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## Gender and Culture in Indigenous Films in Nigeria

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### Introduction

The world of films in any human culture is a world of magic, creativity and imagination. It could be the heaven of inspired storytelling, flight of fancy, morality, beauty and emotions. It could also be the depth values, knowledge and wisdom, in short, the best in us. On the other hand, it could be the hell of violence, gore, sexual depravity and emotional and mental grossness, in other words, the beast in us.

Filmmaking is the outcome of the application of modern developments in the field of technology (celluloid and electronics), theatre arts and mass communications to the production of entertainment. It is a world of visual education, pleasure and relaxation. It has come to become a staple in the cultural menu of the developed world.

In Nigeria, black Africa's most populous nation and developing society, the story is far different but interesting. Celluloid film's short life had its beginnings in the 1970s when Nigeria boasted close to 100 cinema houses. Now they are down to a handful. These film theatres were owned and controlled then by Indian and Lebanese proprietors who brought to Nigeria mostly grade B Indian and Lebanese movies. Occasionally they showed good films, but these cinema houses were most appreciated for their news of the world. They dominated and decided film fares absolutely until the Indegenisation Decree of 1972 made it unprofitable to import foreign films. It became very difficult to obtain import licenses to import foreign films.

Little by little, indigenous filmmakers began treading the tortuous waters. Hubert Ogunde, the veteran Yoruba dance drama performer, brought the per-

formance of his traveling dance drama troupe to the celluloid screen. It was novel, magical and heavily patronised even outside Yoruba speaking states. In 1976, the late Francis Ladele brought Wole Soyinka's 'Kongi's Harvest' to the screen. Ola Balogun and others like Adeyemi Afolayan, Moses Adeyemo a.k.a. Baba Sala came on board. The years of military misrule made life more difficult, and harsh with increased unemployment and high living costs. As crime increased, streets became unsafe and few wanted to be out at night watching movies in cinema houses. As it became more difficult and expensive to bring in 35mm films, theatre audiences dwindled.

The economic collapse of the oil-boom 1970s saw the end of celluloid films in Nigeria and the 1990s saw the rise of the home videos. Shooting a celluloid film was unaffordable and video makers lacked the knowledge of celluloid film technology and the necessary resources. However, there remained a huge appetite for film drama and the home video makers cashed in to fill that gap. Electronics and video equipment sellers finding that their customers did not like to buy blank cassettes started producing video films based on local subjects, stories that Nigerians could relate to, could see themselves in. For as little as N10,000 (naira) movies were shot within one or two weeks on Nigerian locations. Most plots were simple minded as well as sensational and sentimental. The plots were forgettable, the story line thin, the acting poor, the directing absent and the lighting and camera work pedestrian. The masses nonetheless, lapped them up because they dealt with witchcraft, cultists, armed robbers, search for love and poor take-offs of western gangster films.

One of the first home video films *Living in Bondage* (1993) created quite a stir. It first came out in Ibo, followed by *Evil Passion*, *Taboo*, *Fatal Desire*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, *Circle of Doom*, *Forbidden* and *Glamour Girls Parts I and II* in rated success. None of the above home videos is any longer in production. While they lasted, they sold an average of 350–400 copies per day at each marketer's store!

Since 1993, many more home video films have been released. In fact, there has been an avalanche of home videos. According to the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board, the following numbers of films were produced between 1994–2001: Abuja (1997–2001), 916 films; Onitsha (1999–2001), 455 films; Abuja (1994–2001), 2,010 films. This makes a total of 4,297 films within a period of 8 years. Of the 3,380 films rated by the Censors' board, 1,191 were in Yoruba while 1,183 films were in English. From information from 5 film production companies in Lagos, it was ascertained that 10 best selling Yoruba films were:

*Ti Oluma N'ile Parts 1, 2 and 3* (The Earth is the Lord's)  
*Saworoide* (Brass Bells)  
*Kosogbe* (Immovable)  
*Agogo Eewo* (Taboo Gong)

*Thunderbolt* (Magun)  
*Asiri Nla* (Big Secret)  
*Oko* (Missile)  
*Asewo to re Mecca* (Prostitute who went to Mecca)  
*Maradona Eewo, 1 and 2* (Taboo 1 & 2)

The five best selling films sold from around 25,000 to 65,000 copies.

The ten best selling English films were:

*Power of Love, 1 and 2*  
*Ukwa*  
*Okada Man*  
*Stupid*  
*Atinga*  
*He Goat* (1 and 2)  
*Sharon Stone* (1 and 2)  
*The Orphan*  
*Church in Crises*  
*Christ in Me*

The following twelve best-selling films were selected for our discussion of gender and culture in Nigerian Home Video films:

English	Yoruba
<i>Power of Love</i>	<i>Thunderbolt</i> (Magun)
<i>Stupid</i>	<i>Kosegbe</i>
<i>Ukwa</i>	<i>Ti Oloma N'ile</i>
<i>Atinga</i>	<i>Savoroide</i>
<i>Okada Man</i>	<i>Agogo Eewo</i>

Women's Issues

*Agony of a Mother*  
*Ungrateful*

### Synopsis of Selected Video Films

In order to convey something of the content and character of the films under discussion, the following short synopses are presented.

#### *(a) Films in English*

##### *Power of Love Part 1*

Christopher, the lead player falls in love with Juliet, the girl who finances him to get a visa to the USA where he makes good. He returns home to marry her, but Juliet has been crippled in an accident and was not very receptive because of her disability and because she heard a lie that Chris has a white wife. Feeling rejected, Chris turns to an old flame Sandra and they marry, but Sandra's reputation ruins the marriage. Miraculous healing sets Juliet on her feet again and finding her lover married, she attempts suicide by jumping off the top of a building but is again miraculously saved. Sandra comes after Chris with a gun and there ensues a shoot-out with the police who kill her. Chris and Juliet are now free to marry at last.

##### *Power of Love Part 2*

Sandra's mother swears revenge. Sandra's sisters plan an elaborate and generally unbelievable revenge on Chris and Juliet. Conniving with Mary, former girl friend of Chris, fake compromising items are sent to Chris to make him think Juliet has been unfaithful. Sandra's mother uses Juliet's intimate garment in a magical ritual to curse her with bareness. With Juliet's infertility, pressure of work and suspicion of infidelity by her husband, the marriage falls apart. Cynthia befriends Juliet and with each visit to her house slowly poisons her drinks. Disillusioned with women and his marriage, Chris falls into the arms of conniving Mary, the former New York girl friend who pretends to be pregnant in order to break his marriage. Things fall apart for the plotters when Chris overhears the plot to ruin his marriage and kill Juliet. Cynthia meets her Waterloo when Juliet switches their drinks and Cynthia dies of her own poison.

##### *Stupid*

Two low-lifers more stupid than immoral get themselves involved with a number of incompetent but greedy crooks and lose their lives in the encounter. The story opens with a five-man gang double crossing themselves over a large sum of money ill-gotten from an unrevealed source. A member of the gang disguised as a white-garment pastor cons two of the thieves into praying and while they pray he shoots and kills them. He takes the money and joins the remaining two criminals in a waiting car but they had plotted against him. During the celebratory drink, his glass is poisoned and his corpse is thrown callously out of the car by his co-criminals, a Chief and a woman. Knowing what each can do, they watch

each other like hawks. After sharing the money Chief goes a spree of debauching with his married lover whose dwarf husband returns inadvertently on them causing Chief to scale down from the second storey in his underwear. The security men let him out for a fee. The next day they call at his office for gratification and he cleverly thinks of using them to double-cross his female partner. She, in the meantime had secured a crooked deal with a white expatriate who was willing to pay two million naira for a piece of land on which to dump toxic industrial waste from overseas. The two brothers were to pose as policemen and rid the expatriate of his money with which he was going to pay the female partner. The two brothers succeed in relieving the expatriate of his money, but they do not deliver it to the Chief, meaning to keep the money for themselves. This leads to both the Chief and the woman chasing after the two brothers leading to further mayhem and in the end, everyone dies leaving the suitcase containing two million naira, standing forlornly surrounded by corpses.

#### *Atinga*

Atinga is a pointless tale about the rich exploiting the poor at every turn. The rich have every advantage it seems. Atinga, an indolent village bumpkin who kept by his girl friend in the village, eventually loses her to a city slicker, Chief Aguijeigbe, a millionaire cosmetics tycoon. Swearing deadly vengeance, Atinga goes in pursuit of the Chief armed with magical charm from the village medicine man. The charms were to make the Chief so docile that he could be thoroughly humiliated before being finally killed. The charm does not work because Atinga is too scatterbrained to follow instructions. He is told not to eat before and while applying the charm but his girlfriend Amaka, now wife to Chief Aguijeibe, persuades him to taste her food to please her, which he did. When he then attempts to command the Chief with the charm to do demeaning things he is given a severe beating by the outraged Chief, and Atinga ends up as a servant in the Chief's house. Amaka for old times' sake persuades Chief to open a supermarket for Atinga. Here again Atinga is too daft to be able to cope with the demands of running a supermarket and therefore appeals to the Chief to bring his friend, Damian, fellow daftie from the village to assist in the shop. Meanwhile Amaka is sent away to the US for childbirth. In her absence, Chief's roving eyes fall on Nkechi, who widowed by Damian's brother, is expected to marry Damian. Money from Chief however persuades Nkechi's mother to go along with the new arrangement and both friends Atinga and Damian not only lose their women to Chief but also find themselves lowly servants to Chief. They plot unrevealed revenge which one is sure will be stupid and unsuccessful knowing how daft they both are.

*Ukwa*

This is the story of the chequered life of a ne'er-do-well with a good heart. Unrepentantly jobless and impecunious, he lives off his charming family, a wife, 3 children and a frustrated father in the village. He is a problem at home with his roguish ways until big brother Aguiyi takes him to Lagos with him to make something useful out of him. Ukwa in Lagos is a disaster. He seduces his sister-in-law's sister and dresses down the sister-in-law. He exposes Aguiyi's prophet-futurologist by revealing him as the lecherous and fake character he is. Hoodlums who assault him and relieve him of his property egg on his sudden return to the village. An ejected tenant and his young hoodlum associates kill Aguiyi, the elder brother. The prophet is lynched and Ukwa's attempt to seduce his newly widowed sister in law ends up in his getting the beating of his life. He goes back to the village.

*Okada Man*

This is a rambling comedy about various aspects of Nigerian life with a running commentary and reactions by Nicholas, a.k.a. Nicho Loudmouthed, unrepentant non-conformist rogue, liar, thief and seducer. He is a Nigerian Peter Pan, a forty-year-old who does not grow up. Various areas of Nigerian life and culture feature. Nicho's iconoclastic humour pervades family life, domestic servitude, Okadamanhip (Motor cycle taxi), police, human sacrifice, ethnic conflicts, tenement dwelling and witchcraft.

**(b) Films in Yoruba***Magun*

Magun is a brief tale with an Othelloish plot. Irrationally jealous Yinka falls in love and marries Ngozi at the cost of her own status and position in her Igbo culture. Fuelled by baseless rumours of extra-marital affairs lapped up by Yinka, a Yoruba man, problems develop in the marriage. The subsequent distrust leads Yinka to engage the services of a trado-medical practitioner who injects Ngozi with Magun, a magical drug which among other ill-effects may result in an adulteress, unknown to herself causing her lover to die.

*Kosegbe*

A dedicated professional officer takes over the Immigration and Customs services in a city after the previous senior officer is relieved of his duty due to rampant corruption. The efforts of the new officer at cleaning the Aegean stables of Immigration and Customs are severely undermined by a cartel of disgruntled dismissed officers, smuggling barons and corrupt police officers. Bound together by the love for ill-gotten wealth, they use a loose society woman to photograph Kosegbe while being seduced and plant fake drugs on his son. In spite of these

setbacks, he is unrelenting and engages the smugglers in a shoot out. Despite being wounded, he worsts his enemies by tape-recording their confessions of bribery, blackmail and corruption.

#### *Savoroide*

Savoride is a story of a traditional rural community, Jogbo, with a deeply rooted pact with its ancestors that the ruler of the community, the Onijogbo, must rule to serve the community and not the community to serve the ruler. The ruler must take an oath and must be ritually incised to keep his pledge; failure to do this means he will be removed by the ancestors. Lapite, a rapacious Oba, takes the throne by having all threatening opposition killed or exiled. He declined to take the oath or be incised. He buys the Chiefs to his side and together; they milk the town of its natural resources and put their ill-gotten gains in foreign banks. When the suffering and deprivation become too much, the youths revolted only to be crushed by Lagata, an army officer at the behest of Lapite. But Lagata having tasted power, does not want to relinquish it and he kills Lapite and usurps the throne. Nemesis catches up with Lagata when he dons the brass crown without the protective incision and the brass crown strangulates him as the royal drum with brass bells is beaten for him.

#### *Agogo Eevo*

Corrupt traditional Chiefs of Jogbo, after the deaths of Lapite and Lagata the military dictator, conspire to put their man on the throne so as to continue business as usual with corruption. They pick on Adebosipo, a retired police officer. Adebosipo on becoming king, chooses to depart from evil and corruption and to actually fight for the peace and progress of his people. Here begins a battle royal between the Oba and his Chiefs. With advice from Ifa the deity of wisdom and divination, he restores the old oath taking ritual whereby Chiefs swear to uphold the morality and values of the community. Erring and guilty Chiefs must confess past misdeeds and be cleansed before taking the oath. Failure to comply means summary death. Two recalcitrant Chiefs, the Balogun and Seriki who have been causing murder and mayhem, refuse to capitulate and therefore die on the spot.

#### *Ti Oluma N'Ile 1, 2 and 3*

An uneven tale of the fatal sale of traditional ancestral land by two greedy citizens who engage the services of a traditional Chief, the Otun, to help them carry out the deal for a handsome payback. The oracle reveals that the land belongs to deities and therefore not suited for the siting of a petrol station. When the two perpetrators die suddenly one after the other, the Otun realises he is next in line and seeks the oracle's intervention. The oracle says that as long as he can prevent the second conspirator's corpse from being buried, he would be safe. Parts 2 and

3 are the stories of his Herculean task to stay alive. The second conspirator's body is buried after a long delay. Another application to the oracle gives him a short lease of life during which he runs away in a boat, the boat is wrecked, he is captured as an armed robber, and rescued from the police by a rich lady who eventually marries him. Otun, the traditional Chief, goes home to find both his wife and title taken and his clothes shared among family members who presume him to be dead. After his futile fight to reclaim his title, he runs out of time and the ghosts of his two friends reclaim him after all.

### ***Films relating to Women's Issues***

Male dominance is apparent in all twelve films examined in this study, although more heavily so in *Saworoide*, *Agogo Eewo*, and *Oluma N'ile* set in traditional rural settings. But even in urban situations like in *Power of Love* and comical *Ukwa*, *Stupid*, *Atinga* and others the men have upper hand and take all the decisions. Sites of patriarchy include domestic work, paid work, male violence, sexuality and cultural institutions like the levirate and widowhood. (*Power of Love*, *Saworoide*, *Ukwa*, *Agony of a Mother*). Widowhood is given full treatment in *Agony of a Mother* where Aswani suffers, true to culture, accusations of having a hand in her husband's death, insensitivity from kinsmen and mother-in-law, neglect by family, impoverishment, loss of status and humiliation. On the other hand, the loss of spouse by a man does not warrant any punitive or derogatory action. Vesico-Virginia Fistula (VVF), a serious woman's issue afflicting young girls who are forced into early marriages and therefore premature birthing in northern Nigeria, is treated unrealistically and sentimentally as a grown up affair in *Ungrateful* as a knight in shining armour comes out of the blues to rescue this tertiary institution student with VVF from a fate not worse than death, pays her enormous hospital bills for restorative surgery and marries her in the end in spite of her dilly-dallying.

#### *Synopsis: Agony of a Mother*

Aswani, a deeply religious woman is happily married with two children, a boy, Joseph and a girl, Edith. Her travails begin when unknown assailants murder her husband. At the news she runs to her husband's wealthy younger brother who refuses to assist her because her husband refused to sell his land to his business partner to use to dump toxic waste. Outwardly he pretends to be sympathetic by giving her a cheque, which bounces. She is blamed for her husband's death but vehemently she declares her innocence. Ostracised and abandoned, the children suffer, the brother-in-law is callous and merciless and a friend who tried to assist her provokes the fury of his wife who assaults Aswani. As Aswani seeks refuge in her religious faith, her brother-in-law intensifies his applications of charms provided by a sorcerer. Didi is killed by a hit and run driver driving Aswani to greater desperation. When Joseph is attacked several times by unknown assailants, he

leaves for Lagos. The sorcerer pursues him with long-distance charms and fails due to his mother religious intervention. Frustrated by the sorcerer's failed attempts to take Joseph's life Chief sends his murder squad to have him killed. In the meantime, Joseph is doing very well in Lagos, works in a company and is married to the boss's daughter. When Chief learns of Joseph's success, he could not stand it any more and decides to go and kill Aswani in the village. Unfortunately, Chief's wife discovers Chief's pot of magical concoctions in the wardrobe, brings the pot outside and sets it on fire, an act which immediately sets the Chief on fire. This makes him take off all his clothes, lose his mind and begin to confess all his crimes throughout the village.

#### *Ungrateful*

This is a poor treatment of a tale of VVF (Vesico-Vagina-Fistula). Jennifer suffers VVF from a mishandled gynaecological surgery. She is deserted by her boyfriend and ostracised to take her lectures from outside the class. A stranger arranges and pays for her surgery to the chagrin of his family. Jennifer is mended; Emeka her benefactor proposes, but she still has feelings for her ex-boyfriend, who knowing that she is mended wants to marry her. Dramatically on her wedding day, she changes her mind, and marries her benefactor.

#### **Gender and Culture in Indigenous Films**

Although considerable literature is available on gender, discussion of the topic gender is still contentious, conflicting and somewhat confusing. There are many perspectives and approaches to the subject. Clatterbaugh's eight perspectives on gender which include the moral, pro-feminist, men's rights, mythopoesis, socialist, homosexual-male, African American, and evangelistical-Christian, are too involved and masculinist for the purpose of this paper (Clatterbaugh 1992). Rather, gender will be simply defined as any approved way of being an adult male or female and while acknowledging the existence of an essentialist perception that gender is biological. This paper would rather take the view that gender is conditional and constructionist by the application of the mythopoesis and social constructionist approaches to our analysis of gender and culture in indigenous films in Nigeria. The mythopoesis approach expressed here involves the examination of folklore such as traditions of stories, myths, and rituals in a non-neo-Jungian sense of deep, unconscious patterns or archetypes or male mythopoesis as found in current discourses on masculinities (Bly 1990, 1991). Our social constructionist view is one that looks at gender through the male roles of supplier, safe keeper and spouse; and female roles of mother, nest builder and nurturer as forged by role socialisation by institutions and practices grounded in traditional societies.

Culture in this paper will be taken to mean the identifying totality of the way of life of a people as enshrined in their material and non-material aspects of life.

It includes their material production such as architecture, food, and belongings, creative and recreational objects such as houses, cuisine, clothing, books and music. The nonmaterial aspects include their cognitive culture, their way of being, thinking and perceiving. Beliefs, songs, dance, music, ideology, laws and customs are also subsumed under culture.

### ***Society Portrayed in Indigenous Films***

Nigeria is an amalgamation of numerous societies and cultures with over two hundred and fifty languages. Mercifully, this paper will be examining Nigerian culture from the perspective of indigenous filmmakers who are either Yoruba or Igbo and whose themes are therefore situated or given a perspective from either the Igbo or Yoruba cultures. All the films in this paper examine a slice of life in Nigerian culture.

The society portrayed in indigenous films is clearly Nigerian, the setting being rural or urban Igbo or Yoruba society. Rural life in the village is simple, poor, and agricultural with subsistence farming and lack of many amenities and utilities. Three of our twelve films are situated in a rural setting. *Ti Oluwa Ni'ile*, *Saworoide*, and *Agogo Eevo* all play out in the traditional rural setting. The background is not pre-colonial but nonetheless it is distant from western style central modern governance. The themes are about various aspects of life where the locals are rural dwellers. The presence and influence of traditional kingship structure of Oba and traditional Chiefs and the royal court are much in evidence in the Yoruba films; and the traditions of elders in council palpable in the Igbo films. On traditional matters such as land, beliefs, heritage, traditional social institutions still carry much weight. The village school with its poor facilities and ever so influential village headmaster are depicted in *Magun*. The larger family, not the nuclear family, is depicted in *Ukwa* where the family is headed by grandfather, the final arbiter of family conflicts. *Agony of a Mother* captures the impoverished setting of the village as well as the tyranny of tradition and belief regarding widowhood and women's rights. Nonetheless, in spite of the material deprivation, a sense of greater humanity and cohesiveness shines through the rural rather than the urban settings.

Alienation, corruption, slum dwelling and general hustling to make ends meet, often overshadow town or urban settings. *Kosegbe* examines corrupt social institutions and services like Customs and Immigration and the Police departments. Urban problems like greed and criminality are satirised in *Stupid*. *Okada Man* is a running commentary on corrupt city life, social ills, ethnic conflicts, police brutality, tenement dwelling and alienation in urban centers. *Power of Love* is set among the near affluent that talk big money and peddle fake foreign culture in dress and mannerism. There is prevalence of immorality, fraud, violence, gun totting, use of poison to settle scores and an amazing belief in witchcraft and sorcery. *Un-*

*grateful* hints at tertiary education and the upwardly mobile dwelling in urban centres. But all in all, the urban settings depicted in the films are only as urban as cities can be in developing countries. So many social indicators of development are lacking: good roads, absence of power outage, and potable water amongst other things.

### ***Gender in Family and Marriage Relationships***

Family life is historically and culturally specific. All twelve films depict family and marriage relationships. Love and marriage are authentic within Igbo and Yoruba traditions. Where they are not, they ring hollow and unbelievable. In *Power of Love*, Juliet and Chris's western style love and married life are a mystery to their parents but the problem of childlessness generates traditional intervention from Chris's father who advocates his son taking an additional wife (polygamy) even in the face of the fact that he the father is monogamous and does not contemplate marrying another wife. Cultural perceptions of the male as supplier, safe keeper and head spouse are brought up but not treated satisfactorily. They are introduced irrelevantly or just to move the plot forward. It is not clear what Chris does eventually and how successful he is at it. If he is a good provider, it is not clear why Juliet works so hard and is sexually harassed at work unless to gratuitously bring in issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and infertility which are not fully treated. Chief Ajiugbe in *Atinga* as a good supplier is wealthy and therefore a monarch of all he surveys. He is the societal ideal of the successful, mature, responsible and respectable citizen. Like Aguiyi in *Ukwa*, the source of wealth does not seem to matter. Being wealthy by hook or by crook is the modern morality in Nigeria. It is not supported by traditional values. The rolling stone, hapless protagonists like Ukwa in the film of the same name, Nicho in *Okada Man*, Atinga, the two brothers in *Stupid* are caricatures or spoofs of the immature, irresponsible, never-do-well personages who cannot be providers and protectors. They are embarrassments, social failures, and useful as slapstick commentators. Yet they are very perceptive in their analysis of the ills of the society in spite of the fact that they are portrayed as crude and unintelligent.

The family as a social unit is strongly depicted in all the stories. Issues such as domestic life, male infertility (*Power of Love*), and wife inheritance (*Ti Olumwa ni ile* and *Ukwa*) all feature. The family as a social unit is strongly depicted in all the stories. The women are conceived as nurturers, care-givers. In their domestic role, they provide the food and serve it respectfully to their husbands, a chore which is despised by men as Ukwa is insulted when his sister-in-law asks him to go and buy her tomatoes and onions from the market. Not even the queens in the traditional stories are exempted from domestic chores. *Submission* is interesting because it deals with an out-of-character domineering and insubordinate wife,

but the veiled implication is that she misleads her children and comes to a bad end herself because she is not submissive.

The woman as an agent of socialisation is also stressed. Mothers have a great impact on their child. It is the grandfather and the mother who teaches their children the norms of the society through folk tales, stories, and riddles (*Savoroide*, *Agogo Eewo*), and grandfather also teaches by storytelling (*Ukwa*). Lapite's wife advises her daughter to face her studies and beware of palace intrigues. Ukwa's Peter-Pannish ways are also indirectly blamed on the permissiveness of his mother and not on the father's weakness in controlling his son. The traditional stories more consciously depict the family as an agent of socialisation. Families are closer and establish the rule of authority. The eldest male, grandfather, father, husband, dominates everyone else; and if he is a king, even more so because traditional ideology supports it. The patriarch allocates tasks, settles disputes and takes other important decisions affecting the family. So, grandfather decides that Aguiyi take his brother Ukwa to Lagos never mind that Ukwa a grown man who does not want to go. In the absence of the grandfather, in Lagos, the older brother becomes the patriarch and also can force Ukwa to go to the prophet with him and even attend church against his will. The family provides for sexual regulation, so Otun's wife and Aguiyi's wife go to their husband's brothers in order to keep their status within the family. The family also provides for socialisation, economic cooperation and emotional security.

### ***Gender Roles in Production and Power Structures***

That women work either in the private or public, formal or informal sectors, is clearly depicted in all of the films here presented. In the films in English, for example *Power of Love Parts 1 and 2*, Juliet, one of the protagonists works, first in her father's business and after marriage to Chris works in the formal sector in a bank where the problems of juggling the demands and home contribute to the ruin of her marriage. She suffers long working hours, insults and sexual harassments from her boss and lack of understanding from her jealous and suspicious husband. Cynthia and Mary are also examples of educated women who hold their own in city life. Women in the city or village could also work as prostitute as in *Submission* or courtesans as in *Kosegbe*. Women in low-income jobs live in tenement buildings, where everyone shares a courtyard. In the Yoruba films, we find Ngozi, a devoted schoolteacher in a village school where sexual harassment from the headmaster is reduced to innocence by her flirtation. With its more traditional setting, women in *Savoroide*, *Agogo Eewo* and *Ti Oluwa N'ile* engage in more private and practical work. They process and cook food, they sell vegetables and food items at the market. They sell clothes from house even to the palace as the woman who attempts to seduce Oba Adebosipo. The titled women Chiefs, the Iyalode and Iyaloja trade and are paid gratification along with the other Chiefs.

We see a successful businesswoman in *Ti Oluwa N'ile* but we do not know what particular business she is in, but she is well connected and influential. *Agony of a mother* presents the rural widow in subsistence farming and poverty. Poverty makes her subservient and humiliated. She has no voice.

In the social power structure, women are not very evident. Not as bank workers, prostitutes, members of the police force, market women, farmers, processors and producers of food are they empowered. Nor do they have a voice. It is only in *Submission* that the matriarch attempts to manipulate everyone and she is depicted as an unsympathetic figure. Only as traditional Chiefs do the Iyalode and Iyaloja and Akewe belong in the traditional power structure as members of the royal court in their own right. They are involved in the making of policy and sharing of resources, which is what power is all about. In return they are respected and recognised and can step outside the normal social constraints of women.

### **Beliefs**

Belief is arguably the single most important issue in indigenous films in Nigeria. It is a huge bone of contention in the determination of quality in indigenous films in Nigeria. Belief is a cognitive system or a system of perception shared by members of a group. It provides understanding, explanations, and meaning to the eternal 'whys' of life. It gives a cohesive view of the world and serves to integrate the various parts of the culture. Its major elements are cosmology, values, myth and ritual.

#### *Cosmology*

All indigenous home video films in Nigeria reflect a culturally given belief system and it is this belief system that makes the films peculiarly Nigerian. The belief system of a culture forms a mirror by which people visualise the nature of the world and of the powers that govern it, man's reality and the process of creation as reflections of a single reality. Belief can be divided into different areas such as religion, ideology, science and magic. All of them have elements of cosmology, values, myth and ritual. These elements explain the nature of the world, its history, man's place in it and they express values and guide behaviour. To further clarify the use of the following terms: religion consists of beliefs dealing with the supernatural; ideology, with a non-supernatural explanation of the nature of society, magic with man's ability to control aspects of the supernatural and science, with empirical understanding of reality. We shall examine these various aspects of belief in the films at hand.

Three films, *Savoroide*, *Agogo Eewo* and *Ti Oluwa N'ile* situated in Yoruba culture explore and integrate various aspects of Yoruba belief very aesthetically, educatively and successfully. *Savoroide* and its sequel *Agogo Eewo* demonstrate great

fidelity to traditional Yoruba culture. The plot is based on a Yoruba community with deep roots in the past, in the origin of history and religion. There is a cosmology, a world-view inculcating a theory of the universe, its different parts and the beings that populate it. There is heaven and earth; a spiritual world of ancestors, spirit beings, deities, ghosts and an earthly world of people. These two worlds are interconnected. Thus in *Jogbo*, there is the pact between heaven and earth. The will of God, Olodumare, and of the deity Orunmila is communicated through Ifa the channel of divination by his priests, the *Amawo*. The spirit world is constantly watching and guarding and guiding the earthly world through the medium of the Ifa oracle. All is well when earth follows faithfully, but there is disaster when it does not. There is reparation when earth confesses, it is cleansed, and then restored. *Ti Olumwa Ni ile* depicts ancestral land as the land belonging to deities (*ile orisa*) separated (sacred) to spirits departed, ancestors and deities. This land should be considered sacred, holy, but greedy citizens decide to sell it off to make room for a petrol station. Those who engaged in this activity lose their lives one after the other.

In every cosmology there is an evaluation of the elements composing the universe, that is a set beliefs and feelings regarding what is good and what is bad, what is desirable and what is undesirable. These beliefs known as values help to mould behaviour and thought. Values in the kingdom of *Jogbo* are handed down from the cosmology. In the pact between the ancestors and the community, service is the value preached. It said 'if you love life you do not aspire to be the king of *Jogbo*. Onijogbo serves the people, not the people serving Onijogbo. Onijogbo cannot seek affluence like modern day kings because of deep secrets. If the king wants to be affluent, he should not be incised or swear oaths'. In other words, the peace and prosperity of *Jogbo* should be of primary importance to any Onijogbo who should be selfless, moral, a role model to his people. Spiritual endeavours or growth should be more positively valued than material things.

*Saworoide and Agogo Eewo* are replete with values, communicated in maxims, folksongs, riddles, incantations, allegory, myth, legends folktales. In the two films there is a Yoruba chorus who like the Greek chorus comment chorally on the action, the prologue and the epilogue. The verse or songs are full of values. Of *Jogbo*, he chants

Jogbo, bitter as bitter kola  
 Dangerous as the Oro Cult  
 With two eyes you can cope at the riverside  
 With two eyes can survive Kaduna  
 But you need two eyes to survive in *Jogbo*  
 With two months you get by in Lagos  
 But you need 18 months to survive in *Jogbo*

With two hands you can handle Ekiti  
 With two hands you can handle Egba  
 But you need 24 hands to manipulate Jogbo  
 Jogbo, bitter as bitter Kola.

(From *Agogo Eewo*).

Jogbo, here is an allegory of Nigeria: Nigeria, difficult to handle, to please, to serve: as all Nigerians, if not the world, know.

Earth and Heaven killed a rat,  
 Quarreled over seniority,  
 But earth took the rat away.  
 Heaven protested, retreating to the skies,  
 So, rain refused to fall,  
 Plants sprouted and dried up,  
 Maidens suffered stunted growth,  
 Take note of my song,  
 It is a proverbial song,  
 You form your various parties,  
 Promising to reform Jugbo,  
 But your parties embezzle funds,  
 You become partial,  
 You indulge yourselves and forget the masses,  
 Let's be watchful,  
 We shall be vigilant.

(From *Agogo Eewo*).

#### *Myth and Legend*

People do not learn their cosmology and values passively. They absorb a theory of reality and values in active daily life. They learn them in part from the stories and legends that explain the world and its history. Anthropologists call these stories myths. Heroes embody the culture's virtues and villains embody its vices, and the stories are filled with fabulous events. Myths and legends provide the specifics about the origin of the world, where man came from and how society got to be the way it is. So in *Agogo Eewo*, the Narrator and chorus tells us about ancestral Jogbo kings, to illustrate how things should be or not be.

The reign of Abiodun was noted for hard work  
 Abiodun's reign was a period of prosperity

Aole's reign was full of trouble  
 Arogangan's reign was a time of pestilence  
 The king passed on, leaving behind the pestilence  
 Abiodun, please come back for another term.  
 (From *Agogo Eewo*)

#### *Rituals*

And finally, we come to rituals. It is a term so badly misunderstood and sometimes used out of context in films that the Censors' Board has a field day mis-ranking any and everything it considers 'rituals'.

Belief systems are more than values, folktale and cosmology. There are also a system of rituals and symbols to which the believer responds profoundly. As Geertz (1965) puts it, a person does not hold such beliefs but instead is held by the beliefs. Ritual symbolically recreates incidents and value of the belief system often in a dramatic form. Thus the deity consultant (Amawo) consults the oracle the deity of divination, Ifa in a ritual. He acts, but he acts in a special, predetermined stylised way. He says incantations, words laden with spiritual power to the spirits in the spirit world to make them react. He makes use of objects, the *opele* (Ifa Beads) on the divination board. These objects embody his concept of the universe and replicate the tenets of these beliefs. Ifa consultations are found in *Savoroide*, *Agogo Eewo* and *Ti Olunwa N'ile* representing serious aspects of belief, cosmology and values. For example in an incantation before oath taking:

Those who get such by the use of force  
 Don't last a year  
 those who acquire instant wealth like soldiers  
 Don't last a day  
 The patient ones are still alive  
 Enjoying a life of bliss  
 A day of retribution is a hand  
 If a youngster violates taboo and gets away  
 Eventually he will face the law of retribution.

#### *Magic, Witchcraft, and Sorcery*

Magic, witchcraft, and sorcery are related but somewhat different types of belief systems. Classifying them separately is somewhat arbitrary because they constitute part of a common cosmology. Like religion, magic, witchcraft and sorcery are concerned with the supernatural. They convey methods of compelling the supernatural rather than imploring it. If religion is the emotional and philosophical aspect of the supernatural world, magic is the engineering. The magician seeks practical results. He knows the formula or ritual that will force the desired out-

come. Supplicants use the services of a practitioner of magic to solve specific problems in return for a fee. The goal is concrete, specific and usually devoid of moral or ethical meaning. So in *Ukwa*, Aguiyi goes to the false prophet-futurologist who is actually an unbelieving magician. This man for a fee gives his clients a magic stick for protection and prosperity. When the 'prophet' is lynched, the magic wand fails to work to save Aguiyi from his vengeful former tenant.

Sorcery on the other hand is where powers we used to cause illness or bring bad fortune. Sorcery incorporates the knowledge of formulas, medicines spells. Thus in *Thunderbolt Magun*, jealous Yinka laces his wife Ngozi with *magun*, a sorcery concoction which among other ill effect may result in the adulteress, unknown to herself, causing her lover to die in various ways.

from constant coughing (*magun elegbe*)  
somersaulting (*magun olokiti*)  
being in a state of extreme languor (*olorere*)  
crowing like a cock before dying (*alakuko*)  
(Abraham 1958:259)

In *Submission*, Lebechi goes for a sorcerer's vial to eliminate Azuka's husband but she does not meet the condition that the contents of the vial may not be spilled. In a fright from being caught in the process of wanting to poison the meal at the table, she slips, drops the vial, and becomes insane from contact with the contents of the vial. *Okada man* is instructed not to eat before using his portion in his magical duel with Ade but he eats and the portion does not work. In *Power of Love*, Sandra's mother with a view to killing her slowly uses Juliet's personal effects to cast a spell of barrenness on her. Ade is a male witch in *Okada Man* who has inherent psychic powers that permit him to do evil. Unlike the sorcerer who has props and concoctions, the witch uses nothing besides willing his evil and saying some powerful words. Feared, despised and rejected, Ade can be intent on harming others who despise and reject him. So calling on his mothers, the witches, he becomes the neighbourhood terror.

### Conclusion

Of the twelve best selling indigenous films, three Yoruba films *Sawoode*, *Agogo Eewo* and *Ti Olunwa N'ile* are quite good. The last two are really good because they are carefully crafted, beautifully filmed, true to the culture they represent and are educative and entertaining. So giving *Agogo Eewo* a rating of 18 NTBB meaning Not to be Broadcast by the Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board on the grounds of rituals and violence and seduction is grossly ignorant on the part of the Censors. And there is a raging contest going on even as I write [2002]. *Ti Olunwa N'ile* could do with some editing of its slow sections. It really does not

deserve to be in three parts. The story line is too thin. But nevertheless is a good try. *Kosegbe* is a good little morality tale. *Magun* start well but loses focus and does not treat its subject well. Is there really Magun? The ending is muddled.

As regards the English films, they are rather shallow, with thin plots and poor directing. They bear out the observation that most of these films are made for quick money by people who are basically traders and who lack knowledge, skill and training in film-making. *Ukwa* and *Okada Man* are the two that have prospects as comedic genres. They are really the stuff of stand-up comics and it is instructive that the main character in the two is the same comedic actor. *Stupid* is really stupid, pointless and not funny, but it is a very popular film. *Agony of a Mother's* treatment of widowhood is ruined by the insertion of magical charms. It could have stood out on its own.

It is a wonderful thing that in the age of overwhelming globalisation from American culture through the media, most Nigerians want to watch films in which they see themselves and to which they can relate. There is a market for Nigerian films from here to Cameroon or Senegal. But the knock offs and the glutting of the market with poorly produced films must stop.

Gender and culture are not well treated in most films indigenously produced. Admittedly, the films do not set out to be anthropological or sociological. They set out to inform, educate, and entertain. They fail for the most part to do any of these three. They fail to provide a balanced view of Nigerian society on which they are based. The society as a homogenous integrative whole is totally unbalanced. The plots are pointless and disjointed. It is very difficult to appreciate gender roles in the films because they are not true to what obtains, and where they begin well, they are not fully developed. So, they are unbelievable and unrealistic. Serious themes are shoddily presented. Religiosity is at once ridiculed but at the same time implied to work and be effective. Magic, witchcraft and sorcery are thrown in gratuitously in over 90 percent of the films even when they do not move the plot forward or add anything to the film. Comedic levels or spoofs are crude, noisy and boisterous. All in all, most of the films become a parody of the society. Sensationalism is the order of the day, lurid topics, witchcraft, rituals out of context, cultism, murder and mayhem make it seem as if Nigerians are a superstitious, murderous, criminal lot.

It is perhaps encouraging that producers, directors, actors and marketers have recently agreed to the Resolutions of the 43rd Art Stampede by the Committee for Relevant Arts (CORA). These Resolutions urge the following:

- That Nigerian movie practitioners need to be caring in their approach to their trade.
- That they should iron out their differences, constant conflicts and bickering.

- That there should be a film practitioners' council to prevent the activities of quacks and characters who have *invaded the industries*
- That they should desist from making negative statements about the sector
- Practitioners should take advantage of the services of training facilities available such as Nigerian Film Institute etc.
- Those in the industry should ensure that the contents of films are sufficiently sensitive to avoid themes and materials capable of projecting wrong impressions about the culture and people of Nigeria.  
(*Guardian*, Thursday, July 11, 2002).

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