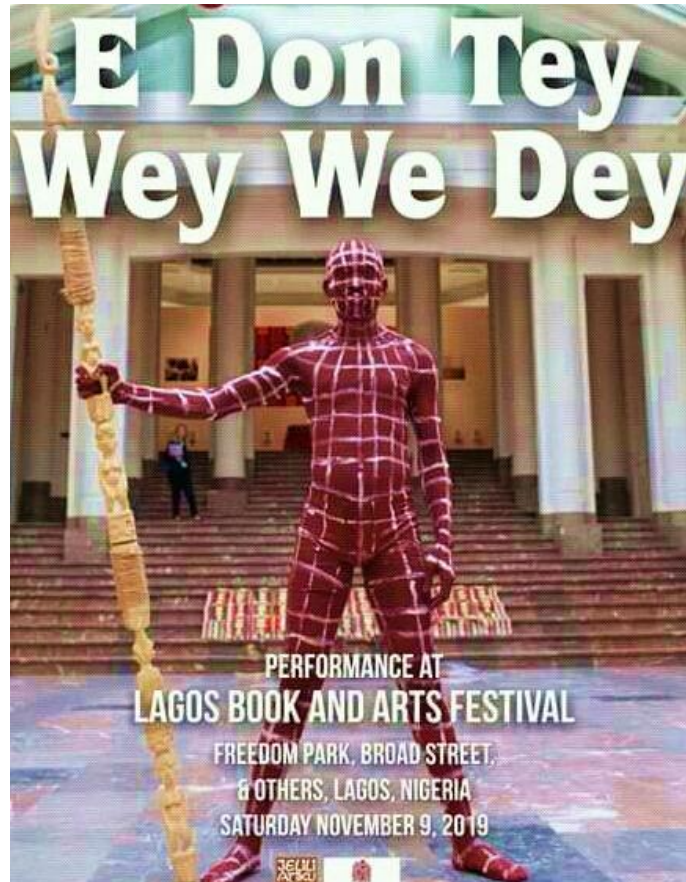
**Figure: 74**

**Name: Name: The white skroll, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur), Title: Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, Date - May 24 2014, Copyright Jelili Atiku. Photo Credit : Chiara Cartuccia**

The white Skroll in figure: 74 above used for the performance is a record tablet which could preserve history and writing for decades. A white skroll is a symbolic document that suggests the purity/integrity of the recorded facts, stories, songs, poems, name etc. contextually, Atiku used the white skroll to communicate hidden truths which hither to have been coated and plated in numerous colours about African and the coming of the imperial powers to the continents. It discloses how the continent was bastardized, upset and turned around to the will of the intruders in so much detail in songs and poems. The white skroll represent the true/pure written record of the hidden truth which has been perverted in so many foreign historical records. It contains the names, ethnic groups, indigenous nations , African Native lands .The skroll contains the songs of the Ancestors detailing the ills of imperialism and colonialism in African with its consequences in this post colonial era.

#### 4.5 E Don Tey Wey We Dey Performance

Figure: 75



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *E Don Tey Wey We Dey*, at the Lagos book and Arts Festival at Freedom park, Location Broad Street-Lagos, Nigeria, **Date** - Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2019,,**Copyright** Jelili Atiku,

This performance by Atiku Jelili is an art piece on the consciousness of outsiders, to assert that Blacks and Africans operate by ancient values, symbols, signs, languages and rituals. This performance was first unveiled at the Lagos book and Arts Festival at Freedom Park, Broad Street-Lagos, Nigeria, Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2019 as shown in figure 75 above. It was later reproduced at the 2023- 3rd edition of FARaway, Festival des Arts, FRAC Champagne-Ardenne Reims, France (Saturday February 11th). And has been re-performed live at both the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival), Square Viger / L'Union Française,

Montréal, Canada (September 15) and Art Festival, Premier Junction, Oremeji Bus Stop, Mokola, Adegoke Street (Akala Way) / Adegoke Street / Adeola Street and New Culture Studio, Ibadan, Nigeria (October 23) respectively.

**Figure: 76**



**Name:** Atiku Displaying Some Cultural Symbol, **Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *E Don Tey Wey We Dey*, performance at the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival, **Location** Square Viger / L'Union Française Montréal, Canada, **Date** - September 15, 2023., **Copyright** Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku/youtube videos

In this performance the artist started out with a loud shout of “I am Ancient”, I am ancient” while dressed in a semi -nude appearance, painted in earthy brown and white squared line markings. In the middle of the performance Jelili approaches many of his spectators with a big book containing several symbols in black ink as seen in figure: 76 above, and figure:77

below from which his viewers both children and adults reproduced with a chalk on the floor the symbolic image he shows them.

**Figure: 77**



**Name: A child Reproducing a Symbol, Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: *E Don Tey Wey We Dey*, performance at the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival, Location Square Viger / L'Union Française Montréal, Canada, Date - September 15, 2023., Copyright Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku/youtube videos**

Furthering his performance, in this show Atiku makes remarkable moves of dragging a huge cloth material decorated with the sculpted images of the Ere Ibeji sculptures made of wood on his shoulders while making a long procession on the streets. In his right hand is a very long and well carved staff of about 7 feet in height with which he strode the streets at 2<sup>nd</sup> phase of the performance. These images /objects represent ancient cultural symbols with significant meanings rich and deep in the context of African traditional beliefs. The cloth material stands for the coverage/backing of the ancestors/gods while the staff represents a high symbol of ancestral

authority likened to a staff with which Africans operate and live. See figure : 78 and 79 on the next page.

**Figure:78**



Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: *E Don Tey Wey We Dey*, performance at the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival, Location Square Viger / L'Union Française Montréal, Canada, Date - September 15, 2023., Copyright Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku/youtube videos

**Figure: 79**



Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: *E Don Tey Wey We Dey*, performance at the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival, Location Square Viger / L'Union Française Montréal, Canada, Date - September 15, 2023., Copyright Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku/youtube videos

## CHAPTER FIVE GENERAL ANALYSIS OF OTHER CULTURAL SYMBOLIC FORMS

## 5.0 Introduction

Atiku incorporates sacred elements of local and foreign cultures into his performances. In an interview with the researcher and Africanah journal Jelili sheds more lights on his use of cultural symbolisms and his dedication to Yoruba culture (Pia Diamandis 2024). The cultural Symbols are studied under the following sub-heading:

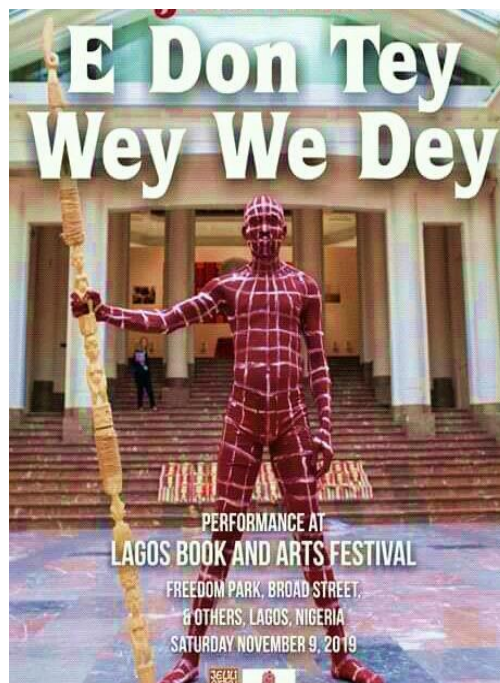
- 5.1 Cultural symbolisms of colours
- 5.2 Cultural symbolisms of masks/masquerade
- 5.3 Cultural symbolisms in Head gears
- 5.4 Cultural symbolisms in Attires
- 5.5 . Cultural symbolisms of processions in Yoruba land
- 5.6 Cultural symbolisms of rituals / Orishas
- 5.7 Cultural symbolisms in Atikus performance titles and names
- 5.8. The Yoruba culture and symbolisms

### 5.1 Cultural symbolisms of Colours

Figure: 80A



Figure: 80B



Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: *body art line symbolism*, Location Lagos- Nigeria, Date - September 4, 2022, copyright Jelili Atiku, Photo Credit : google/images

According to Jelili Atiku his use of colours in performances, artworks or exhibitions is guided by two things; his consent and his audience. This refers to his collection of memories, references and his audience current ability to relate based on contemporary situations.

The use of earthy colours in performances E Don Tey Wey We Dey symbolizes the deep knowledge and sacrifice of Africa, white represents the purity and the protections Africans receive from their ancestors. In his performance of the red series, Atiku emphasizes the human propensities towards violence, destruction, bloodshed and his imbalances with positive energies. Red is 'pupa' in Yoruba language, red signifies resilient power, strong energy—the potent components that sustain our life foundation and activate our own living. He asserts that “Blood is red, but in his performances, it retains a duality. The two aspects of the word denotes life and also destruction”. The conscious use of red, white and black is rooted in Yoruba cultural symbolism. These colours according to Atiku are associated to the orisha Esu and they represent purity, strength and activation of the highest potency respectively. White is the purest and strongest followed by black for strength which is the energy of creation or manifestation while red is the activator of the two.

**Figure: 81**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Red Day (In The Red Series -17)* **Date** – October 19-2017 .**Copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2022. **Photo Credit** : Dominic Rotheroe

Black in “Alaagba” painted all over the artist bare body is used to say black dominates. “Put black in anything, it dominates because it is a strong colour”. The night is black-the most important energy of creation manifest at night and night is dark colour. Black initiates while white serves as a state of enlightenment and sacredness of the body. Red as depicted in the performance image in figure: 81 above represents death, destruction, and the colour of blood and life. While black depicts dominance and strength as seen in figure 82 below.

**Figure: 82**

**Name:** painted body in **Black Gouche Colour**, Artist: Jelili Atiku (Featuring Anne Letailleur)  
**Title:** Performance/Installation in Public/Gallery Space at Richardplatz / SAVVY  
 Contemporary Location Berlin, Germany, **Date** - May 24 2014, **Copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2022.  
**Photo Credit** : Chiara Cartuccia

In E don Tey Wey We Dey performance, the artist painted his body brown as to represent the colour of the earth. The white lines on his body represents the experiences we have gone through as Africans, sacrifices, sound generation with deep indigenous knowledge and protections of our ancestors who watch over us. The processional walk on the street, with crowded onlookers according to him, means that we are communal people, energetic and strong. The bare body suggests that we Africans are open, to knowledge, wisdom and real values unlike westerners who are not (Thedde, Tewa 2021).

## **5.2 Cultural Symbolisms of Masks/Masquerade**

**Figure: 83**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title** *I Am A Fish From The Sea*, performance at the Live Art Network Africa Gathering, Institute for Creative Arts, University of Cape Town, South Africa. **Location** South Africa, **Date** - Sunday February 19, 2023. **Copyright** online wikipedia source. **Photo Credit** wikipedia.

Wikipedia, 2025 defines a mask as an item normally worn facially for protection, disguise, theatrical performances, or entertainment, and often engaged for rituals and rites. Masks have been used since ancient times for both ceremonial and practical purposes, as well as in the performing arts and for entertainment. In figure: 83 above Jelili performs with masked appearance using transparent fabric and dry tree branches.

**Figure: 84**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title** *Kill Not This Country (Maanifèsitò II)*, **Location** Ejigbo Lagos, **Date** - September 3rd, 2016. **copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2016. **Photo Credit** : Dominic Rotheroe.

They are typically worn on the face, though they may also be placed for effect in a different place on the wearer's body e.g Queen mother idia mask worn around the waist in the Benin Kingdom by the Oba. In art history, especially sculpture, "mask" is the term for a face without a body that is not modeled in the round (which would make it a "head"), but mostly produced in low relief. The use of masks dates back several eras. It is projected that the first masks may have been used by primitive people to associate the wearer with some kind of irreproachable authority, such as a deity, or to otherwise lend credence to the person's claim on a given social role. Figure :84 above shows the artist on a performance wearing oxygen mask.

**Figure: 85**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back*, performance at the 57th Venice Biennale, Arsenale, **Location:** Venice, Italy, **Date:** May 12, 2017. **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku, 2017. **Photo Credit:** Andrew Essiebo

According to Wingert, (2025) the essential characteristic of hiding and revealing personalities or moods is common to all masks. As cultural objects they have been used throughout the world in all periods since the Stone Age and have been as diverse in appearance as in their use and symbolisms. In figure 85 above the artist Jelili Artist performs in a scary traditional mask. In cultures in which masks of mystic beings have played important ceremonial and religious role, it is usually supposed that the spiritual power of the created image is strongly felt by the artist. A primary belief involved in both the ideation and the execution of these items was and is still that all organic and inorganic matter contains spiritual power and that the mask itself therefore possesses the power of whatever material was used to make it and the power of whatever spirit it represents.

**Figure: 86**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *QLO'MOYOYO*, performance at Aarhus Festuge , **Location** Denmark, **Date** - September 4, 2022.**copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2022. **Photo Credit** : Dominic Rotheroe.

**Egungun** (masquerade) is a Yoruba word meaning (the collective dead), in the broadest sense it is any Yoruba masquerade or masked costumed figure Adepegba, (1984). More precisely, it is a Yoruba masquerade for ancestor reverence, or the ancient ancestors themselves as a collective force. Egungun is a observable expression of the spirits of deceased ancestors who occasionally re-enter the human community for commemoration, festival, and blessings. Atiku's performances are majorly characterized with appearance of various types of Masquerade/Egungun outfits or costumes adapted to suite his messages, themes and prevailing societal concerns as seen in figure: 86 above.

**Figure: 87**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Red or White (In The Red Series #1* performance at 4th Media Actions Biennale), **Date** – Sunday September 21- 2014 .**Copyright** Jelili Atiku, 2022. **Photo Credit :**

Masquerades are an important feature of Yoruba traditional artistry. They are generally known as Egúngún. The term refers to the Yoruba masquerades connected with ancestor reverence, or to the ancestors themselves as a communal force. There are different types of which one of the most prominent is the Gelede An Ese Ifa (oral literature of orunmila divination) explains the origins of Gelede as beginning with Yemoja, The Mother of all the orisa and all living things. An outdated theory stated that the beginning of Gelede might be associated with the change from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society among the Yoruba people. The Gelede spectacle and the Ifa divination system represent two of Nigeria's only three pieces on the United Nations Oral and Intangible Heritages of Humanity list, as well as the only such cultural heritage from Benin and Togo. Jelili Atiku continuously incorporates these traditional cultural elements

into his performances in a modern light to bring healings, directions and possible discussions to humanity through art enlightenments/campaigns.

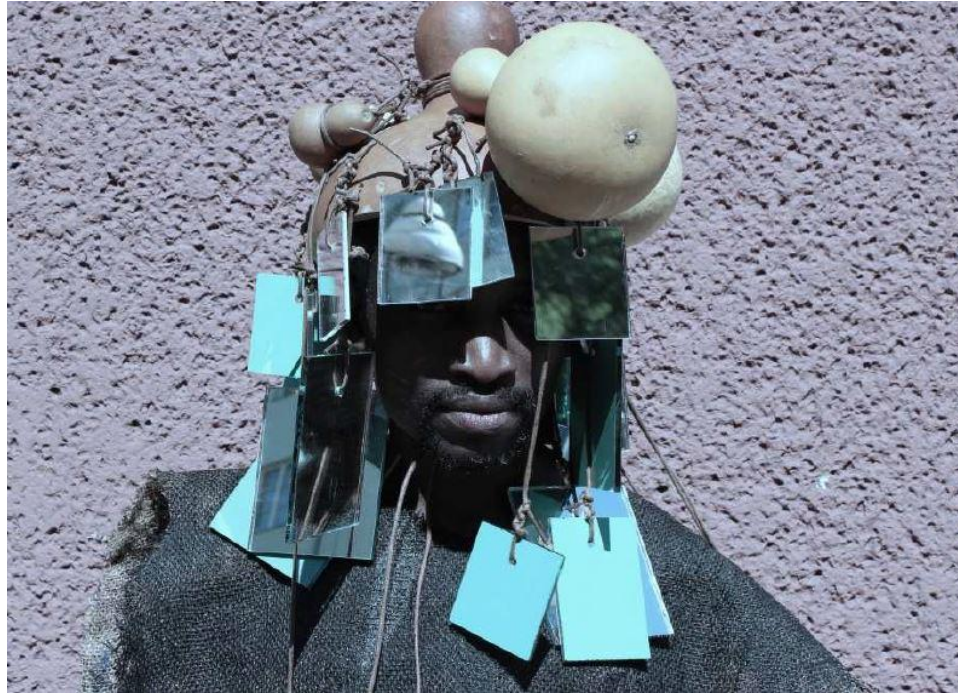
**Figure: 88**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Àràgàmàgò Will Rid This Land off Terrorism*, performance with Monsuru Saula, Hassan Nosiru, Jamiu Sanni and Ashimiu Muyideen, **Location:** Ejigbo, Lagos, Nigeria, **Date:** January 14, 2016, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku, 2016. **Photo Credit:** Emmanuel Sanni.

According to Atiku Egungun/ masquerade is the sacred manifestation of ancestors in Yoruba culture. He affirms that in the performance of Alaagba he used the masquerade as a collective resistance of the ancestors against colonialism- in Alaagba the ancestors manifests to heal, cleanse the community of the abomination created by the colonialist through Egungun.

### 5.3 cultural symbolisms in Head gears

**Figure: 89**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** Alaagba: the performance/Installation at SAVVY Contemporary, ,  
**Location:** Berlin, Germany, **Date:** May 24 2014, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku, 2016. **Photo Credit:**  
 Femke van Gent.

The exclusive respect given to head gears is entrenched in the general African philosophy and specifically the Yoruba concept of “Ori” (Head) which propounds that the head is the seat and carrier of wisdom/ destiny (personal interview, Atiku 2023). As such Atiku gives special attentions to the masks and head gear as seen in figure 88 and 89 above.

**Figure: 90**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Mokoo Moro*- nomadic performance about Covid-19 held at LABAF 2021 ,**Location:** Lagos-Nigeria, **Date:** from November 15–22, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku, 2024.  
**Photo Credit:** NaijaTimes.

Arnoldi, and Kreamer, (2022) postulates that the head itself is a powerful image that plays a key role in how a person is perceived. This affirmation indicates that the head is fundamental to the African concept on the appreciation of the human figure. Jelili Atiku propagates this through most of his works which shares similar concept of venerating the head as a symbol of solution and direction. Figure 90 is an image on *Mokoo Moro*- nomadic performance about Covid-19 held at LABAF 2021. It is one of such performances that sort to give direction for eradicating covid 19 scourge traditionally. Figure 91 depicts both head gear and attire.

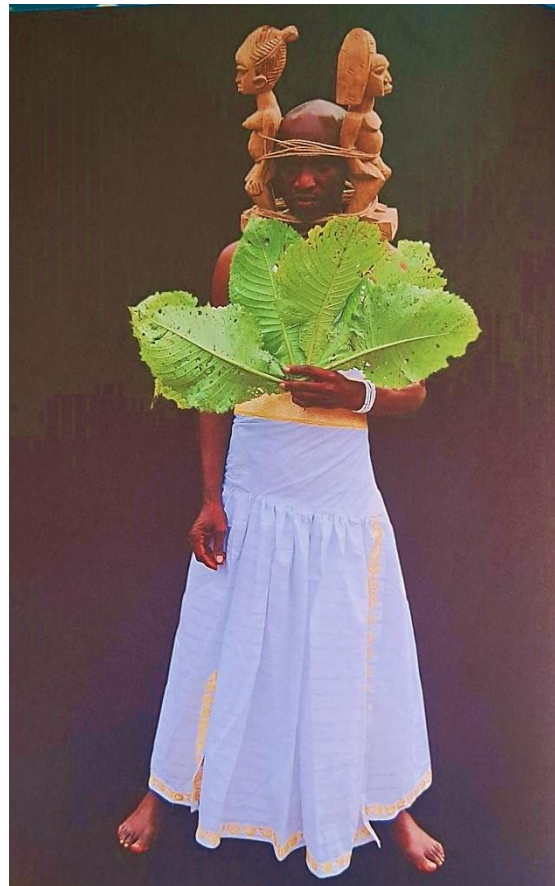
**Figure: 91**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** Amoriya Weds Senator Yerima's with 13 years old *Rafiat Azeez*, **Location:** Ejigbo Lagos-Nigeria, **Date:** August 2013, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku, **Photo Credit:** Akin Onipede. **Source:** Akin Onipede Article

## 5.4 Cultural Symbolisms in Attires

**Figure: 92**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title** *Ìyámi Gbèní, Bàmí Gbèní*, performance at Igboji **Location:** Igboji Ogun State, Nigeria, **Date:** Friday September 25, 2020, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku,.. **Source:** Atiku's Collections

A costume can serve as a reflection of societal norms, historical periods, and individual personalities and cultural heritage. Scholars have extensively analyzed the multifaceted nature of costume, emphasizing its roles in performance, social interaction, and personal expression. One significant aspect of costume is its role in performance art. Atiku has skillfully integrated both cultural and contemporary imposing attires into his performances to captivate and attract viewers' attention. Figure 92 is cultural attire also called elements of his art. Figure 92: and 93 depict different cultural attires.

**Figure: 93**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** *Even Tomorrow, Ọ̀rọ̀mọ̀dìmọ̀dì Lives in You (Alárúagbó XV)* 14th edition of La Muga Caula performance fesAval, Les Escaules, **Location:** Catalonia, Spain **Date:** Sunday September 16, 2018). **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku,. **Photo Credit:** Akin Onipede.

In her work, *The Costume in Performance*, costume designer and scholar Judith Dolan states:

Costume is not merely a representation of a character but a vital component in the storytelling process. It transforms an actor's physicality, enhances the audience's perception, and serves as a visual cue that informs the narrative's tone and setting. A well-designed costume connects the actor to the character, creating a bridge of understanding that enriches the performance. (45)

In *Costume: A Cultural History*, Christopher Breward asserts: Costume is a powerful signifier of identity, operating on multiple levels from the personal to the societal. It is a means of communication that conveys messages about class, gender, ethnicity, and even political affiliation. Understanding costume requires an appreciation of the context in which it exists, as it is deeply intertwined with cultural narratives and historical events. (78)

## 5.5 Cultural Symbolisms of Processions in Yoruba Land

**Figure: 94**



**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, **Title:** Atiku led Asese Procession with yemoja Devotees, **Location:** Ejigbo Lagos-Nigeria, **Date:** August 2013, **Copyright:** Jelili Atiku., **Photo Credit:** Akin Onipede.  
**Source:** Atiku Archive

Processions are formal parades, marches or movements on the streets performed by a group or collections of people in order to express their opinions, protests or perform a religious/traditional/spiritual obligation/rites. In Yoruba cultural set up, processions are key and vital components of religious events, ceremonies or traditional celebrations. These processions include elaborate displays, dances, music and symbolic rituals. Some of the notable events with accompanying processions include: the Osun Oshogbo festival which has an aspect of procession to the Osun goddess shrine for sacrifices, the Olojo festival led by the Ooni in Ile-Ife has a sacred crown procession etc. Figure: 94 above, 95 and 96 below are typical images of symbolic processions performance by Jelili Atiku.

Figure: 95



Artist: Jelili Atiku, Title: *Kill Not This Country (Maanifēsītò II)*- performance at Catholic Mission Street/ Hospital Road / Broad Street,, Location: Lagos Island, Nigeria, Copyright: Jelili Atiku, Source: Atiku Archive

Atiku as a traditional Princes and devotee of the Yoruba traditional religion has continuously projected his beliefs and practices through artistic performances inculcating elements of these practices.

While processions are not merely festive, they are solemn and also create opportunities for deep spiritual re-connections. They are also acts of veneration, renewal and purification which come along with certain rituals all carrying symbolic interpretations and also connecting all the participants, to their ancestral heritage/ spiritual blessings.

**Figure: 96**

**Artist:** Jelili Atiku, In *Mama Say Make I Dey Go, She Dey My Back*, women with *Opón-Ifá* and *Ìròkè-Ifá* (Yoruba divination tray and wooden instrument for diving the future), calabash bowls filled with *Ilè* (soil) and water were used as sacred elements and a way of utilizing indigenous Yoruba problem-solving resources.

### 5.6 Cultural Symbolisms of Orishas / Rituals

One of the most shared Yoruba traditional religious notions has been the concept of Orisha (gods/goddess/deity). Atiku proves his beliefs as a devotee of *Yemoja* and further popularizes some of the orishas through his performance works, where he engages in certain rituals, dances or sacrifices in their honour. Yemoja is the mother of the world; she is a life-giver. She directs all the lives of humankind and is associated to water as she is the *Òrìshà* of rivers. Orisha (also spelled Orisa), these are various godly forms that reflect one of the various manifestations / avatars of God in the Yoruba spiritual or religious system. Some widely known Orisha are Ogun, (God of metal, war and victory), Shango or Jakuta (God of thunder, lightning, fire and justice who manifests as a king always wielding a double-edged axe which conveys his Ashe or divine authority & power), Esu/Eshu elegbara (The trickster and sole messenger to the pantheon, who

conveys the wish of men to the gods. He understands every language / tongue spoken by humankind, and is also the guardian of the crossroads, *Oríta méta* in Yoruba).

*Eshu* has two avatar forms which are manifestations of his dual nature- positive and negative energies; *Eshu Laroye*, a teacher instructor and leader, and *Eshu Ebita*, jesty, deceitful, suggestive and cunning Orunmila, The god of Infinite Knowledge, divination, wisdom and fortune-telling, who reveals the past, solution to problems in the present, and the future, consulted through the Ifa divination system by oracles called Babalawos. Olorun is one of the manifestations / avatars of the Supreme God of the Yoruba pantheon, the owner of the heavens, and is associated with the Sun known as *Oòrùn* in the Yoruba language. The other two avatar forms of the supreme God are; *Olodumare*, the supreme creator and *Olofin*, who is the conduit between *Òrunn* (Heaven) and *Ayé* (Earth), *Oshumare* a god that manifests in the form of a rainbow, also known as *Òsùmàrè* in Yorùbá, *Obatala* god of clarity and creativity. Other *Orishas* include: *Elegua*, *Erinle*, *Eshu*, *Ibeji*, *Oduduwa*, *Ogun*, *Olokun*, *Ori*, *Oko*, *Oshumare*, *Ọba*, *Ọbatala*, *Ọranyan*, *Ọrunmila*, *Ọsanyin*, *Osoosi*, *Ọsun*, *oya*, *Shango*, *Yemoja*, *Aganju*, *Ajaka*, *Ayao*, *Babalú-Ayé*,

### **5.7 Cultural Symbolisms in Atiku's Performance Titles and Names**

Most titles of Atiku's works/exhibitions were created in reactions to his perceived feedback of people's negative ideas of Africans and what Africans are. He uses titles and names to project the real Africa, Yoruba culture and the traditional religion of Ifa system. Similarly, his performance in words and practice promotes Africans as indigenous people and ancient civilization. Alaagba as a title is used to project the Egungun (masquerade) tradition. *Ọlomọyọyọ*, performance at Aarhus Festuge, Denmark (September 3- 4). Atiku was carrying a weighty piece representing Kori (the *Òrìshà* in charge of the welfare and growth of children in the Yoruba

pantheon) during the procession. *Wórowòro-Kóbokòbo*, performance at Brunei Gallery, SOAS University of London, Russell Square, London, UK (June 23). *Mokóó Morò*, performance at the Lagos Book & Art Festival, Freedom Park, Lagos, Nigeria (Tuesday November 16). *Ìyáláàyá*, performance held at Museum Paul Eluard, Saint-Denis, Paris, France (Sunday July 18).

Other performance titles are; *Aláraagbó*, *Àtáramàgbà*, *Emi Olóṣà Ara*, *Onílé Ganyìnganyìn I*, *Ìyámi Gbèmi*, *Bàmi Gbèmi*, *Èrò Wòṣò*, *Mádàrikàn (Àkéké ló ní k'òṣ má torí mì ké)*, *Wógé-wògè-wógé*, *Olòlò*, *Şèlèrú Àgbo*, *Àgbàrá Àgbo*, *Olúwwojìwo*, *Ológbèrè (Ò gínrinrìngìnrin II)*, *Jangbala Jù' bú*, *Ìwòrìwò Wò*, *Ajẹmbẹṣe*, *Èjì Wòrò*, *Èjì Wẹwẹ*, *Àràgàmàgò Will Rid This Land Off Terrorism*, *Èlẹ́gba (Ò gínrinrìngìnrin III)*, *Afámakò*, *Olúworiogbó (Aláraagbó III)*, *Agbo Ràgó*, *E Wó – Nigerian Prisoner*, *Èlábòrù*, etc. According to the artist these titles were carefully chosen to publicize the deep meanings of the Yoruba words/philosophy because English could not capture the full imports in their entirety without diluting/corrupting or even reducing the potency of the words. Especially the power of “*Ase*” that works with the repetition of the words. In addition, symbolic titles like these arouse a quest for answers and discussions from spectators which in turn creates room for engagements and rich discourse on the subject matters.

## 5.8 The Yoruba culture and symbolisms

The Yoruba culture is highly elevated in Jelili Artistic practices and performances. This culture made of the language, philosophy and religion all of which combine ancient, realities and moralities. Yoruba people are believed to be descendants of *Oduduwa* the founder of the Yoruba nation and philosophy (Ogunyemo, 2025). Yoruba language has many dialects and yoruboid languages e.g *igala*, and *Itshekiri* (Bendor, 2025). Yoruba is believed to be spoken by over 20 million people in southwestern Nigeria and parts of Benin and Togo while the Yoruba translation dialect used by Bishop Ajayi Crowther in 1884 had led to the development of standard written

Yoruba that is used in books and newspapers today. Spoken Yoruba is popular among natives of Yoruba origin who pride themselves in the purity of the language and its potency in ifa religious worship. This indigenous language is one of the most elaborate languages with vast literature of poetry, short stories, allegories, myths and proverbs. This is due to the ethnic group's earlier urbanization and civilization spanning over a millennia of consistent migration and leadership in pre-colonial times.

The Yoruba philosophy is based on a set of narratives, folk tradition and cultural practices that attempts to explain life on earth as a result of causes and effects based on ancient wisdom and Ifa divination system. Yoruba philosophy is rich in aphorisms, allegory, proverbs (Ogunyeemi, 2025). In E. Bolaji Idowu's book published 1962 titled: *Oludumare: God in Yoruba Belief*. He succeeded in combining religion with philosophy and literature. In the book Bolaji valorizes the Yoruba cardinal virtues of love, morality, temperance, honesty, honour, bravery, justice e.t.c. In theory, the Yoruba cultural philosophy cannot exist without the "Ori" which means head in Yoruba, is believed to carry physical and spiritual connotation, it defines the body, hold all knowledge and destiny. In this ancient philosophy every idea comes from the head and the head carries all other parts of the body before the ideas can be implemented.

Similarly, *Ifa* is an integral part of Yoruba culture and it is the fulcrum of wisdom. It is a traditional sanctuary independent of the colonial influence of religion, education and politics. Atiku often infuses major elements of Yoruba language, philosophy and religion into his artworks/performances. Constantly, he projects these cultural morality and strength of character. Jelili Atiku can be likened to a visual philosopher who uses the ancestral *Ori* symbols of masks, masquerades, Yoruba words and *Ifa* divination to highlight the Yoruba philosophy and culture and culture. Hence, the presence of cultural symbols, traditional religious imageries of deities

(orishas) and masquerades (*Egungun*). These are techniques of expressionism chosen by the artist to express parts of his personal idiosyncrasies and philosophy .

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **6.1 Summary**

This study on Cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's Artistic performances was set out to fill the lacuna in the comprehensive analysis of the cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's performances. This Research was carried out asking specific questions such as; who is Jelili Atiku? What are the cultural symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's artistic performances? What are the meanings/references of these symbolisms in provoking social and political commentaries? What is Jelili Atiku's performance philosophy and techniques? What are the impacts of his performances on his audience perceptions/interpretation?

The specific objectives include the following; to clearly identify who Jelili Atiku is, to assess the cultural symbolisms present in his artistic performances, to clearly state the meanings/references of these symbolisms in provoking social and political commentaries, to determine Jelili Atiku's performance philosophy and techniques, to assess the impact of his performances on his audience perceptions/interpretation. The scope was on the Cultural Symbolisms used in the Artist works.

Chapter two focused on scholarly literatures from secondary and primary sources under the following sub-headings: Theoretical frameworks, Performance theory themes in Atiku's Artworks, theory of Symbolism, cultural Symbolisms in Jelili Atiku's Artworks. Conceptual

frameworks covers; visual protest/ Artivisms, Who Jelili Atiku Really is / Background and Identity, Some Jelili Atiku's historical performances, Yoruba Culture/ Traditional Religion.

Chapter three concentrated on the methodology and design of the study which expressly outlined the techniques used by the researcher in this study to include field research, iconography and contextual analysis, repeated oral interview with the artist, consultation of journals, resource persons in the academia. Method of data collection comprises; Recorded Interviews, photographs, note-taking, (Travelling/trips) while the Method of analysis consist of; the combination of Iconography, Contextual Analysis and Expressionism.

In addition, Chapter four of this study fixated on the detailed analysis of cultural symbols used by the artist in different performances which include; *I Will Not Stroll With Thami El Glaoui*, performance held at Marrakech Biennial 5, Marrakech, Morocco, (Wednesday - Friday February 26 – 28, 2014). Aláàgbá, performance first held with Anne Letailleur, at Richardplatz / SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany (Saturday May 24, 2014) **and** 2023 *E Don Tey Wey We Dey* performance, held at the VIVA Art Action (8th edition of international performance art festival), Square Viger / L'Union Française, Montréal, Canada (September 15).

Finally, Chapter five of this study covers broad sub-headings of various aspects of cultural symbolisms embedded in the artist's performances such as; Cultural symbolisms of colours, Cultural symbolisms of masks/masquerade, Cultural symbolisms of Head gears, Cultural symbolisms of Attires, Cultural symbolisms of processions in Yoruba land, Cultural symbolisms of rituals / Orishas, Cultural symbolisms in Atiku's performance titles and names, the Yoruba culture and its generic symbolisms.

## 6.2 Recommendations

Following the discoveries and knowledge garnered from this study the researcher has the following recommendations:

1. That performance art be academically infused into the visual art curriculum in Nigeria's Tertiary education offered by various art schools and fine Art teaching Universities/institutions.
2. That the Nigerian contemporary artist should think backwards and outside the box-making references to their cultural memories to recreate dying cultural assets and make them relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century just like Jelili Atiku is doing. Thereby creating unique niches for themselves empty of the colonial impressions and influences.
3. That visual art practitioners should make detailed historical research a vital aspect of study before proceeding to physical productions of all artworks and visual performances. This would ensure proper and deeper understanding of each creation thereby helping the artist engage with his viewers. This would also regulate a mere spontaneous expression of talent as claimed by some artists.
4. That by all means possible art exhibitions and performances should have detailed plans and premeditated intentions to engage communities directly, arouse contemporary discussions at locations and other places afterwards, and ignite viewers' direct participations in the process of displays and exhibitions

5. Further areas of study on the artist could include the following: Interpretation of symbols in Jelili Atiku's performances, the Influence of Traditional Yoruba religion and Islam on Atiku's Artistry, detailed analysis of Jelili Atiku's Performances/Exhibition from the 90s till date, Jelili Atiku as a social Activist, spiritual and Community Leader, A study on Jelili Atiku's foreign Grants, Recognitions and Performances.

### **6.3 Contribution to Knowledge**

The study has contributed to knowledge in the following ways:

1. The study has added to the intellectual collection of symbolic roles played by visual art performances/ visual artists in the society.
2. The study has documented a detailed analysis of cultural symbolisms used by Jelilii Atiku in some of his performances and has decoded their contextual interpretations as used.
3. The study has revealed the importance of incorporating visual art performance as part of curriculum in fine or creative art studies.
4. The study has contributed to detailed historical documentation of one of Nigeria's foremost, globally recognized performance/multi-media artist who is an academically trained visual artist.
5. The study has contributed to knowledge by setting many wrong notions about Jelili Atiku's beliefs and personal philosophy/technique straight.
6. Atiku's background as a native Yoruba prince exposed to traditional rites and practices influenced his artistic practice and helped form his philosophy and technique.
7. The discovery that Jelili Atiku always adapts and adopts the culture of his Audience to pass his messages through performance art.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

The imprints of Jelili Atiku's artistic performances nationally and internationally speak volumes which cannot be exhausted in a single study. However, the researcher has made worthy attempts to cover a reasonable quarter bordering on the cultural symbols entrenched in the artist's works. The contributions to knowledge include; the discovery by the researcher that the artists delves into deep historical research to obtain cultural symbols of nations, cultures, races and religions used in his visual performances, that Atiku adopts the culture of his audience to portray his performances, the rich meanings of the Yoruba culture and traditional religion (Ifa divination system) is being popularized by the artists through his crafts, that the performances are not mere artistic displays but targeted towards spiritual connections, social rebirths, healings and solutions to communities and the world at large, that there is a need to officially integrate the visual performance art techniques and philosophy into the Art education curriculum in the Nigerian Art schools, given the notable impacts of performance art globally and its growing trends. Due to the constraints of time and other resources more of the artist's visual performances would have been covered within this inquiry. Nevertheless, the researcher hopes to do more investigations on the artist in the possible future given the opportunity by the Almighty God.

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