



## An Analysis of Kunle Afolayan’s *October First*, Using François Truffaut’s Auteur Theory

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### Abstract

Auteurism is a concept that originated from the French film criticism of the late 1940s, and it is the belief or proposition that upholds and projects the director as the author of film or filmic media production. Auteur theory has come to exemplify the prowess, expertise and technical competence of any director. Relying on Kunle Afolayan’s historical depiction movie, *October First*, this article takes a cursory look at the auteuristic elements of this popular film which is a cinematic reenactment of key events that occurred shortly before and during Niigeria’s independence on First October, 1960. This article uses Afolayan’s *October First* to demonstrate the professional capabilities, cinematographic techniques and productorial initiatives of the film director as the auteur (author) of film. It concludes that from cast and crew, cinematic lighting, costume, suspense and humour, to production design and storyline rendition; the productorial imprimatur of Kunle Afolayan’s auteurism clearly stand him out in his works, most especially the one under review, *October First*.

**Key words:** Auteurism; Nigerian film; Cinematics; Lighting; Nigeria’s Independence

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### INTRODUCTION

This article is an evaluation of *October First (2003/2004)*, a Kunle Afolayan-directed Nollywood movie, through the lenses of the auteur theory; auteurism being the belief or proposition that upholds and projects the director as the author of film (Afolayan, 2014). An auteur is an artist with a distinctive approach, usually a film director whose filmmaking control is so unbounded and personal that he or she is likened to be the “author” of the film, thus manifesting the director’s unique style or thematic focus.

### HOW AUTEURISM BEGAN

Auteurism originated in French film criticism of the late 1940s, and derives from the critical approach of André Bazin and Alexandre Astruc, whereas American critic Andrew Sarris in 1962 called it auteur theory. Yet the concept first appeared in French in 1955 when director François Truffaut termed it policy of the authors, and interpreted the films of some directors, like Alfred Hitchcock, as a body revealing recurring themes and preoccupations (Dricoll, 2014).

As the French New Wave in cinema began, French magazine *Cahiers du cinéma*, founded in 1951, became a hub of discourse about directors’ roles in cinema. In a 1954 essay, François Truffaut criticized the then quality of film productions whereby he contended that directors, faithful to the script, merely adapted a literary novel. Truffaut described such a director as a *metteur en scene*, a mere “stager” who adds the performers and pictures. To represent the view that directors who express their personality in their work make better films, Truffaut coined the phrase “la politique des auteurs”, or “the politics of the authors”. He named eight writer-directors, Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophüls, Jacques Tati, and Roger Leenhardt, as examples of these authors.

As early as his 1962 essay “Notes of the auteur theory”, published in the journal *Film Culture*, American film critic Andrew Sarris translated the French term *la politique des auteurs*, by François Truffaut in 1955, into Sarris’s term *auteur theory*. Sarris applied it to Hollywood films, and elaborated in his 1968 book, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*, which helped popularize the English term, *auteur theory* (Chaudhuri, 2013).

## KUNLE AFOLAYAN AND AUTEURISM

Following his first two films, *Irapada (Redemption)* and *Araromire (The Figurine)*, Kunle Afolayan has already established himself as a major force in Nigerian filmmaking and one that fits into the conceptual stipulations of the *auteur theory*. His talents are obvious, and the fact that he stars in his own films gives an unusual personal character to his prominence as a director. Kunle Afolayan’s success as a director particularly exemplifies an important trend in the emergence of a high-end segment of the industry that works with bigger budgets and includes as part of its basic strategies theatrical screenings, foreign/diasporic audiences and foreign film festivals. Of course this kind of filmmaking is not entirely new: it is what Tunde Kelani has always done (Afolayan, 2014). There is an obvious relationship between these two filmmakers, and not only because Afolayan got his start as an actor playing the young prince in Kelani’s *Saworoide* and *Agogo Eewo*. (Of course, Afolayan was born a prince of the Nigerian film tradition as the son of the dazzlingly charismatic actor and director Ade Love.) Afolayan, like Kelani, has conspicuous professional training and technical proficiency, an uncommon level of artistry and a slow, deliberate, careful approach to his work. Both have a tangential relationship with Nollywood (Adesanya, 1997).

Afolayan casts stars with backgrounds and personae as different as Ramsey Nouah and Jide Kosoko, he has the musician Lagbaja provide voice-over narration and gives the painter and performing artist Muraina Oyelami, who is a walking authority on modern arts in Nigeria, a small but iconic role. Obafemi Awolowo University museum of archaeology and modern arts has become a recurrent point of reference. Afolayan expresses his own generation’s urban culture in the edgy fashion designs, interior decoration, architecture, and soundtrack music in *The Figurine*. Afolayan’s films radiate the warmth, humanism, broadmindedness and moralism that are so characteristic of Yoruba culture.

## OCTOBER 1 SYNOPSIS AND KUNLE AFOLAYAN’S IMPRIMATUR

Kunle Afolayan’s directorial imprints can be seen from the beginning of the film as the storyline begins with

images of a young lady being raped by a seemingly unknown man. Inspector Danladi Waziri (Sadiq Daba) is summoned by the British colonial military to present a draft of his findings on the series of virgin killings that has occurred in Akote. The film flashes back (another epic aesthetic feature by Kunle Afolayan) as Inspector Waziri narrates his story on his observations and experience from his arrival in the town of Akote. He is warmly received by Sergeant Afonja (Kayode Aderupoko). On getting to the village square, Inspector Danladi notices the villagers celebrating a horserider, who is later noted by Afonja to be Prince Aderopo (Demola Adedoyin). He just returned from the city, as the first university graduate in the community. Danladi observes physical and circumstantial similarities in the deceased virgins, and deduces it must be serial killing. Danladi and Afonja continue in their investigations; the officers interrogate Agbekoya (Kunle Afolayan), who is the owner of the farm where the last lady was killed. Agbekoya denies any knowledge of the events that led to the killings and is subsequently freed by the inspector Waziri due to a perceived language barrier between them. After being cautioned by the Oba about his late night movements, Prince Aderopo visits the village bar, where he meets his childhood friends, Banji (Femi Adebayo) and Tawa (Kehinde Bankole); the trio discusses the coming independence and their pasts. One of the guards assigned to protect the prince deserts his post to spend some time with his lover, close to a stream. Afonja and Danladi question the traditional priest, Baba Ifa (Ifayemi Elebuibon) on their way out of the bar; he responds to their questions proverbially and says that the killer will continue to kill until he is satisfied. The next day, the dead body of the lover of the guard who fled his post is discovered. Danladi orders the arrest of Baba Ifa, which Afonja refuses outright to carry out; he is thus suspended from his job and replaced by his deputy, Corporal Omolodun (Fabian Adeoye Lojede). Corporal Omolodun, however, is eventually killed by the serial killer after trailing him along the bush-path, following the discovery of another body, this time of an Igbo girl. The girl’s father, a farmer Okafor (Kanayo O. Kanayo), along with his ethnic men, captures a travelling Northerner, claiming that he is responsible for the death of his daughter. The accused man is taken into custody by the police, but still maintains his innocence. Danladi informs his superiors that he will be closing the case, since he has found the killer. As he is about to transfer the Northerner away from Akote, Okafor throws a machete at him, piercing his heart. Even with his dying breath, the man insists he didn’t kill the girl. Okafor, who repeatedly affirms his actions as doing what a real man would do, is taken into custody. At night, the officers gather to celebrate the Inspector’s impending departure following the presumed victory over the killer. Danladi is persuaded into drinking against his will. On his way out

he hears someone whistle a tune he was earlier told by the Northerner to be from the killer. The killer approaches him but he is too drunk to identify the face, and is assaulted by the killer. Afonja sees him lying on the road and takes him to his residence. Afonja and his wife gave him herbs for relief of his constant catarrh. During the process of his recovery from his fever, he recollects the face of the killer. The next morning, he goes to the market square to observe the body language of Prince Aderopo, who suspiciously stares at him in confidence and even winks at him that there is no evidence to prove he indeed killed the girls. Danladi visits Tawa in the school she works as a teacher, in order to question her about the relationship she has with the prince. Danladi discovers that Aderopo and Agbekoya are both recipients of a scholarship from a Reverend Father in the town, Father Dowling (Colin David Reese). Danladi visits Agbekoya, who reveals to him that they were constantly molested by the Reverend Father in Lagos city. At a celebration on the eve of Independence, Prince Aderopo invites Tawa to their childhood hideout, which has been renovated. Danladi and Afonja try to trail them, but are unsuccessful; Agbekoya, the only other person who knows the location of the hideout, leads them to it. On getting there, Aderopo is about to make Tawa his sixth victim, representing the end of the six years of violation he received from the Reverend Father. Tawa is saved. The film shifts back to the present day, as Danladi concludes his account to the British officers. The officers are against his desire to speak the truth on the identity of the real killer and they instruct him not to tell anyone about it. He reluctantly succumbs to the pressure for the sake of a peaceful independence.

At each step in the development of the film, Kunle Afolayan's outstanding skills as a director are enacted and showcased.

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## **KUNLE AFOLAYAN'S DIRECTORIAL EXPERIMENT IN OCTOBER 1**

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It has been noted that Kunle Afolayan is one of the major figures in new Nollywood film making. He does not only produce, but also direct his films with special skills. He is also a very skillful film director. The achievement of Kunle Afolayan in Nollywood film making can be seen from three perspectives, viz: producing, directing, and film education. In the sphere of film education as a director, his output is unique (Akpore, 2022). This supposition is anchored on his mastery of the art of film directing. He is a film director of considerable dimensions despite being an economist (his first University degree being B.Sc. Economics), his penchant for film making drives him to achieve certain heights in the film industry hence his quest for more knowledge at the New York film academy. Afolayan is adequately informed on directorial principles

and techniques. In this regard, he readily experiments with the diverse tools of his actors as a juxtaposition of his actor's emotions, body and psychological gestures, this in turn culminates into what Kunle refers to as a superb combo. There are certain directorial techniques which cut across genres of films whether historical, action, scary, ritual, comedy, and the likes. The first thing to recognize is that in most films where one is working on special dimensions, different from the special dimension of real life, there is a kind of magnification of life and those who act in films and those who participate in it, such as production managers, props man, DoP, costumiers and others members of other departments of the production crew must recognize that techniques are quintessential to the art of film making not just the art of directing. Therefore, a good director would ensure the full mastery of the directorial techniques; directorial concepts which are the ideas of the director are crucial. The initial directorial concepts should be discussed especially with the production cast and crew. Directorial concepts for each film will depend on such variables as the political environment, the social consciousness of the would-be consumers, the prevailing circumstances in terms of the sheer hopes and aspirations of the community where the shots are taken. These are the things that tend to guide directorial concepts.

Afolayan's primary emphasis is on aesthetics. His penchant for a unique film tradition has clearly driven him to study the relevance of diverse parts that culminate in an ensemble before applying them in his films. Kunle Afolayan exhibits a set economy that corresponds to dramatic economy, a performing style engendered by a literary style. In this way, he creates a film of all the arts - total theatre (Akpore, 2022).

His visual imagination is active in his movie experiments. This assertion springs from a creative or directorial observation of his films. His actors' expressions are an immensely important means of dramatic delivery, as even when he has been able to test his ideas he could see in his mind's eye with remarkable vividness how the visual elements might be made to function as part of the dramatic rhythm.

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## **OCTOBER FIRST'S DIRECTORIAL TECHNIQUES**

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### **Cast and crew**

In the case of *October 1*, Kunle Afolayan's directorial experimentation began from his quest for a story with a national appeal and dovetailed into his choice for characters to best interpret these roles. According to Afolayan, care had to be taken during casting as it is one of the key areas that could make or break a film like

*October 1*. The audition for the film which took place on 6 June 2013 at Golden Effects Studios in Ikeja recorded over 1000 people in attendance. The lead character of Dan Waziri posed a challenge; a Northerner is needed to play the role, and Afolayan stated that there is a particular "look" that has been associated with people of the sixties. He also pointed out that he needed an actor who could not only speak Hausa, but would represent the ethnic group as well. No one seemed to tick these essential boxes, until Daba came to mind. However, his whereabouts were not known at the time as the last time he had been seen was in the 1998 Mahmood Ali-Balogun's short film *A Place Called Home*, produced by MNET. Sadiq Daba was prepared for Waziri's character for a period of 8 months before filming commenced. The character of Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti was another challenging aspect of casting; Afolayan had to research on the Kutis for some time in order to learn about some dominant physical features that might be common with the family. He also announced it on *Twitter* that he was looking for an actress with close resemblance to the late Funmilayo Ransom-Kuti, but to no avail. When the director met designer, Deola Sagoe for the costume design of the film, He would always see this round face like the Kutis, and he eventually asked her out for the role. She agreed to the role after three weeks of Afolayan's persistence and convincing. Kunle Afolayan like in his previous films featured in *October 1* as a farmer with the name Agbekoya. For his role, he had to leave his hair for some time to let it grow. He also stated in an interview with Toni Kan and Peju Akande on *Africa Magic* that some other actors were also asked to leave their hair and beard for about a year for the film. In the words of Onyeka Onwenu:

Mr. Afolayan incorporates facts into fiction to create an everlasting joy in this work. He is not one who is scared of exploring, and he does so beautifully. He takes his time to create. He takes his time to understand the people he is making films for. No matter how intellectually stimulating *October 1* is, it can be enjoyed by anybody (Nwenu, 2018, p. 67).

At the end, one can easily say, Mr. Afolayan's *October 1* is for everyone who loves great films. From Nwenu's assertion, Kunle Afolayan as a director is very concerned about his audience when making his films, and this drives him to do an excellent job. According to Nwenu (2018), *October 1* is brilliant, thought-provoking and timeless. *October 1* preaches the truth and it does so from an artistic point of view. Kudos must be given to Tunde Babalola for writing such an amazing script and ultimately to the producer/director of this movie for breathing life into the story. *October 1* is such a good movie that has the power to plunge every well-meaning Nigerian into a reflective mood and possibly positive action. It suffices that the sociopolitical underpinnings of the movie can emancipate Nigerians for a positive action to revitalize democracy, Nwenu (2018) opines.

## Production Design and Cinematography

From the directorial point of view, Sodas and Popcorn, applauded the production design, the performances from the actors, use of costumes, and also described the cinematography as "the best work of art in Nigerian cinematic history". It commended the film for its attention to detail and concluded: Afolayan obviously had clear vision of what he set out to achieve and pushed his cast to give the best possible performance you could expect from them (8th October, 2014). This is the number one requirement of an experimental director: he/she must have a vision and concept, and this vision can only come alive through a skilful management of cinematic and cinematographic elements to achieve the desired objective. The glory of the film, however, is in the fact that the story is not afraid to go there: explore the timeless themes of religion, ethnic rifts, corruption, abuse, pain and privilege events (Stephen, 2016).

## Suspense and Humour

The film plays for 2 hours but there is enough suspense and laugh-till-your-sides-hurt humour to keep you at the edge of your seat.

## Costume

In realizing the visions of aesthetics in *October 1*'s costume, Afolayan and the costumier Deola Sagoe of Haute Couture had to cross-fertilize ideas to design the primordial costumes used in the film. Costume designer, Susan Akalazu, noted that she had to watch many of documentaries and read documentations on events from the 1960s in order to understand the kind of style prevalent during that era in Nigeria and this was the director's instructions. Kunle Afolayan as a director is aware of the fact that costume helps in accentuating the believability of a character in performance, hence, he instructed the costume designer to do a detailed research on costumes that best suit his vision for *October 1*.

## Cinematic Lighting

Another crucial area of Kunle Afolayan's aesthetic auteurism can be gleaned from his creative manipulation of light. Anyone who has seen the film *October 1* would agree with the fact that the film tells the story of the night. In other words, this is a narrative that reveals the night life experience of Akute community around and at the eve of Nigerian independence in 1960. In revealing any major event that occurred in the night hours, the **auteur** of such movie must be knowledgeable in the techniques of cinematic lighting (Okwuowulu, 2012). Analysing the range of tonalities in frames which represent selected shots from the opening sequence, one could see that these shots could not be achieved without appropriate lighting. Even though, in cinematographic lighting and editing, the night scene is usually depicted with blue or purple hue where the environment of

police headquarter in Akute is established with blue colour and the inner chamber of the building is depicted with the hard yellow of incandescent interior lamps. Nevertheless, in the prologue of this film *October First*, the director decided to use a darken crimson toning not just to represent the night hours but for other narrative purposes which include creating atmosphere of fear or horror hence, the lighting hue could be interpreted as "a warning sign of the impending doom" that is to befall of the villagers in this narrative.

In exploring further, the deployment of the quality and the direction of the light for narrative purpose, one could see how hard lighting served as key light and a cross lighting system. This cross-lighting technique is used to establish the level of importance, shape and texture among the two figures in the frame. Although, the key light (in a hard-lighting form) is used as a cross light from the right side of the frame, yet one could see that Winter Bottom, the District Officer is the most lit figure facing the camera while the backlight is able to carve him out from the house entrance background. Both the shape and the texture of this image are clearly identified through the use of this hard lighting technique. However, the same could not be said of the other man in this shot. Here, one could say that Inspector Danladi, who is established at the foreground, backing the camera with a panning face to the right, is a less important figure because his face is partially revealed with the same cross lighting while other un-illuminated parts of his head and his back are established with attached shadow. Although, his shape and texture are not clearly identified with this cross hard lighting system in the frame but he is of a lesser scale, to the District Officer who is much more distinguishable from the frame.

In reflecting and creating the illusion of the act of murdering in cool blood by an evil-genius, the director established the scene where Aderopo kills Corporal Omolodun, a young police officer who first unravelled his identity with a razor. One can identify the invocation of a soft lighting technique which creates a diffused illumination. Thus, the figures of both the perpetrator and his victim are established in silhouettes through the use of soft lighting technique. In this case the soft light is used as key light coming from the background of the frame. This technique of creating silhouettes is invoked to create the impression of mystery around the murdering act committed at night undiscovered and expected to go with the night.

Basically the thrilling mood of selected frames is presented and achieved with the creative deployment of highlight and shadow. For instance, the highlighted part of the moon in the mainframe looks gleaming while the un-illuminated side results in attached shadow. Mystery mood so created with the invocation of this half-lit moon is in line with thriller or horror movies lighting convention

which are often deployed to connote fear and anxiety. The creation of suspense is further entrenched in the film with the lighting technique used in registering both the running and dying images. Here, one could see that the highlighted parts of these bodies produced glittering skills because of the sweats which the bodies had generated while running in the forest yet the other unlit parts of these bodies equally recede into shadows of mystery.

In exploring further, the creative deployment of the directional light, one could identify a shot where Prince Aderopo is revealed with hard key light from right side of the frame in the very attempt to murder his last virgin victim, Miss Tawa. In this shot, half of Aderopo's face is lit while the other part of his head is in cast shadow that falls on his right shoulder. The fill light could be identified as under-lighting, as it comes from the bottom of the frame while the backlighting is able to separate Aderopo's image from his background.

In establishing his victim, one could notice how the director creatively used what could be termed as "a hard-soft lighting" in revealing the suppressed lady at the point of death. In this shot, the hard light technique used had some components of diffused illumination due to the creepy function of a mystery film it performs in this narrative. This lighting technique falls between the two extremes of hard-lighting and soft lighting. Therefore, while some parts of Tawa's head are clearly defined with crisp texture and sharp edges (attributes of hard lighting), the other parts of the suffering lady at the point of death are depicted with diffused illumination (characteristic of soft-lighting).

In examining the creative use of the sources of light in this narrative, one could identify the employment both the motivational lighting source and the authentic sources of light.

In this film, kudos must be given to the director for his attempt to synchronize the authentic source of light with the motivational source of light in the sequence that leads to the climax of the narrative, but as depicted in the frame, there is an unsynchronized relationship between the two identified sources of light. From this shot, one could see that the authentic source of illumination comes on screen behind an obstruction very close to Agbekoya's belly, the ray radiates as key light of this shot, while the ray of the fill light comes from the right side of the frame and radiating on Aderopo's and Agbekoya's backs. Closer observation still reveals the fill light equally radiating on one of inspector Danladi's arms. The radiation on the established lantern on set could be said to glitter only on parts of Agbekoya's hand and the frontal parts of Aderopo's laps, and outer part of inspector Danladi's touch light.

Based on the foregoing analysis, it could be argued that, the lantern in the hand of Agbekoya and the touch-light Inspector Danladi is holding are supposed to be

the two sources of illumination in this frame (thus in cinematic lighting, they are regarded as the false/motivational sources of light). And the authentic source of light — the real lamps used in lighting the scene are supposed to be synchronized along the same direction as the established sources of light on the set. But due to unpredictable movements of the images in the scene, the main shot as analysed above thus revealed an unsynchronized relationship between the motivational and the authentic sources of light in the frame.

In another scene, one could see a better synchronized relationship between the motivational source light - house lights and the authentic sources of light which come on the set from the top right side of the frame. From the established house of Winter Bottom in this shot, it is easy to think that the illumination that brings out the shape and glorified the texture of the house is the security light around the house which in cinematic parlance is not but just the false or motivational lights on set. However, the authentic source of light that carves out the shape of the house and project the texture of the house is from the right top side of the frame. Naturally the shot is another scene that adds aesthetical quality of the night shots featured in the overall composition in the film.

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## NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE AND PLOT STRUCTURE

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Although, the narrative technique used in this thriller is not new to some filmmakers in other parts of the world, however, the fact remains that, it is one of the novel approaches to filmmaking in Nigeria and it must be encouraged. Basically, the narrative method used in *October 1* is that of a *detective* or a *method of revealing mystery story*, while its mode of presentation follows a goal-oriented pattern of a plot structure. In exploring the narrative structure of this film further, one could say the movie makes use of unrestricted range of plot information or an omniscience pattern of story development. That is, the cinematographic style of revealing and withholding pieces of information.

Mainly the director, Kunle Afolayan employed this method in telling his story for so many reasons. For instance, the nature of a *mystery plot* requires holding back certain pieces of information at the initial stage and revealing these pieces of information at the later stages of the narrative. Therefore, the deployment of this technique of storytelling in the movie is meant to arouse viewers' interests, create and maintain suspense throughout the film. In accomplishing his target of keeping the viewer glued to the screen, the auteur of *October First* employed a cut transition mode of editing at the prologue of the film. With this editing style, the director is able to realise the fast tempo needed for a sequence of action scenes

which the prologue demands. In this first sequence, viewers are greeted with two contradicting images of a frightened virgin running for her dear life and a desperate male chaser, the sequence ends up with the revelation of a "stylized" act of rape cum cool blooded murder.

In introducing anachronism which is another narrative technique of bringing the past into the present or revealing the past experience within unfolding events, the director used a cut transitional mode in revealing a sequence of black and white frames which brings in series of flashback events instead of using a fade transitional mode. The first of such flashback reveals how Aderopo and Agbekoya were entrusted to a clergy man, Rev. Dowling, who rather than inculcating moral and advancing their educational standard, sexually abuses these two boys and turning them into potential murderers. The subsequent use of the technique equally reflects on how the reverend clergy man is honoured by the villagers and how he is eventually murdered by Agbekoya among others events (Stephen, 2016).

Basically, the employment of these flashbacks is meant for the manipulation of the depth of story information and for elongating the plot time in the narrative. That is, through the use of this anachronism technique, viewers are able to penetrate into the casts' memories while sharing their past experiences. For instance, in accomplishing this narrative style visually, the director in these selected frames used shooting or editing process that maintained a balance of grays, blacks and whites in depicting the various actions that are taking place both in the day and at the night in hours of this narrative.

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## CONCLUSION

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No doubt, Kunle Afolayan's directorial skills have catapulted him to the point of auteurism in the footprints of Nigerian film industry. His professionalism and prowess are arguably most demonstrated in the expertise that went into the production of *October First*. From cast and crew, cinematic lighting, costume, suspense and humour, to production design and storyline rendition; the productorial imprimatur of Kunle Afolayan's auteurism clearly stand him out in his works, most especially the one under review, *October First*.

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