

Chapter 3

Body Without Organs: Understanding TikTok Reterritorialization and Ówànbè Practices in Southwest Nigeria

John Adeoluwa Ogunrinde



<http://orcid.org/0009-0007-6588-9276>

London Metropolitan University, UK

ABSTRACT

TikTok continues to emerge as a research subject. While its affordances have been variedly researched, the app's interaction with culture in the Global South is here interrogated. Through the philosophical lens of Assemblage theory, this chapter examines the mix of Ówànbè practices in Southwest Nigeria, and the introduction of TikTok app into this mix. It frames TikTok as a multiplicity in a relation of exteriority within a peculiar cultural, social and technological assemblage. Evolving communication and social practices are identified to account for how the relation of exteriority between Ówànbè and TikTok is constituted. This assemblage sets in motion a unique flow in which neither TikTok nor Ówànbè is individually capable. As Ówànbè is captured on TikTok, the app is reterritorialized from being a technology to a cultural code - charged by desires and connections in that environment. This work exposes social media as a co-function of technology, sociality and culture with compelling evidence of this assemblage in the cultural context of the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria.

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-2600-4403-2.ch003

Copyright © 2027, IGI Global Scientific Publishing. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global Scientific Publishing is prohibited. Use of this chapter to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited. The publisher reserves all rights to license its use for generative AI training and machine learning model development.

INTRODUCTION

This work interrogates specific communicative and cultural practices platformed on TikTok in Southwest Nigeria through the philosophical premise of Assemblage theory (AT) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). The global success of TikTok marks the rise of what Kaye et al. (2022) call the “short-video turn”. Short-video turn extends the concept of “visual turn” (Jay, 2002), it designates the increasing appetite for short-form video content and the spread of platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts. Short-video turn signifies the era of snippets audiovisuals characterized by immediacy, sociality and playfulness. Various studies have queried the phenomenology of TikTok in terms of its features, functions, and immersiveness (Yaqi et al., 2021; Bucknell & Kottasz, 2020). In Nigeria existing literature have similarly focused on uses and gratifications (Oyeleke et al., 2023; Olaoye & Asemah, 2023).

Away from this trend, the current chapter digs into the ontology of TikTok by framing it as an assemblage- a co-functioning of technological, social, and cultural components in a specific environment. The technological TikTok speaks to the app’s mechanics and the workings of its algorithm suggestions; the social TikTok constitutes the networking of people, communities and influencers converging and socializing within the app’s digital space; while the cultural TikTok manifests the memes, drama, music, dance, humor, parody, etc. platformed on it. This paper focuses on the interaction of sociality, culture, and technology in a relation of exteriority, emerging as the TikTok phenomenon and how it expands in a new way, the existing Ówàńbẹ̀ system among the Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria. This view is accommodated on the theoretical foundation laid by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) in their work – *A Thousand Plateaus*. They argue that the outcomes we experience are a reflection of ongoing interactions of multiplicities at a deeper level. To them, the process of interaction among multiple elements subjects those elements to continuous change, to newness, to an emergence of something different.

The introduction of TikTok, its viral short videos, algorithms deployment, affordances, and personalized contents into the Yorùbá culture of Ówàńbẹ̀ (elaborate parties, Afrobeats, talking drum, Nollywood, comedy and play systems) demonstrates Deleuze and Guattari’s Assemblage in which TikTok is culturally recommissioned into Southwest Nigeria, proliferating the Yoruba culture in a new way, and unleashing a flow that is materialized through new desires (such as TikTok sociality) and possibilities (such as instant fame) in that cultural environment. The objective of this chapter is to explore the interaction of technological, social, and cultural flows that constitute an assemblage through the lens of how the app disrupts existing patterns and reshapes Ówàńbẹ̀ practices in Southwest Nigeria.

ASSEMBLAGE METAPHOR: A THOUSAND PLAY-TOOLS?

Assemblage is metaphorically loaded, with cognate words such as rhizomes, flows, desiring machine, line of flight, interiority, exteriority, territorialization, deterritorialization, segmentarity, war machine, body without organs (BwO), etc. The theory is often simplified as a coming together of many components to form a structural whole, whose function or identity cannot be represented by any of the individual components when isolated from the whole. The relationship between the components and the structural whole could be that of interiority or exteriority (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). Interiority has been exemplified by the filial relationship between a parent and a child, in which the idea of being a parent is contingent on the existence of a child and vice versa. Components in a relation of interiority are existentially dependent, and the absence of one annihilates the other (DeLanda, 2019). Relations of exteriority are not filial but in alliance, components are existentially independent, and the absence of a part though voids the relationship, isolates the component whose survival perpetuates outside the relationship. The summary of this kind of philosophical stand embraces peripheral totalities in which the functionality of any central core is understood through the interaction of its dynamic components.

This simplified way of defining Assemblage is reflected in DeLanda (2016, 2006), who sees it as an aggregation of multiple “heterogeneous terms among which liaisons are established in relations across gender, age, and reigns”. DeLanda believes Assemblage is a unity of co-functioning, a form of interlocking that exalts alliances, and not filiations. The problem with this, however, is its reduction of Assemblage to an outcome, rather than a process; by compressing the idea, it loses its essence. The definition neglected the presence of flow, desiring machine, specific causality by which Assemblage reterritorializes through its line of flight, and the rhizomatic nature. Thirdly, it reduces Assemblage to structural materiality, rather than the idealistic, continuous, and infinite flow it represents. Indeed, “thoughts lag behind nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 5). Thus, the theory carves its originality not from the multiplicities of components that constitute an entity, but rather from the complexity of their interaction and continuous change, such that we must understand

Assemblage as a process, a continuum, and not just an interlock of multiples.

The concept of flow in the Assemblage context is demonstrated by the evolution of social media today. For instance, before TikTok, music, visuals, texts, comedies, and folktales were territorialized (structured and controlled) within the available technology of CD, hard disks, flash drives, video players, and TVs. The arrival of TikTok (like other social media) unleashed a process of deterritorialization of these products from the hitherto established assemblage of CD and video player to a new platformisation, producing a new experience for TikTokers. Reterritorialization therefore occurs when TikTok reacquires these cultural products into itself and

vice versa, creating new specific practices, evidencing the flow of desire that is continuously taking place as new possibilities emerge.

What's Rhizome got to do?

“A book has neither object nor subject; it is made of variously formed matters, and very different dates and speeds. To attribute the book to a subject is to overlook this working of matters and the exteriority of their relations. In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also, lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. All these lines and measurable speeds constitute an Assemblage” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 4).

This quote from the chapter on rhizome clarifies the nonmaterial and abstractive aspect of Assemblage, which further suggests that approaching matter from tangibility and intangibility, material and nonmaterial, virtual, actual, and the lines in-between, makes for a complete understanding of Assemblage.

Rhizome like many terms in AT, is a metaphor of multiple use- one to explain how a productive desire (a tree for example) flows into another sets of production (papers, books for example). Buchanan (2021) describes rhizome as “precisely an open system”. The metaphor also explains the symbolic assemblage of materials, buds, nodes and leaves emerging as a rhizome, and of which none of these components in isolation of the others could have the identity of a rhizome. Using the example of book referenced in the quote above, it shows that the rhizome assemblage as a metaphor for desiring production is a process that is continuous and infinite (Lawley, 2005, p. 2), though the flow of that production is only made possible by connecting with another desiring machine (processing of trees) which leads to another assemblage (paper), an assemblage with potential to flow by the touch of another desiring machine (ink, human, and thoughts) to further produce another Assemblage (book) and it goes on infinitely. DeLanda (2016) is therefore right to refer to a single assemblage as “an assemblage of many assemblages”.

An important aspect of Assemblage that is apparently missed in this configuration is the subject of specific causality, each flow of desired production (e.g., paper) that constitutes an Assemblage (e.g., book) is caused specifically by another desiring production (thoughts, ink for example) seeking a connective flow. This is one of the reasons Deleuze & Guattari refer to desire as a machine- one because it liaises with another in a manner of machinic components, two because the alliance flows to produce an emergence of a new assemblage, and this has the capacity to continue inexhaustibly. The issue of specific causality is further discussed, but Deleuze & Parnet (1987)’s military example of the horse-arrow-archer expands on the materialist understanding of Assemblage. The bow and the arrow form an Assemblage of

materials such as the bow string, feather, wood, that flows with the Assemblage of an archer riding on a horse. Each of these consolidates the functional capacity of the whole by producing an emergence of power that each component on its own is unable to wield. The archer is articulated by stretching the arm through space, with the bow becoming an extension of the arm and the horse navigating through space, complementing the speed of the arrow, the reach of the arm, and the intensity of the entire configuration of a combatant.

This horse-bow-archer example has, however, allowed for various materialist interpretations of Assemblage by scholars such as Posteraro (2020), DeLanda (2016, 2006), Komen (2014), and rightly so, because it encapsulates the machinic, interlocking, and co-functioning of elements and systems. Though AT has undoubtedly generated a new ontology of social realities, the philosophical idea is lost when we see Assemblage solely as a world of endless connections (Buchanan, 2022). This oversimplified way of thinking Assemblage defeats the purpose since the notion is readily self-evident. In addition, if we must talk about the interconnection of systems in this way, System theory accounts for that; therefore, AT will be a duplication of structuralism (a close and rigid system), which it originally intends to displace. Hence, a clear and definite way to understand Assemblage is to approach it as a potentiality of connections, a process of becoming, an openness, and endless possibilities.

Body without Organs (BwO)

Deleuze and Guattari use the phrase ‘Body without Organs’ (BwO) to depict natural phenomena in the state of rest, with which desiring machines connect to produce flows. According to them:

“Matter equals energy. Production of the real as an intensive magnitude starting at zero.. all independent of accessory forms because the organs appear and function here only as pure intensities” (1980, p. 153).

For instance, land is a body without organs on which seedlings are planted to assume the identity of a plantation; the same land, if impacted by cattle, assumes the identity of a ranch, and if impacted by dredging, assumes the identity of a canal. The land is a farm to a farmer, a site to a builder, capital to an enterprise, estate to a realtor, collateral to a lender, field to a herder, home to wildlife, and a symbol of sovereignty and power to the state. This exemplifies the endlessness of possibilities by which flow can naturalize through a BwO and the unpredictability of circumstances in which it is capable of production.

Deleuze and Guattari’s implication is to vacate structuralism, centralism and control, advocating an open system, embracing decentralism, variability and fluidity. They suggest ending the dominance of one structured reality to account for connective multiplicities from which new possibilities can emerge infinitely, such that gender

character is not reductively simplified into Oedipus reactivity, but imagined as an interaction of complex unpredictable variables flowing in a specific but different and unique assemblage. So, when structuralism captures the world in the language of what it has become, assemblage rethinks bodies as a continuous becoming.

“Because he sees all things in relations of becoming, rather than implementing binary distributions between states...” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 352).

BODY WITHOUT ORGANS: AN ASSEMBLAGE OF ‘ÓWÀÑBÈ PRACTICES IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

The culture of Yorùbá people in Southwest Nigeria contextualizes an Assemblage of a Body without Organs (BwO). Predominantly fluid and playful, Yorùbá language itself is tonal, euphemistic, and largely proverbial (Adéèkó, 2017); poetic, and diacritical (Yussuf & Olúbòmẹhìn, 2018; Omobowale, 2008; Oladipo, 1991). “*Òwe l’ẹsin ọrọ*” is a general saying among the people, translated as proverb is the horse on which meanings ride, as they convey more messages with less effort or less words. Music, theatre, and visual arts are majors in Yorùbá society as rendition of history and oral scholarship, such that till modern days, music and drum remain the major tools of communicating events, inter-family and inter-tribal relations, as much as they also serve as insignia of wealth and royalty. One peculiar Yorùbá practice is its membranophonic communication popularly known as the “talking drum” (Euba, 1990), which is ancestrally inherited in certain families. By mimicking diacritic speech patterns, talking drums are percussively rhythmized into codified proverbs. The proverbs -based on tones, convey contextual messages of warning, entertainment, correction, adulation, protest, recreation, or news breaking.

Adeyemi (2017) appraises the talking drum as one of the irreplicable communicative gifts offered to the world by the people of Yorùbá. Monarchs have their traditional drum talkers as part of protocol in the public and in the palace. They praise, they warn, and they hint monarchs through an encrypted messages blasting from the hollows of a talking drum. While people listen to their monarchs, monarchs listen to their talking drum for cues, warnings and schedules (Adeyemi, 2017). Apart from monarchs, drums and music are also used as a class identity in specific contexts. For instance, wealthy individuals negotiate fame through the frequency at which their names were sung in music records or chanted in live music performances. Being sung in a music record or even so a live performance is valued as a commodity for wealth, popularity, and public validation.

MERRY TO BE SEEN: THE POLITICS OF ÓWÀNBÈ AND AŞO ẸBÍ CLASSISM

Yorùbá society has a tradition of festivity known as Ówànbè. Lavish outdoor parties are routinely thrown for relatively less remarkable events such as getting a job promotion, completing an apprenticeship, housewarming, wedding anniversaries, retirement, and even things in the range of second funeral, third funeral, memorial, anniversary, etc. (Badeji, 2021, Adedeji, 2010). Yorùbá street parties are not only about drum ensembles, dance performance, and a large menu, it also involves a custom social uniform known as *Aşo ẹbí* by all attendees (Badeji, 2021; Lawal et al., 2022). Though the term Ówànbè is loosely translated to mean ‘presence’, it is used convivially to encapsulate perpetual attendance of multiple parties all year round, and a commitment to prescriptive custom outfit- *Aşo ẹbí* - for each party. An individual’s subscription to *Aşo ẹbí* for Ówànbè occasions not only indicates one’s social presence but also deepens ingroup participation. An example of a mega Ówànbè festivity is the famous *Ojúde Ọba* (palace gathering) that has been described as the glitz of culture in Nigeria (Fahm, 2015) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ojúde Ọba Festival 2024, Ogun State Nigeria, Photos by Niyi Fagbemi @theniyifagbemi 2024



Among Yorùbá people, sociality and class are largely negotiated by one's appreciation of music and hospitality through the practice of Ówàńbẹ̀ (Badeji, 2021). Elaborate outdoor parties, especially with *Aṣọ ẹbí* and live music performance, confer a perceived status of wealth, hospitality, popularity, and social validity (Nwafor, 2011; Yussuf & Olúbòmẹhin, 2018). On the flipside, one's failure to obtain the prescriptive *Aṣọ ẹbí* is received as outgroup deviance that is then fed back through subtle exclusion in the inner layers of that social circle. At Yoruba parties, though appearance is sought, an *Aṣọ ẹbí* appearance is preferred, hence the popular saying—"kò wọ ànkàrá kò jẹ sẹ̀mó" meaning a non-*Aṣọ ẹbí* appearance deserves no sumptuous treatment. The larger one's friend circle, the more parties one is invited to, and this extends to friends of friends, neighbors, families and faith relations (Badeji, 2021).

Ówàńbẹ̀ Mirrors Ubuntu Philosophy

"I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am" (Mbiti, 1969, p. 108). This quote serves as the foundational premise for the emergence of Ubuntu as a philosophical discourse. What does it mean to exist, to be a human? Ubuntu says a person is only a person in the presence of other person(s), and that it is in the act of being together that humanity is defined. With specific reference to African settings, it offers communal personhood, necessary bonding, empathy, connectedness and interdependence as an epistemological explanation to the question of being and that of identity. Ogonegbu & Ogelenya (2025) further argue Ubuntu as an alternative philosophical reasoning to the individualistic notion in Descartes' "I think therefore I am", they say that personhood is not attained through rationality, but rather through relationality.

Particularly among the Yoruba of Southwest Nigeria, Ówàńbẹ̀ (presence) demonstrates the philosophy of Ubuntu through the cultural embrace of gregariousness—the idea of "coming together" or "being together" in perpetual festivity. Chinua Achebe describes this "coming together" type of society in his work, *Things Fall Apart*: "When we gather together in the moonlit village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so" (Achebe, 1994, pp. 166-167). It is this idea that underlies the practices of Ówàńbẹ̀.

BwO: Ówàńbẹ̀ as a Marketplace for Afrobeats, Nollywood, and Comedy

Ówàńbẹ̀ points to a longstanding vibrant tradition of theatre that is traceable to the opera of ancestral masquerade, and the pantomimes of the pre-colonial Alar-injo troupe (itinerant dancers). (Odunaike, 2016; Adedeji, 1981). Equiano (2021)

sums it up in his popular quote, first published in 1789, saying that we are almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets. Centuries after Equiano, festivals, dance, and music have evolved into full fledged industry, from which generations of singers have emerged, each to their genre. The point here is the rhizomatic flow afforded by Ówànbè as a body without organs that enabled such possibility. For instance, Afrobeats stars often credit their early days to performances at Ówànbè occasions, club shows, street carnivals, talent hunts, or church stages as the ready market that accommodates large production and consumption of musical outputs. Scholars observe how Yorùbá Ówànbè culture is shaping the expression of Afrobeats, and particularly how it is defined and projected around the world (Adesina, 2022; Shonaiya, 2021; Adedeji, 2010).

Afrobeats as known today is an adaptation of Yorùbá traditional rhythms, mostly Juju, Fuji, Apala (Shonaiya, 2021), offering a blend of local genres with American pop style as a musical alternative that is acceptable in Nigeria and marketable around the world. Originally, the late Afro star Fela Ransom Kutí, a Yorùbá lyric-activist, is generally credited with having initiated what is today known as Afrobeats (Adedeji, 2023; Shonaiya, 2021; Adedeji, 2010), but with the influence of Western pop and the readily absorbing music culture in Nigeria, modern Afrobeats have evolved since the Fela era (Adesina, 2022), featuring multiple sub-genres such as street pop, afro-fusion, and afro soul, among others.

The mix of music, dance, drama, oral tradition, and folktales has further advanced a globally recognized film industry, Nollywood, which grew to become the second largest in terms of global output, and with far-reaching impacts on socialization, consumption, and social media practices in Nigeria. Adedeji (2010), while tracing the anthropology of music and theatre in Nigeria, submits that “most of the cultural contexts that emerged into being the mainstream originated from the Yorùbá popular culture” (p. 74). This is in specific reference to Nigerian entertainment, visuals, and screen culture. A close relative to the Nollywood film industry is a large market for comedy skits operated by celebrity comedians such as *Bovi*, *Basket Mouth*, *A.Y*, *Kenny Blaq*, etc., and skit makers such as *Mark Angel*, *Bro Shaggi*, *Taomaa*, *Mr. Macaroni*, etc., keying into the local fun economy. In Nigeria, these comedian celebrities schedule regular shows, though they are not all of Southwest origin but are predominant in the Southwest state of Lagos, where the market is capitalized (Adesina, 2022), and where fame is negotiated within the linguistic space of Yorùbá and pidgin.

The above demonstrates the point of affects characterised by BwO as emphasised by Deleuze and Guattari. In this context, the BwO in Southwest Nigeria is Ówànbè which in literal sense encapsulate funfair, parties, talking drums, carnival, night club, or any mix of music, dance, theatre, comedy shows etc. characteristic of the Yorùbá celebratory culture. Metaphorically, Ówànbè festivity is a claim to elegance,

to class, popularity and wealth: to say- ‘I’m there, I’ve arrived into high class, I’m better off’, ‘I am hospitable and socially valid’ summarises Ówàńbẹ̀ in ideological sense. Indeed “we are in a social formation; first see how it is stratified for us and in us... It is only there that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 161).

RETERRITORIALIZING TIKTOK WITHIN THE ÓWÀÑBẸ̀ PRACTICES OF SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

Territorialization is literally a concept of space (Doel, 1996), but Deleuze and Guattari do not reference it in spatial sense, rather metaphorically as an organized way of controlling matter and energy quantifiably, within a specific structure of meaning and use, since according to them both matter and energy are naturally in the realm of speed -flowing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980, p. 4). Though TikTok was briefly introduced at the beginning of this study, it is necessary to unravel its rhizomatic nature in this section.

TikTok designates a desiring machine- an Assemblage that is constituted by flow and of itself constitutes flow. Wang et al.’s (2019) idea of TikTok relates it to a social networking site that allows for the creation of short videos, music, and funny fads. The app’s affordance of such content interacts with TikTokers in a way that produces flow: a human-algorithm interaction, one may say. Zuo & Wang (2019) emphasize the kind of space that TikTok offers for self-expression and what they call social interaction, though the experience could be better described in part as intra-acting (Barad, 2003) or ‘acting with self’, through algorithmic mediation, since the algorithm filters people’s personality and interests back to them in a form of customized content. TikTok therefore produces rhizomatic effects in its boundlessness, fluidity, algorithmic transmission, flexibility, flow, and its connectivity with TikTokers’ culture, desires, and enterprise to produce an Assemblage that is unpredictable, malleable, and inexhaustibly adaptive. TikTok deterritorialises from its default territory of being purely an algorithmic platform, and reterritorialises by offering itself to newness in an unpredictable Assemblage with existing Ówàńbẹ̀ practices in Southwest Nigeria.

In the same way, the intensity of Ówàńbẹ̀ cultural practices- expressed through its flexibility, multiplicity, boundlessness, and connective capacity- shapes TikTok in an Assemblage situation as exemplified in the Yoruba culture of Southwest Nigeria; following Buchanan (2022), the connective synthesis of Assemblage is coordinated not subordinated. Hence, TikTok is reterritorialized in a relation of exteriority with Ówàńbẹ̀ practices in Southwest Nigeria. The essence of this Assemblage is better apprehended within the context of an environment that activates its flow. Deleuze and

Guattari argue that Assemblage is a flow of compatibility or at least an availability of connection points by which relations of exteriority can be enacted. In their words: “The identity of affects, the continuity of genera, the totality of all BwOs can be obtained on the plane of consistency only by means of an abstract machine capable of covering and even creating it, by assemblages capable of plugging into desire, of effectively taking charge of desires, of assuring their continuous connections and transversal tie-ins” (p. 166).

Buchanan (2022)’s argument on “specific causality” further speaks to the unique compatibility of TikTok with Ówànbè. The communicative practices set in motion by TikTok through its ForYou page, algorithms suggestion, TikTok streaks, TikTok challenge, TikTok live, TikTok coins, gifting etc. proliferate Ówànbè in form of contentisation, memefication, and viral dance challenge. While previous social media platforms have created similar space for identity expression, TikTok appears more as a customised space configured in symmetry with Ówànbè system. This demonstrates what Deleuze and Guattari meant by the ‘capability of Assemblage to plug into desire, to effectively take charge of desire and assure continuous connection. Komen (2014) captures this compatibility of components in assemblage by saying “a knife can only cut things that have the capacity to be cut”.

Nigerian TikTok is domesticated, transforming it from being purely an algorithmized technological artefact to a cultural artefact; reterritorialized within the culture of Yoruba people in Southwest Nigeria. Reterritorialization translates TikTok to a cultural derivative in the terrain of Ówànbè - festivity, music, theatre, dance steps, comedy, recreation, leisure, and fashion. For instance, prior to TikTok, there were popular dances that originated from Southwest Nigeria or were molded by the Ówànbè system. In 2007/2008, ‘Yahooze’ dance trended in Nigeria and across Africa where there was access to video CD, it was *Alanta* dance in 2009/2010; *Azonto* in 2011; *Kukere* in 2012; *Skelewu* in 2013; *Shoki* in 2014; *Shakiti Bobo* in 2015; *Dab* in 2016; *Shaku-Shaku* in 2017; *Zanku* in 2018; *Tesumole* in 2019; *Legwork* in 2020; *Focus* in 2021; *Buga* in 2022; *Odoyewu* in 2023; *Twe-Twe* (twerk-twerk) in 2024.

These dance steps emerged with each trending music of the year, sometimes two or more dance steps trend in a particular year. While these dance steps were practiced at Ówànbè occasions, the arrival of TikTok technology into that social and cultural assemblage unleashed them into the content economy (Adedeji, 2023) through the platform’s affordances of ‘hash-tagging’, augmented reality, humor, algorithmic virality, likes, reshares, remix that make contents downloadable and replicable on multiple platforms, maximizing their virality.

As understood through AT, reterritorialization of TikTok in Southwest Nigeria opens new territories of cultural possibilities. Trending songs and dance steps are being repurposed as TikTok challenges in a way that historicizes Nigerian musical antecedents and lyrical evolution. For instance, *#Alcohol challenge*, *#Warisi*,

#Go-low-low-low#, *#Buga#*, *#Odeyewu#* and many other TikTok challenges are Nigerian dance steps that have evolved with various Afrobeats significantly since 2020, trending across TikTok in geographical and diasporic Nigeria.

Nigerian TikTok also expressed the Nollywood sector in a new way with movie trailers, comic scenes and remixes expanding the concept of films; and a growing skit economy aspiring towards stardom through algorithmic virality.

The content monetization policy of TikTok coupled with its livestreaming and gifting practices, attracts mass participation within the algorithmic labor as an actual occupation. For instance, in October 2024, the world witnessed the most viewed African TikTok live stream from Nigeria- a celebrity TikToker named Peller gathering around 400,000 viewing population on his TikTok livestream; also in April 2025, around 260,000 viewing population and made over 4.1 million TikTok coins (50,000 USD) from TikTok gifting on his TikTok live in a single night (MyNigeria, 2025). The 20-year-old celebrity TikToker based in Lagos has about 15 million followers and over 600 million likes as of February 2026. These coordinates as put by Deleuze and Guattari are “determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals, but by pragmatics composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities. A new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree, the hollow of a root, the crook of a branch. Or else it is a microscopic element of the root-tree, a radicle that gets rhizome production going” (1980, p. 15). All these practices constitute the process of TikTok reterritorialization in the specific culture of Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria.

AT provides ontological clarity on TikTok reterritorialization in Southwest Nigeria, how it sets flow in motion and opens new territories of unpredictable possibilities, and reactivates a marketplace for Ówàńbè practices. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1980, p. 326), “a territory is always enroute to at least potential deterritorialization, even though the new Assemblage may operate a reterritorialization (something that “has-the-value-of home)”. In this line of thought, one may argue that the reterritorialized (decoded) TikTok is reterritorialized in the Ówàńbè culture and vice versa. However, the philosophical point of Assemblage is not to replace structures, but to observe their openness, decentralization and componential function- such that a structured TikTok technology is better understood as accountable to multiplicity of cultural and social systems in different environments; producing emergence in an unpredictable kind of order, not mappable and never in binaries.

As mirrored in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, Nigerian TikTok as an assemblage has constituent parts of: social interaction, cultural context, cultural productions plus the existing artefacts seeking outlets, the technology affordances of TikTok, the mechanics of the app, algorithmic effects and time-space intersections. In the current Assemblage situation, Deleuze and Guattari provide the theoretical background to synthesize the cultural context in Southwest Nigeria as BwO. The rhizomatic nature of TikTok in terms of fluidity, flow, flexibility, algorithms, etc.,

and its affordance for cultural amplification offers it as renewable (territorializable); while Ówànbè practices are also in perpetual flow, seeking avenues for expression, and thus profits from TikTok in proportion. These, therefore, constitute what the theorists called “capability to plug into each other, taking charge effectively and the assurance of continuous connection” as evidenced by mutual profitability consolidated within this Assemblage situation in Southwest Nigeria. The Assemblage forms an emergence that the components are individually incapable. Buchanan (2021, p. 44) relates this to why Deleuze & Guattari used the word “machinic” to demonstrate when an Assemblage “has taken on a logic of its own, one that emerges with the selections themselves but then becomes autonomous”.

CONCLUSION

The overriding argument in this study is that TikTok in Southwest Nigeria is socio-spatially fueled by cultural products, as TikTokers share content of preferences that define the predominant cultural practices in that subregion. Continuous flow of these contents reflects the dynamic nature of desires of connection, interaction, and intra-action that form an Assemblage configuration in a decentralized way. The Assemblage of TikTok by nature is mercurial and non-linear, as the affordances of TikTok and the rhizomatic nature of Ówànbè cultural practices in Southwest Nigeria lead to new trends, viral content, #hashtags#, dance steps, and self-expression by TikTokers, extending the possibilities of new Assemblage connections across online and offline life-worlds inexhaustibly. This, according to Buchanan (2021, p. 47), is why Deleuze & Guattari referred to Assemblages as stratifications, especially as they are in the habit of “producing things other than themselves”.

The nature of Assemblage is not in the tangible and the static, but in the desires and processes that are set in motion and how these desires and processes work to constitute the world we live in. Leaning on Buchanan (2007)’s idea that the rhizomatic nature of the Internet should not be conceptualized solely as network interconnect-edness, but rather as the set of desires, choices that they sponsor, and the “degree to which the resulting grid is open or closed”. Hence, TikTok as a rhizome is here understood as a tendency for desires to flow in cultural intersections, rather than TikTok being a pure coded technological phenomenon. This tendency explicates why TikTok assemblage in Nigeria produces a different kind of flow from, let’s say, the cultural context in Britain, as the app responds according to the nature and environment of the BwO.

Understanding TikTok through the philosophical lens of Assemblage provides insights into its fluidity and nature as it continues to evolve. AT illustrates how desires shape TikTok practices in Southwest Nigeria and how new connections are

formed as the platform adapts through deterritorialization and reterritorialization in response to TikTokers' practices and cultural influences.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1994). *Things fall apart*. Anchor Books.
- Adedèji, A. (2010). *Yoruba culture and its influence on the development of modern popular music in Nigeria* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield).
- Adedèji, J. A. (1981). Alarinjo: The traditional Yoruba travelling theatre. In *Drama and theatre in Nigeria: A critical source book* (pp. 221–247).
- Adedèji, W. (2023). Digitalization and new trends in the Nigerian music industry: The social media angle. *International Journal of Recent Research in Social Sciences and Humanities*, 10(3), 132–144.
- Adéèkó, A. (2017). Culture, meaning, proverbs (For Oyekan Owomoyela, in memoriam). In *Arts of being Yoruba: Divination, allegory, tragedy, proverb, panegyric* (pp. 26–47). Indiana University Press., DOI: 10.2307/j.ctt20060q5.6
- Adesina, J. O. (2022). Popular music and socio-cultural changes in post-colonial Yorubaland: Interrogating hip hop and Afro-pop music, 2000–2020. *Global History Dialogues*. <https://globalhistorydialogues.org/projects/popular-music-and-socio-cultural-changes-in-post-colonial-yorubaland/>
- Badeji, S. O. (2021). Aso-ebi custom among the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria: An assessment of trend, challenges and prospect. *Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science*, 34(5), 14–22. DOI: 10.9734/jesbs/2021/v34i530326
- Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs (Chicago, Ill.)*, 28(3), 801–831. DOI: 10.1086/345321
- Buchanan, I. (2007). Deleuze and the Internet. *Research Online*, 1–19. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers/1392>
- Buchanan, I. (2021). *Assemblage theory and method*. Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: 10.5040/9781350015579
- Buchanan, I. (2022, April 20). *Deleuze and Guattari's differential method* [Video]. Department of Contemporary Continental Philosophy, Institute of Philosophy, Czech Academy of Sciences. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jh9xUfHMzeU>
- Bucknell, C., & Kottasz, R. (2020). Uses and gratifications sought by preadolescent and adolescent TikTok consumers. *Young Consumers*, 21(4), 463–478. DOI: 10.1108/YC-07-2020-1186

- DeLanda, M. (2006). A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity. *Continuum*.
- DeLanda, M. (2016). *Assemblage theory*. Edinburgh University Press., DOI: 10.1515/9781474413640
- DeLanda, M. (2019). *A new philosophy of society: Assemblage theory and social complexity*. Bloomsbury Publishing. DOI: 10.5040/9781350096769
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1980). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (Massumi, B., Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (1987). *Dialogues* (Tomlinson, H., & Habberjam, B., Trans.). Columbia University Press.
- Doel, M. A. (1996). A hundred thousand lines of flight: A machinic introduction to the nomad thought and scrumpled geography of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space*, 14(4), 421–439. DOI: 10.1068/d140421
- Equiano, O. (2021). *The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano*. Press-books, Ryerson University.
- Euba, A. (1990). *Yorùbá drumming: The dùndún tradition*. Bayreuth African Studies Series.
- Fahm, A. O. (2015). Ijebu Ode's Ojude Oba Festival: Cultural and spiritual significance. *SAGE Open*, 5(1), 2158244015574640. Advance online publication. DOI: 10.1177/2158244015574640
- Jay, M. (2002). Cultural relativism and the visual turn. *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1(3), 267–278. DOI: 10.1177/147041290200100301
- Kaye, D. B. V., Zeng, J., & Wikström, P. (2022). *TikTok: Creativity and culture in short video*. Polity Press.
- Komen, L. J. (2014). *Mobile assemblages and maendeleo in rural Kenya: The case of Marakwet* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East London).
- Lawal, M. O., Akintunde, T. S., Aliu, N. L., Irhue, Y. K., Akinrinde, O. O., & Ajayi, O. O. (2022). Urban realities and politics of Owanbe in Nigeria. *Acta Politica Polonica*, 53(1), 59–73. DOI: 10.18276/ap.2022.53-05
- Lawley, S. (2005). Deleuze's rhizome and the study of organization: Conceptual movement and an open future. *Tamara: Journal of Critical Postmodern Organization Science*, 3(3–4), 36–49.

- Mbiti, J. S. (1969). *African religions and philosophy*. East African Educational Publishers.
- Nwafor, O. C. (2011). *Photography and the spectacle of As Ebi in Lagos, 1960–2010* (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Western Cape).
- Odunaike, D. A. (2016). Performers' rights and evolution of performance in Nigeria. *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalization*, 53, 61–69.
- Ogonegbu, F., & Ogelenya, G. (2025). Consciousness and the question of self: An African philosophical perspective. *Revista de Filosofia UCSC*, 24(2), 83–98. DOI: 10.21703/2735-6353.2025.24.2.3422
- Oladipo, O. (1991). Traditional African philosophy: Its significance for contemporary Africa. *African Notes*, 15(1–2), 96–104.
- Olaoye, T., & Asemah, E. S. (2023). Attitude of selected university students in Edo State towards TikTok health tips. In Asemah, E. S. (Ed.), *Mass media, politics and civic engagement in Nigeria*. Franklead Publishing.
- Omobowale, A. O. (2008). Clientelism and social structure: An analysis of patronage in Yoruba social thought. *Africa Spectrum*, 43(2), 203–224. DOI: 10.1177/000203970804300208
- Oyeleke, A. S., Onyike, I. E., & Queen, R. C. (2023). Implications of exposure and usage of TikTok short videos on broadcast news reception among journalism students in Nigeria. *Global Media Journal*, 21(64), 1–7.
- Posteraro, T. (2020). Assemblage theory and the two poles of organic life. *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 14(3), 402–432. DOI: 10.3366/dlgs.2020.0410
- Shonaiya, A. (2021). *Afrobeats: The back story* [Documentary series]. Netflix.
- Wang, Y. H., Gu, T. J., & Wang, S. Y. (2019). Causes and characteristics of short video platform internet communities: Taking the TikTok short video application as an example. In *2019 IEEE International Conference on Consumer Electronics–Taiwan (ICCE-TW)* (pp. 1–2). IEEE. DOI: 10.1109/ICCE-TW46550.2019.8992021
- Yaqi, Z., Lee, J., & Liu, S. (2021). Research on the uses and gratifications of TikTok (Douyin short video). *International Journal of Contents*, 17(1), 52–60. DOI: 10.5392/IJoC.2021.17.1.052
- Yussuf, B. N., & Olúbòm hìn, O. O. (2018). Traditional music and the expression of Yoruba socio-cultural values: A historical analysis. *Muziki*, 15(2), 61–74. DOI: 10.1080/18125980.2018.1554980

Zuo, H., & Wang, T. (2019). Analysis of TikTok user behaviour from the perspective of popular culture. *Frontiers in Art Research*, 1(3), 1–5. DOI: 10.25236/FAR.20190301