

## SIGNIFICANCE OF SOME THEMATIC VIEW IN SELECTED NIGERIAN YORUBA HOME VIDEO FILMS

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### Introduction

Sparshott (1971: 12) defines film as a series of motionless images projected onto a screen so fast to create in the mind of anyone watching the screen an impression of continuous motion, such images being projected by a light shining through a corresponding series of images arranged on a continuous band of flexible material. Sparshott's definition analyses that films help to sensitise and facilitates a form of entertainment, socialisation and changes within the society where there are audiences. This is also true about Nigerian video films, which are divided into different categories such as Igbowood, Hausawood, Urhobowood and Yorubawood, which is under analysis in this paper. All of these 'woods' are classified as 'Nollywood' in the Nigerian society.

Over the decades, Nigerian home video films have been a reliable source of entertainment. Within a little period, Nollywood has become a household name and a source of income for many Nigerians who should have been jobless, therefore, improving the standard of living of this selected group of people. Opubor and Nwaneli (1979: 1) observe that:

Of all the media of mass communication, the motion picture has perhaps the most universal appeal and impact. Properly conceived and executed, a film can rise

above the limitations of language and cultural barriers by the power of its visual images, its use of music and sound effects can succeed in conveying much the same message to audiences of heterogeneous background... because of film potential effectiveness in communicating emotions and ideas.

Right from the beginning of Nollywood, women have always been characterised stereotypically. They are seen as either sex objects, domestic workers, objectified human, weaker vessels, or reproductive instruments amongst other portrayals. Creating the differences enable Nollywood to question the socio-cultural layout of what it means to be a woman in a patriarchal society like Yorubaland. Through the various themes examined in many of the films, the relationship among language, politics, gender and culture is exposed. Such exposure allows the scriptwriter to present gender as a social construct that has limited the identity and autonomy of women and in some cases that of the male gender.

While one of the major reasons for filmmakers in Nigeria is to produce films for the rejuvenation of the decayed society, it is also to promote an enduring inclination for revival of the cultural values of the Nigeria nation or for commercial purposes. Again, it is the function of the filmmakers, like the literary stage playwrights, to produce films that satirise the society; but most of the films we see in Nigeria today are the culturally deficient films that add little or no values to the people's values. Ironically, it adds to the producers financial status which makes film making a two edged sword in Nigeria. However, the initial purpose of filmmaking is described by Adeyemi (2006: 376) as "affinity for social change... cultural nationalism... aesthetic recourse to the so-called motherland, especially in the face of threatening cultural annihilation". Thus, over time, the commercial notion behind the exploit begins to manifest in sharp contrast to the moral values and culturally pleasing perspectives that the filmmaking is supposed to

present.

Starting from the Alarinjo travelling theatre to Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola, Duro Ladipo, Oyin Adejobi, Ojo Ladipo (aka Baba Mero), Moses Olaiya (aka Baba Sala), Isola Ogunsola (aka I Show Pepper), Lere Paimo and host of others, Yoruba plays and films have developed into a multi-faceted business that have helped all and sundry.

While Nigerian home video films have attracted many criticisms such as lack of content, plot, stereotypic characterisations, editing, language, negative representation of Nigerian culture, amongst others, Nollywood has also created an avenue for artistic expression that can be exported to the world. Onookome Okome (2007: 6) sees that:

Nollywood has redefined contemporary cinema culture in Africa and about how it has enhanced discussions of the social imagery of the classes of people who patronize a peculiar form of this visual culture... Today, Nollywood is a big cultural business.

Okome's submission is that Nigerian movies have helped to project Nigeria's stories in their own views, perspectives, language, and representation and world in their own way. Unfortunately, Okome's submission presents the exact opposite of what most of the films in Nigeria today represents. However, Jonathan Haynes (2007: 4) also observes that:

The video may not give us what we thought we wanted but there are good reasons to pay attention to them. They offer the strongest, most accessible expression of contemporary Nigerian popular culture which is to say the imagination of Africa's largest nation.

Either one likes it or not, the Nigerian home video films have made tremendous impacts both in and outside the country. The films under analysis in this paper present us with satirical views of the Nigerian



society. While we have issue of abomination, love, infidelity, hatred, modernity, childlessness, polygamy, destiny etc., in many of Yoruba Nollywood films category, this category has helped and still helping to showcase the Yoruba people's culture, values, traditions amongst other things.

### **Synopsis of *Onitemi***

Damilola is a new student who falls in love with Bayo a 300 Level student of same university. After Bayo's graduation, he never gets in contact with Damilola during and after his National Youth Service period. However, Damilola falls in love with Tokunbo, who has always shown her love and affection from her first year at the university. After a few years, Bayo shows up to ask for Damilola's forgiveness giving various excuses but she realises she cannot leave her husband, Tokunbo for any other man. The film is written and directed by Daniel Ademinokan in 2011.

The film plays on the audiences' intelligence by presenting some important part of it in a dreamlike mode whereby the audiences are made to believe that Morenike is falling in love again with the runaway Bayo. While her attitude changed towards her husband claiming that her husband travels a lot after meeting with Bayo. The film presents women as thoughtless and senseless human beings. Despite Tokunbo's love for her, she is unrepentant, rude, aggressive, unconcerned and selfish. Also, the film discusses the political scenario in Nigeria through Tokunbo's father. In his conversation with Damilola seeing her for the first time, the call for true federalism whereby power is disseminated at different level of government is brought to the fore.

### **Synopsis of *Obiri Laye***

*Obiri Laye*, a Yoruba Nollywood video by NURETO Films Production in conjunction with Tomiade Productions, deals with the household experience, conflicts and disagreements in a Yoruba setting. The play commences with two career-preoccupied growing families who are



interested in getting individuals that can be of assistance in some of the household duties. One of the families, which the play is largely based on, seeks and is able to beg the wife's mother to come and help by staying with them. On the other way round, the second family is not as lucky as the first family in their quest for a helping hand. The husband only ditches out certain conditions pertaining to the kind of house help (servant) which the wife must take, in terms of gender, education, working conditions and age.

The mother-in-law accepts the moves in with the overtly busy family of a medical doctor and a businessman, the wife and husband respectively. Nothing could be compared to the kind of joy, which the family begins to experience due to the care that Grandma renders to Ayomide, the eight- year old child of the couple. The care and affection come naturally through the kind of love expected of a grandma-child relationship. Grandma in the film also plays the dual role of home tutor and the chef of the house especially for Ayomide.

Just in the midst of this ecstatic mood because of the servant duty which Grandma plays with a motherly care to the entire nuclear family of Peju and Bosun, the husband announces that Grandpa has agreed to come back to Nigeria. Ayomide's mother, her husband and her business partners, receive this happily. However, Ayomide's father raises an issue that bothers on possible loneliness of Grandpa if he eventually arrives. He believes that Grandpa will only turn out to be experiencing loneliness and boredom since he would be left alone in his compound without a wife because he is a widower. Ayomide's mother shares a contradictory view that it will be better for them to allow Grandpa to stay with them. She promises to implore Grandpa to accept staying with them. Grandpa arrives, and as planned, begins to live with them. The one-time messianic status which the family found in Grandma now becomes an object of ridicule. He disagrees with virtually everything Grandma cherishes and this raises a strong reason for concern.

Surprisingly, the opposite begins to happen at a period the couple are still finding a permanent way of making the two cross grandparents to live peacefully together. Alas, an unexpected intimacy has suddenly crept in-between Grandpa and Grandma. In a short time, Ayomide's parents discover that there is an illicit romantic relationship between Grandpa and Grandma. This causes a serious problem between the young family where Ayomide's mother (Peju) accuses Bosun (her husband) that his father must have charmed her mother for such an abominable act to be condoned by Grandma – Bosun also gave a counter-accusation and abuses.

As this continues, Grandma becomes pregnant for Grandpa, an act that is expressly taken as an abomination and disgraceful act among Yoruba people. Bosun and Peju fall apart with series of quarrels, with the latter's insistence that her mother (Grandma) must abort the pregnancy. Grandpa begs Grandma against terminating the pregnancy, with explanation of how important it is to him. At length, Grandpa takes his beloved wife, Grandma, to a hospital for a complicated childbearing labour. As the need for a surgical procedure arises, Grandma insists on having her daughter perform the operation, but Peju refuses to do it. After much appeal, Ayomide's mother performs the operation where Grandma loses the foetus; and Grandma apologizes to her daughter who forgives her. The play ends with a partly broken and disunited family.

In addition, Grandpa's elder brother who is supposed to be the custodian of tradition is unable to influence his decision in marrying Grandma who is his son-in-law's mother. The belief that his western view has overshadowed his thought is presented as if everything about the western world is bad. Tracing the historical perspectives of Nigeria's independence decades ago, the mutual relationship between both continents must be maintained, but in *Obiri Laye*, the scriptwriter makes us see that western culture is of no use and all it does is to destroy the cultural values that we have in Africa. This view is also noticed in



Kofoworola (2015: 59) that, when we consider:

value in relation to traditional folklore and the challenges of modern civilisation progress, development and changes, we will begin to perceive the indomitable power of socio-political, socio-economic technological and scientific factors of changes of modern globalisation in the annals of human history.

That is, globalisation has taken over many traditional values and that modern creativity is what is needed to sustain the values due to its economic, social, technological and political usefulness in the society. Although Grandpa's action is despicable, the objectification view of women is also presented to viewers.

### **Thematic Concerns and Issues in *Obiri Laye* and *Onitemi*: The Confluence of Destiny, Civilisation and Modernity.**

These divergent concepts are fused in the video in several ways. Firstly, the film begins by setting in motion the idea of destiny and predestination in the mind of the audience. It starts out by putting the audience on a cutting edge of imagining a possible experience about watching a film that deals with predestination, just like in the stage experiences of the classical Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* or Rotimi's (1979) *The Gods are not to Blame*. This is exactly what viewers begin to perceive even before beholding the first set of shots. Straight through the sound track that comes before the audio-visual shots, the anticipation starts increasing for a possible video version of Otun Rasheed's (2011) *The Gods are Still not to Blame*. The play begins with a chorus thus:

#### **Prelude Music**

#### **Translation**

Aye re wa, Aye reyin

Life tosses one up and down

Aye d'obiribiri

Life becomes a whirl wind

Owo aye, inu aye	Life's hand, innermost part of life
Aye o ye eniyan (2x)	Life is complex (2x)
Obirilaye a aa	Life is a whirlwind
Aye n poyin	Life is cyclical
Obirilaye, aye n yiroboto	Life becomes a whirl wind, it's cyclical
Orimogbewaye	My destiny
Eleda, bamiso ayanmo mi	My creator, watch over my creator
Morimori, momipe	The moulder of destiny, mould me well
Ki n ma sirin	Order my footsteps
K'aye mi ma baje o	So that my life shouldn't crumble
Eni n gbaye, komodi aye	Life's dwellers know not the root of life
Eleduwa, iwonikan lo mo o...	God is the only one that knows...

With this introductory music, the ground for a destiny-based film becomes set. We later see the concept of destiny and predestination in the controversial affairs between Grandma and Grandpa. Despite the outcry from the couple, their children, and even the involvement from the extended family, that the illicit love affairs be discontinued, it continues to show that everything indeed lies in the hand of "*Eleduwa*", God. That the blind couple (Grandpa and Grandma) ends up losing the foetus is also presented in a somehow predestined manner. It was more or less a case of much ado about nothing.

In the same vein, Grandpa raises the idea of modernism and civilisation. As a glaringly acculturated Americana, Grandpa believes that the opposition of people to the love affairs between him and Grandma is actually because of lack of exposure of those opposed to it.



To him, it is a thing that is accepted as norm in the USA. As far as he is concerned, there is nothing wrong with what he did. That the affair runs contrary to the Yoruba marriage culture, tradition and custom is unfounded in Grandpa elitist worldview. Therefore, one begins to see what his exposure and the purported civilisation has made of his culture. This is obviously because of civilisation and globalisation.

In addition, *Onitemi* discusses the nexus between destinies and wishes. Damilola, the main character of the film wishes to marry Bayo whom she meets at her first year in the university, but destiny plays a smart game on her by marrying Tokunbo who she thinks is a spoilt daddy's pet being a former minister's son. With reference to Tokunbo and Damilola's first encounter, which Damilola takes as being insulting and rude, Damilola does not give Tokunbo any avenue to show his love for her but, as destiny would have it, Bayo who helps Damilola by coaching her educationally is found wanting when it comes to love. In Joke (Damilola's friend) and Damilola's conversation, the scriptwriter reveals the extent at which the love affair between Bayo and Damilola is one sided.

**Joke:** Did he tell you himself that he loves you?

**Damilola:** I know he loves me

...

**Joke:** If you love a man, you have to love him with sense

...

Men do not worth the love we shower on them

Joke and Damilola are two opposing characters who are friends. Damilola shows love to gain love, which she never had, while the later shows attention to gain love where it is possible and sees that love is not a do or die affair. This film shows that destiny has a way of playing on people's intelligence when it comes to self and others. The film also

presents how women are ready to do whatsoever is possible to gain the attention of the man they love, not minding how the man feels towards them.

### **Grievous Household Disasters in the Face of Career-Oriented Family**

The overbearing theme and issue in the film deals with the possible crises that the disproportionate concentration on building a career may portend. In producing film and play stories, what is consistently experienced is the possibility of a hired house help (servant) to be involved in an unwholesome relationship with the wife (if the servant is a grown up man) or with the husband (if it involves a matured woman). The film provides similar background through the characters of the second couple, Peju and her husband, who are unlucky in their search for a domestic helper, partly because of the husband's strict conditions. The husband in this second family instructs his wife to only get a helper that is above the maturity age of eighteen years old, who must also be a woman. The wife immediately bemoans this by insinuating that there could be likely affairs between such matured woman household helper and her husband. The wife suggests having a male, but the husband out-rightly rejects such proposal, apparently because of mutual jealousy. They end up being unable to get any servant.

Such is the usual story that normally occurs when it comes to house help matters; like fear of the servant eventually "snatching the husband". Consequently, Peju, the wife of Bosun's friend, retorts that, "if someone of my age comes here to work as a servant, haven't I brought home the second wife for my husband?" In this case, however, no husband is snatched, rather, what is culturally frowned at what happened. We begin to see what is not regularly experienced, an unprecedented romance between adults that are traditionally not allowed. Bosun confesses to his uncle over a telephone conversation that "the matter has become an embarrassment to me [him]". This



nevertheless fails to stop the controversial relationship between Grandpa and Grandma because the former refuses to heed Uncle's advice of him stopping such unc customary coitus relationship.

An important aspect of the film that must not be overlooked has to do with the approach of the other couple, Peju and her Husband. Unlike the case of Moyo and Bosun, they are unlucky in finding a servant due to the stringent rules of Peju's husband. The scriptwriter, Oluwatoyin Adeyemi, arguably uses this as a silent statement, a call for perseverance and endurance in blending household duties with career responsibilities. This issue could also call the attention of both couples to the fore in helping themselves. That is, a man should always help to the wife in domestic activities not minding the African (Nigerian) patriarchal society whereby a wife has to do everything in the house. At the end of the film, Bosun and Moyo's family is in shambles, and the audience could not well predict what would become of the family in the future. Such belated fatal end does not befall Peju and her husband. Though it is not through their ingenuity, that the extended families stay out of their union could be said to have greatly helped.

Similarly, in *Onitemi*, Tokunbo who is the hardworking and loving husband decides to take time off work when the wife complains of not having time for them at home. Instead of discarding her words, the love he has for the wife makes him call off all appointment at work despite that he had important meetings to attend during the week. The love Tokunbo has for Damilola is shown even before they got married and while he is proposing to her. In his words that:

**Tokunbo:** Because I admire you, you are just stressing me

**Tokunbo:** From today, I don't want to see you as an ordinary friend, but I want to start seeing you as my wife.

However, Tokunbo understands the lonely feelings of his wife which makes him sacrifice the needed time she demands of him. In addition, the house help in the film is silent as she does all that is required of her

to help in the house. Tokunbo shows Alice Walker's (1984) view of womanism that man and woman should work together, cooperatively to make a sane society that is pleasing to live for both genders. Infidelity is showcased in the film through the female gender. First, it was Rose; then, it was Damilola making promises she will never keep in the dream despite that she is married.

### **Servant-Master Relationship: A General Call for Humane Treatment**

An issue which the film also addressed is the inhuman treatment of people based on their social status. It criticizes those who maltreat their fellow human beings based on a perceived advantage. Rather than widening the gap, the film advocates for those practices that would reduce the prevalent social echelons. In doing this, the so-called servants should not only serve their masters purposelessly, rather, the latter must as a matter of necessity develops the enabling roadmap that would lead to eventual freedom. An example of this is situated in the film thus:

**Peju:** (Annoyingly) I am talking to you and you're walking away.

**Husband:** Peju, what do you want?

**Peju:** I can't perform all the household chores anymore. I am fed up. I want a servant.

**Husband:** Okay, I should get you someone you'll maltreat?

**Peju:** I won't maltreat her.

**Husband:** For me to get you a servant, I would give you some conditions you have to meet... the person must be eighteen years old or above... you won't maltreat her...make her



learn a trade or go to school... She would sleep at the normal time.

From the above, it is glaring that Adeyemi, through the medium of the film, discusses such issues like child and excessive human labour, exploitation and 'unprogressive' servant-master relationships that exist in our society. This is a practice the government of Nigeria is trying to abolish because they see that there is no future for this category of deprived individuals. This is also seen in *Onitemi*, but the scriptwriter presents the cook as someone who specializes in cooking alone and gets the deserved reward for what he does.

### **Genre Language of both Films**

One can hardly place the films under any genre of drama, but could be situated under satire because of some satirical issues portrayed, such as infidelity, disrespect to culture and tradition, love, hatred and corruption. Since satire can be regarded as one of the most effective sources of understanding a society, techniques employed by writers to expose and criticise the foolishness of a society or an individual, the films under analysis portray these. As it is, satire can be regarded as one of the most effective sources of understanding a society through its engagement in social criticism. This is mirrored in wa Thiong'o (2008: 56):

Satire takes, for its province, a whole society and for its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to poor decision and ridicule on society's fallings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious, laughter.

This shows satire as an art form which is intentionally meant to ridicule and at the same time criticize the society in order to make positive changes where need be. However, satire as a literary form

employs different avenues in its mode of presentation. Ododo and Labiran (2012: 404) assert that film is a major communication channel to the public. Film possesses this awesome power to influence and affect lives, it is important that the stories are in order for it not to send or pass the wrong information to the public. Such messages are disseminated by language in films and this helps to create the mood and the atmosphere needed for positive realignment of societal perspective.

However, use of language is analysed as an expression of an individual's identity and not just the vehicle to communicate an idea. In addition, language is presented as a means of destroying any gender if not carefully used; and the moral, aesthetic culture that is meant to govern 'self', especially the female gender, is scrutinised. Most of Yoruba Nollywood scriptwriters look into their culture, history, economy, society, amongst other things from a male point of view to re-evaluate and write about female situation. Such include women's lifestyles, masculinity, motherhood, gender, poverty and connections between their body, sexuality and representation. However, Awobuliyi (1978: 3) asserts that:

Spoken language is found in all human societies and is characterised by informality, impermanence, spontaneity, ellipsis, and inaccuracies of various kinds. Spoken language tends to be informal because it typically occurs in interaction between interlocutors who both feel relaxed and at ease critically watching their performances. Furthermore, spoken language invariably contains many assumptions, presumptions and allusions etc. and it is also often accompanied by various facial expressions and body movement.

Spoken language in the films show the portrayal of the characters, their acts and manners, skills and capacities which develop the plot of the film and make audiences understands the scriptwriter's perspective.



Although, the spoken language in the film is predominantly Yoruba, there are infusions of English language to differentiate the characters, to show their statuses, to tell the audience the level of education and enlightenment and to make it more appealing to the modern and young audiences who are indifferent about the Yoruba language. There are also the use of proverbs, idioms, songs, music, metaphors to portray the richness in the culture and the setting of the films which help to develop the overall plot of the play. However, the languages of the films are simple, communicative and direct.

## **Conclusion**

The scriptwriter should not forget that globalisation, multiculturalism and trans-culturalism have taken over the world. However, the mixing of western culture with African culture shows an entanglement between two contemporary cultures which helps in the development of third world countries. While African culture is important to the future of the coming generation and the nation as a whole – because culture ensures the history (past), present and the future which will create the needed identity – western tradition can never be dispensed with. This is because such traditions offer numerous benefits such as providing identity, strengthening the societal bond, offer comfort and security, teaches values, connect generations and create lasting memories. In terms of the Yoruba Nollywood category, the films they produce could help in satirizing and correcting the societal ills and sanitizing the decayed Nigerian society if well presented. It is also noticed that language plays an important role in getting the message across to their audiences which allows them meditate between culture, modernity and globalisation without much contradictions.

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