

Contemporary Yorùbá Home Video Films As Custodians Of Yorùbá Cultural Traditional Beliefs: A Case Study of *Balòkun*

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Abstract

Literature is generally, a reflection of the human society. It examines the realistic picture of the human life thus, it is being referred to as "The mirror of the society." Therefore, this translates that if one desires to get acquainted with the norms, beliefs, history and, the cultural values of a society, her literature would be her best source. In this context, the Yorùbá home video film as an integral, important part of literature is our focus. The paper posits that despite the general observation that TODAY; in this contemporary modern time, the Yorùbá home video seems to have almost lost its value (which is not unrelated to the producers' craze for profit maximization which makes them churn out films indiscriminately) but that, we still have some that are worth their salt. One of such is BALÒKUN whose central theme revolves around the projection, validation and the expiation of the Yorùbá cultural belief on the existence of the concept ÒKÒ ÒRUN. And this, is the focal point of this paper. To allow for a robust analysis, sociology of literature is adopted as our theoretical framework. The paper thereafter concludes that in this era, there are still some Yorùbá home video films which have not fully caught 'the craze for modernity' bug. They have not lost their salt and relevance as they still help in not only projecting but also, establishing the existence thus, the authenticity of some of our Yorùbá cultural traditional beliefs.

Keywords: Yorùbá home video. Yorùbá culture, sociology of literature

INTRODUCTION

The inception of film in Nigeria dates back to 1903 when the first film was exhibited, (Akíntúndé, 2012, p.1). Later, the practitioners of the popular Yorùbá traveling theatre transformed it into an independent, commercially viable as well as a cultural propagation medium. During the post-independence era, the Yorùbá traveling theatre groups built a tradition of entertainment that is deeply rooted in people's culture and contemporary experience while at the same time "exploring Yorùbá cosmology with its inextricable connections between the living, the dead the unborn, the human, the super human and the sub-human" (Akíntúndé, 2012, p.2)

However, by late 1970s, Hubert Ogunde came up with his filmed episodes

thereby, adding a new medium. In quick successions came four full length feature film by him. These are: *Aiyé* (1979), *Jáyésinmi* (1980), *Àròpin N Tènìyàn* (1982) and *Àyànmó* (1988) all on celluloid. Other celluloid films such as Qlá Balógun's *Àjàní Ògún* (1976), Adé Afóláyan's *Ìjà Òmìnira* (1979); *Kádàrà* (1979), *Ìjà Orogún* (1982), *Taxi Driver 1 & 2* (1983) and *Èhin Òkú* (1987) (Akíntúndé, 2012, p.2).

It was in the 1980s when the cinema, stage drama as well as the television soap opera media were facing challenges due to the economic downtown that the video film started. Many producers, TV stations (whose soap operas have disappeared from the screen due to lack of sponsorship) took the video cassette market as an alternative. Historically speaking, however, in 1988, Ìṣṣòlá Ògúnṣòlá produced a film version of his Yorùbá stage play "*Àjé Ni Ìyá Mì.*" This therefore, marked the beginning of Yorùbá video film in Nigeria.

Over the years now, thousands of Yorùbá, video films have been produced and still continue to be churned out on daily basis. Some of its depictions usually include the fantastic, the mysterious and the outlandish. At times too, it brings to the fore, the Yorùbá folkloric element, traditional politics/structure, indigenous beliefs and while at the same time, preserving Yorùbá people's history and culture (Akíntúndé, 2012, p.3). The people's culture (although, sometimes mixed with other people's culture) are also richly depicted therein. It is a rich source of entertainment for people generally irrespective of the class generation, gender, religion and so on.

According to Macgowan in Adu (2019, p.1) films are useful when we want to reach out to a broad segment of the population on interests bothering on social, political, historical and cultural aspects. Cinema itself according to her, is now a modern tool of visual intervention in areas such as politics, culture and international relations.

Literature is the mirror of the society. This translates that if one wants to get acquainted, with the cultural beliefs, politics, economy, religion, sociology, fashion, cuisine, art and craft of a society, then, her literature should be consulted. No wonder, Johnson in Adagbada (2015, p.44) asserts that:

Without doubt, film is the most effective medium for the promotion, propagation and even, the preservation of culture. Many cultures of the world have used its potentials to their advantage.

Therefore, the study is in line with Adágbádá submission that although, most Yorùbá home video films are fraught with series of deficiencies but that, there are still some that are worth their salt considering their efforts on the projection, and preservation of Yorùbá culture and to some extent, her beliefs. Such include:

- Those protesting against all kinds of political ills e.g. “Şaworo Ide,” “Agogo Èèwò,” “Àkòbí Gómìnà” and “Owó Òkúta.”
- Those sentitizing the public on their civic duties and human rights e.g. “Èkùn Ọkọ Òkè,” “Èjì Ogbè,” and “Alága Káúnsù.”
- Those promoting our cultural values and beliefs e.g. “Aké,” “Orí Ò jorì,” “Owó Ifá,” “Òpá Agẹmo,” “Ìbínú Olúkòso” and “Egbògi Olóró.”

She however, does not fail to categorise also, those that are in one way or the other deficient especially, culturally. Such include: “*Ohun tó Wùnmí*,” “*Alága Opó*,” “*Òkò Ojà*,” “*Ìbínú Ọrunmilá*,” “*Lárinlọ̀dù*,” “*Bàbá Jayéjayé*,” “*Ìbínú Ọkàn*,” “*Ta ló Lèbì*,” “*Àşírí Ìyá Èkó*,” “*Omijé Ayò*,” etc (Adágbádá, 2015, p.45-49).

The film *Balòkun* under the focal point here, is a latest Yorùbá home video film released in the year 2021. The film, setting her traditional belief with modernity, projects and establishes the fact that indeed, there exists the concept ‘*Ọkọ Ọrun*’ (Spirit husband) as believed by the Yorùbá people. This, is what the paper intends to bring to the fore and analyse thereby proving that although, a large chunk of the home videos produces today lack substance but that, there are still some that are worth their salt.

To allow for a robust analysis, the sociological theory of literature has been adopted as our theoretical framework. Our theoretical preference is based on the fact that sociology of literature believes that art is an uncompromising, reliable chronicle of human experience within the society. It examines the cultural, economic and context in which it is produced, (Adams, 2020, p. 37).

Theoretical Framework: Sociology of Literature

The theoretical framework adopted for this study is the sociology of literature. Sociology itself is a field that is concerned with the people’s customs, habits, organisation, institutions and points of view, (Fọlọrunşó, 1999, n:p). It analyses the economic, political, cultural, artistic, aesthetic, geographical and scientific impact of the society on man and his life. It seeks to answer the question of how society is possible, how it works and why it persists.

Literature on its own revolves around people’s opinions, their knowledge and understandings. It is the expression or reproduction of human life. It raises some questions with regards to the culture of a people, their customs, standards, styles, symbols and myths. It is used to expose, criticize, change and modify the experiences of the people where it evolved, (Fọlọrunşó, 1999, p.38). Expatiating further, Adams (2020, p. 33) asserts that literature discusses life by reflecting and or, refracting what may happen or what might (have) happen(ed) or what actually happened or, is happening now. It is the experience (whether

directly or indirectly) of a literary artist that is reflected in his works as he cannot reflect beyond his experience. Literature differs from one society to another because individual society has its own unique characteristics, structures, cultural beliefs, values, ideas and problems. It examines the realistic picture of human life thus, it is referred to as “The mirror of the society.”

Literature and Sociology are both about people and their experiences. Sociology of literature is thus, the study of the society in a scientific way. Sociology of literature believes that art should be an uncompromising, reliable chronicle of human experience within the society. It examines the cultural, economic and the political context in which it is produced, (Adams, 2020, p. 37).

Adéyemí (2006, p. 24) opines that sociology of literature is mostly concerned with human life and existence within the society, his beliefs, culture, behavioural tendencies and his language. It also revolves around the socialization process and cultural education, (Adéyemí, 2006, p. 24). It is a specialized area of literary study which explains the relationship between a literary work and the social structure in which it is created, (Adams, 2019, p. 4). In addition, it studies the relationship between literature (a work of art) and the society. This is so in as much as a work of art cannot exist in isolation thus, literature and the society cannot be separated. The producer of a work of art is a member of the society; he is born and lives there. All his experiences are garnered from the society. Therefore, he cannot write beyond his experience.

The Yorùbá Concept of *Ọkọ Ọrun*

The Yorùbá are the people of Southwestern part of Nigeria. They are also found in countries like Benin, Togo, Brazil, Cuba, and Sierra Leone. The Yorùbá concept of Spirit husband popularly referred to as '*Ọkọ Ọrun*' is one of the challenges facing some Yorùbá women. Just as it is believed that, *Ọkọ-Ọrun* exists, so also it is believed that Aya Ọrun equally exists although not as predominant as that of *Ọkọ-Ọrun* (Shaykh, 2015, p. 93). The victims of '*Ọkọ-Ọrun*' are mostly faced with challenges such as, inability to get suitors, deaths of prospective husbands and barrenness.

It is a belief mostly shared by the traditional Yorùbá people. The belief is usually centered around the possibility of a woman who is originally, a spirit, married to a spirit husband and most times, having spirit children born to the spirit husband in the spirit world. Later, due to one reason or the other, the spirit woman now decides to come unto the human world by being born as a newly born baby. Eventually when the “baby” grows into a full grown woman and then decides to go into love relationships or marriage, then, problems ensue from the end of the spirit husband. This is due to the belief that though, the woman

now has a physical form but that both she and her spirit husband are still spirits belonging to the same spiritual cult in the spiritual world.

It is believed that most times, the woman victim is only allowed into the human world by the cult leader or the spirit husband due to several appeals she must have made. Even at that, the permission is subjected to some conditions such as the husband having the freedom to visit her at will, her having to remain single that is, not having human husband/lovers and, no children. However, as a result of the regular love making with her spirit husband in her dream in the spirit realm, she may get pregnant and bear children spiritually, (Shaykh, 2015, p. 94). Such visits by the spirit husbands are made in the dead of the night when the woman is fast asleep. That is why on such occasions, the woman will wake up tired, spent and wet underneath sometimes. The spirit husband might be seen by the woman in a dream or trance. Rarely, however, the spirit husband can transform and appear to the woman victim physically in wakeful state. In whichever form of appearances or in all the visits, the spirit husbands comes with the same form of appearance or figure.

As a result of the sex in sleep, the woman may get pregnant in the dream and at the same time, see herself manifesting pregnancy symptoms physically. Though, throughout the period, she may not be visibly pregnant. Subsequently, therefore she may see herself breastfeeding a baby in her dream. Hence, this makes her chances of having children in the physical realm very slim.

Some 'benefits' or 'privileges' for the woman victim include enjoyment of regular lavish gifts from the spirit husband, sexual satisfaction, maximum protection and the likes,. Thus, some of these women sometimes, do not see the need for human husbands. However, parts of the challenges the woman victim faces include: difficulty in getting suitors, deaths of suitors/husbands, inability to get married at all or (finding it hard to) not having a stable marriage/relationship, miscarriages or even, barrenness.

Summarily, the degree of disturbance or havoc caused by the spirit husband is usually dependent on the type of covenant entered into by the woman victim and her spirit husband. If the sworn allegiance to the spirit husband is total then, she would not be able to contract any earthly marriage as the spirit husband would do everything possible to frustrate her efforts to get married. However, if it is partial, and the spirit husband is appeased, then she may be allowed to have romantic relationship or marriage, eventually.

At times, the woman victim may get delivered from her spiritual husband but the Yorùbá people believe that this is usually, a difficult or even, an impossible task. This is because, it is traditionally believed that the spirit husband is the rightful owner while the woman victim who is not keeping her ends of the bargain, is the traitor.

Moreover most spirit husbands are the jealous type and so, do not part with their spirit wives easily. Furthermore, since total deliverance amounts to not only losing the woman victim as a wife but also, as a cult member, therefore they all fight tooth and nail to retain her.

Traditionally, according to (Shaykh, 2015, p. 96), it is the Yorùbá exorcists popularly known as ‘Babaláwo’ or ‘Oníṣègùn’ and in some cases a traditional priest/priestess who leads the appeasement process. The process sometimes involves appeasement through offering which the Yorùbá people call ‘*erù egbé*’. The content may include: clothes, comb, powder, earrings, necklace, waistband, fruits, doll baby and all other materials which they think might be ‘appealing’. If the offering is accepted, then, the disturbance by the spirit husband may reduce. If not, her sufferings may continue. However, even if the offering is accepted, it may not mean that she has been totally delivered because, after sometime of relief, the spirit husband and other cult members may stage a come-back.

The manifestation of the ‘Òkò Òrun’ Concept in the Yorùbá Home Video *Balòkun*.

The home video *Balòkun* has its theme revolving around the existence of ‘Òkò Òrun’, ‘Spirit husband’ as believed by the Yorùbá people. The film tries to project, establish, and revalidate the Yorùbá belief that though the world may seem contemporaneous and modern now but that, there still exist some powers-that-be in the meta-physical world which have to be reckoned with. These powers defeat science, thus, are mysterious and can’t be explained.

The setting of the film is modern therefore, making the thematic idea somewhat ‘ridiculous’ thus, difficult to explain and be accepted. So, it is not surprising when the chief consultant psychologist (Peter Fátómilólá) in amazement, ends the film uttering these words:

...How can we establish the fact that, there is an African God who can kill a groom on his wedding day? It is unbelievable! And if it is true, then, we still have a lot to learn from this dark African continent called Africa! (*Balòkun*, 2021)

The plot of the film revolves around a wealthy politician and his daughter Mórinsólá who is a spirit wife to a spirit husband; Balòkun; a powerful Yorùbá god. Initially, Mórinsólá is ignorant of this fact despite all the tell-tale signs. However, she later by chance, (through her father’s driver Lòbìtò) gets to meet with Ìyá Michael, a traditional Yorùbá Priestess. Upon sighting her, Ìyá Michael gaps in surprise and awe. She courtesies, and exclaims paying obeisance thus:

‘Ha, Qta o! Omi! Omi! Efun o! Kááábìèsí!’ (Wow! Your majesty! Water! Water! White chalk! Long may you reign!

She then drops the bombshell in exclamation: “Ha! Ha! Aya Baba re ! Aya Balòkun re e oooo!” (Wow! Wow! Behold the Queen! Behold Balòkun’s wife)

Mouth agape and bewildered, Lòbító and Mórìnsólá look on confused. Seeing these expressions on their faces makes Ìyá Michael to expatiate further that Mórìnsólá is actually a spirit Queen married to a powerful Yorùbá water god, Balòkun. She later challenges Mórìnsólá to deny that she has not been seeing any tell-tale signs which corroborate her claim. But the latter stubbornly, denies the priestess assertion and proceeds to leave in annoyance. However, as she makes to leave, the priestess issues her a stern warning:

Bí ò bá šètùtù kó tu ojú è, kó tù ú lójú, gbogbo ẹnikẹni tó bá ẹnu kọ ọ, hmmm, òkú lẹlẹja ún tá á o! Oko rẹ òjòwú ni o, kò ní wòran kẹlòmìrán máa ẹe iyàwó rẹ bášubàşu o. Bí ẹ bá fẹran rẹ ẹ tètè sọ fún un o!

(If you do not offer huge sacrifice to appease the god, to placate him, hmmm. It will result into series of deaths. Her husband is the jealous type, he will not sit down with folded arms and watch another man woos/makes love to his wife).

This is to corroborate Shaykh’s (2015, 98) assertion that ‘spirit husbands’ are usually very powerful spiritually and, quite jealous too. And that, before a woman victim can be allowed to get married/ go into love relationships/get intimate with a man, she has to offer huge offerings to appease the spirit husband.

Meanwhile, as expected when Mórìnsólá’s father hears the incident, he raises the roof tops. He claims they are Christians and elites who should not be caught believing such ‘craps’. He calls the priestess a sham amongst other unprintable names. However, Mórìnsólá deep down starts to have some reservations especially as she remembers the frequent scenes in her dreams wherein, she has a male visitor who makes love with her. On such previous mornings she always wakes up tired, spent and wet underneath. It then strikes her that these are the tell-tale signs Ìyá Michael tries to remind her of.

Now, scared and convinced of the situation she is in, she tries to convince her father to allow her do the priestess, ‘biddings’. Meanwhile, in few weeks to that time, she has her physical wedding planned to be contracted.

After some time with some amount of pressure, her father eventually yields to her request however, with a proviso that he does not want to have any dealing with ‘a priestess in a shrine’. They therefore, seek the help of a prophet for spiritual deliverance. Unfortunately, Balòkun overpowers the prophet during the ‘deliverance’ session and, he runs away! Upon further investigation,

Mòrìnsólá's father discovers that (the prophet) is actually a fraud and this episode further solidifies the formal's belief that the whole story is a sham.

Therefore in his divine wisdom, he sends Mòrìnsólá to a psychiatrist to help 'heal her' of her 'psychological malaise'. Sadly, the psychologist also echoes the father's belief. He said:

In my experience as a psychologist and author of many award winning books and journals to my credit, I have to tell you this: religions, politics and superstitions are the problems of Africa. Over the years, I counseled young ladies like you, I told them to steer clear of African beliefs and ideas... when I sit down to study African ways and beliefs, I laugh. Too many discrepancies, theory they cannot back and messing up ladies like you. Balòkun (2021).

Explaining off the sex in the dream, the all-knowing psychologist argues thus:

Let me tell you, you can have sex in the dream with anyone... that is normal.... We have sex in the dream because of intense activity that is constantly going on in our subconscious mind ... we often have deep urge to do certain things and they manifest in our dreams where our conscience cannot prevent them from happening. Some call it wet dream, or sleep orgasm.... It is just a period when your genitals are hyper sensitive.... So, if you are having a dream that is turning you on, then you orgasm and there is a chance you may not know until you wake up.... It is rubbish to let anybody confuse you that your dreams have influence with demons. These are the illogical nonsense religion teaches in African and that is total crap! Balòkun (2021).

He then proceeds to 'cure' his patient.

It is not until Lááre Àkàndé (Mòrìnsólá's childhood friend and admirer) suddenly dies few hours after professing love to her (Mòrìnsólá) that she suspects there is real trouble. She runs to the priestess in fears who also, confirms her suspicion. In fact, the priestess in addition warns that her fiancé's life is equally in danger. She is asked to bring her father who initially refuses stubbornly to go but later, succumbs to pressure.

The priestess now fully unraveling the mysteries surrounding the whole issue reveals that Mòrìnsólá is by nature, a water spirit being and a queen to a river god who covets the human ways of life. She explains that it is out of love that her spirit husband obliges her to explore the human world with the hope that, she would eventually return to him. However, because he is a jealous god who would not stand the idea of another man making love to his wife, he pays her regular visits and makes love to her hence, her wet dreams. In her opinion,

she believes Balòkun can be placated with offerings to allow Mòrìnsólá have a love relationship successfully. She warns strictly, however that: Balòkun cannot be permanently divorced from his wife so, the appeasement exercise will only serve to allow Mòrìnsólá have a love relationship.

This further corroborates our submissions above as regards the way of operations of spirit-husbands.

Subsequently, the appeasement exercise is carried out and it involves the following process:

- i Several traditional dance episodes with the priestess, her party and Mòrìnsólá all clad in white.
- ii Spiritual bathing of her head at regular interval in between the dance episodes
- iii Eating of concoction prepared for her by the priestess.
- iv The carrying of a 'huge' sacrifice to the river by Mòrìnsólá and the party
- v Making of passionate appeals to Balòkun at the river bank.

After the whole exercise, Ìyá Michael gives them the final and according to her, the most important of all the warnings. She says the wedding must be contracted on a very low key level and must be done at night. This to her, is very necessary as she reiterates that Balòkun cannot be permanently separated from his wife and so, the earthly wedding has to be contracted 'secretly' to avoid stirring up any feeling of jealousy from Balòkun. She warns:

...Mòrìnsólá kò gbọdọ ẹ iyàwó aláriwo pín-in pín-in ní abẹ àsiá bó ti wù kó rí, torí pé kí ni, aya bàbá à mi ni, aya Balòkun ni, aya Qbalòkun ni. Tó bá ẹ é tí Balòkun bá fi lè mò, háà! Omi a máa tura, omi a sì máa ba ǹkan jé. Ìjì á jà. Háà!...

(...under no circumstances should Mòrìnsólá contract an elaborate wedding because she is still the wife of Balòkun, the wife of the river god, the river goddess. If she defaults and Balòkun gets wind of the wedding, what a calamity it would be! You will discover then that as water refreshes, so also does it destroys. There will be calamity... she must not contract this wedding ceremony in broad daylight, it must be done at midnight.)

This is to establish further, Shaykh's (2015, p. 98) claim above that most spirit husbands are the jealous type who do not willingly let go of their spouses just

like that even after, offerings and supplications must have been made and ‘accepted’. So, everything still has to be done with caution.

Expectedly, this does not go well with Mòrìnsólá’s father who is a wealthy politician and a socialite. therefore, he left in annoyance.

Unfortunately, on his way home, he meets with some local town gossips who claim Ìyá Michael is not as powerful as Améfònlóyè (another Yorùbá traditional priest). Their claim coupled with the ‘unfavourable’ condition given to them by Ìyá Michael make Mòrìnsólá’s father opt for Améfònlóyè. Indeed, the latter tried all his best possible and after the long, expensive and highly-challenging deliverance exercise is completed, Améfònlóyè declares the ‘coast clear’. Immediately, Mòrìnsólá’s family swings into action by organizing a huge societal wedding. However, on the day of the wedding while fully dressed up for the occasion, the groom suddenly collapses and dies thus confirming Ìyá Michael’s claims.

The psychologist upon hearing the entire incident eats up his words. He is stunned and bewildered and it is in this state of shock that he concludes the story with the following exclamation as earlier on quoted above that:

In my many years of knowledge, I have learnt a number of things. I have never been left without an explanation but, this is different. There is a scientific report, it came without a mystery; that is science. So, how can one establish the fact that there is an African god that can kill a groom on his wedding day? It is unbelievable! And if it is true, then, we still have a lot to learn from. This dark continent, AFRICA!

Conclusion

This paper dwells on contemporary Yorùbá home video films being custodians of Yorùbá cultural traditional beliefs. It posits that in this ‘modern era’ there are still some Yorùbá home video films which have not fully caught ‘the craze for modernity’ bug. They have not lost their salt and relevance as they still help in not only projecting but also, establishing the existence thus; the anthem to city of some of our Yorùbá cultural traditional beliefs. Such is the case of *BALÒKUN*, a 2021 Yorùbá home video which establishes the authenticity of the enshrined in Yorùbá cultural traditional beliefs.

The film gives a detailed operation of the activities of *ÒKÒ ÒRUN* and plights of their victims. However, it does not fail to suggest ways by which he (*ÒKÒ ÒRUN*) can be placated and their women victims ‘delivered’ to some certain extent.

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