

## Yoruba Filmmakers in Search of a Language

Abiodun A. OLAYIWOLA<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** This treatise explores the attempts of three prominent Yoruba video-filmmakers to deculturize the film genre by situating it within indigenous cultural milieu. It reviews the works of these ‘videographers’ reflecting how they have indigenized the conventional film codes as they thematize events that are significantly peculiar to their culture. The essay concludes that Yoruba video film genre is undergoing series of transformation that may occasion the evolution of a unique cultural idiom for the burgeoning industry.

**Key words:** Film genre; Transformation; Cultural idiom

### INTRODUCTION

Critics of the nascent Nigerian film industry have repeatedly accused the indigenous movie practitioners of inability to deculturize the film language by evolving an indigenous form that reflects African cultural temperaments. For instance, Adeleke (2003:1) observes that the new bunch of filmmakers (often regarded by some critics as ‘videographers’) simply imitate the emotional and sentimental Hollywood films without “acculturation of the film genre in line with African culture, exploration of African cultured resources, and delineation between technology and arts”. Haynes and Okome (1997:34) accuse the Igbo and English language filmmakers of invoking Hollywood as a model, regarding this as “a betrayal of African culture in the face of the neo-colonial invasion of foreign media”.

Admittedly, film in Nigeria is still at the manuscript stage, borrowing a leaf from Ekwuazi (1991). The art is yet to undergo the kind of maturity that African literature went through by indigenizing the western narrative form while expressing African views and passions. In the dramas of Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola and Wale Ogunyemi to mention a few playwrights, the English language had undergone a process of ‘Africanization’ that makes their works uniquely different from western expressions and worldviews. For instance, Ugor and Odoemelam (2001) describing the language of Ben Binebai’s *Beyond Nightmare* assert that “the budding playwright thinks in his native Ijaw dialect and then writes in English”. This could be said of prominent literary writers like Soyinka, Osofisan, Achebe, Ojaide, Ogunyemi and the likes. But the same is not true of Nigerian film, it still exists as an alien art groping to find local expression.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo.  
E-mail: biodunlayiwola@yahoo.ca

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This essay is premised on Ngugi's theory of culture centredness which subscribes that every culture or society must define its own values on its own terms, not on the centre created for it by other cultures or societies (Ngugi 1997). While it is incontrovertible that no society exists exclusively without borrowing from other cultures, lack of effective cultural gate keeping will however deprive such society of its cultural essence, leading to cultural extinction especially at this age of fast paced 'villagization'. Hence, for Nigerian video-film industry to maintain its cultural identity and evolve an indigenous film language, its practitioners need to reject Hollywood formula and source for local images and idioms. We agree with Dosumu (1979:62) that "film itself is a culture - though foreign in its physical presentation - that we must here and now recognize and use it to propagate our indigenous cultural identity". Thus Nigerian filmmakers need to strip film of its western cloak and adorn it with African garb through the process of indigenization.

It is within the above contemplation that this essay undertakes a semiotic exegesis of the works of three prominent Yoruba filmmakers with the intent of examining the attempts made by each of them towards decolonizing the film language to reflect African thoughts and cultural worldviews. The directors of the video texts selected for analysis – Tunde Kelani, Tade Ogidan and Niji Akanni – are not only experienced but also well trained in the art of movie making. Hence, they depart characteristically from the pack of indigenous directors whose works are marked by "trial and error" syndrome.

## **CULTURAL SIGNIFICATION IN TUNDE KELANI'S SAWORO-IDE AND AGOGO EEWO**

The two Yoruba Video films - *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Eewo* – explore a single, continuous story which begins in one and ends in the other. *Saworo Ide* is subtitled as "The Parable of the Drum" which reveals its allegiance to culture with strict bias for the role of Yoruba special drum called "Iya-Ilu" in maintaining social ethos amongst preliterate people. Oscillating between the old and the new, the story employs semiotic elements that situate it within a Yoruba community that is becoming in tandem with modernity while at the same time sustaining traditional values.

*Saworo-Ide* opens with the soothing image of "Iya-Ilu" laced with an array of brass bells described in the course of the narrative as *Saworo-Ide*. The image of the drum which is revealed through a close-shot, coupled with the drum message that attends it negotiates the real essence of the story. It is the story of the pact between an ancient community and the kings that ruled over it. The succeeding images and sound reveal an old man of grand father's age narrating the events that led to the pact and the binding rules surrounding the solemn arrangement. This is interspersed with an array of images of drum parts and other elements brought into the making of *Saworo-Ide*. The pact also requires the making of a brass-crown which is associated with *Saworo Ide* in a twin-like manner. The use of documentary style in a flash back form in this sequence does not only help in collapsing time but also introduces a unique narrative style that is essentially African.

A *babalawo* is consulted after the making of "*Saworo-Ide*" and "*Ade Ide*" to access the mind of the gods regarding the guiding rules for the pact. The use of *babalawo's* wand easily reveals this more than the accompanying spoken words, since the *babalawo* is seen as a representative of the divinities, he reveals truths and explores the spiritual terrain in a bid to help clients. The oracle eventually prescribes a special sacrifice that yokes the two elements - *Saworo-Ide* and *Ade-Ide* together in a spiritual union of symbols. The objects of sacrifice are burnt, to be kept in the "*Ado-Ide*" with which incision will be made for the special palace drummer known as "*Ayangalu*" and the reigning king. A king that refuses this spiritual circumcision stands the risk of death if he wears the brass-crown. After the narration, the old man dies and his passing away is celebrated amidst pomp and pageantry. This also subtly reveals Yoruba belief in 'life after death': that people do not die, they simply pass on to the land of the silent ones or join their ancestors (Abimbola,1986)

The character of the old man in the episode above as the initial narrator conjures some semiotic signification. It is steeped in Yoruba cultural values in which age is construed as synonymous with

wisdom. The aged are considered as repositories of history, wisdom and cultural norms. Hence the character of the old man embroiders the narrative with a tincture of truism. The revelation of this pact by the old man at his dying moment also reveals the enormity and importance of the spiritual agreement. This is in view of the fact that, in Yoruba culture, the passing words of a dying old man is always held sacrosanct. Such words are believed to have been said by a man who mediates the worlds of the living and the dead. Deviance to such injunction is viewed with raw discontent not only by the dead but also by the gods and the entire community since such old man is believed to have translated to an ancestral spirit at his death.

The rest of the film enacts the story of Lapite who is billed to ascend the throne of Jogboland. He sends one of his accolades to find out why all the kings who had previously ruled over the land never prospered financially. He is later informed that the incision and oath taking associated with the kingship preclude the king from financial affluence. Lapite at the coronation ritual thus refuses incision and oath taking, threatens the palace ritualists with a gun and leaves. However, the story takes a new turn when he is later told of the repercussion of his action; he cannot wear Ade-Ide, the brass-crown, which is the symbol of his unrivalled authority and the zenith of his rulership. Daring to wear the crown attracts death if Saworo-Ide is beaten by Ayangalu. It also portends that another man is likely to share the throne with the incumbent king.

To avert the above catalogue of misfortunes, emissaries are sent to murder Adebomi, a rival prince, and to abduct Ayangalu and his mysterious 'Saworo-Ide' drum. Adebomi is murdered along with his wife but the bandits spare his son Adebola, while acting on a hint from one of the king's aides, Ayangalu abdicates the town for a far away jungle.

The kingdom groans under the rule of Lapite who harnesses the land's wealth for himself and his chiefs. Forestry business which is the major source of the kingdom's economy is chiefly controlled by the king and his foreign investors. The youth of the land therefore team up to refute this reign of total misrule. They engage in militant activities that frustrate the business of the forestry workers. This invariably tells on the King's income. This upheaval also coincides with the 15-year anniversary of Lapite's reign. At the height of the anniversary, when the king is to be decorated with the glamorous Ade-Ide, the Youth movement, supported by one of the forestry business icons and the palace chief priest, invade the venue and cart away the Ade-Ide, which according to custom must not leave the palace for more than 21 days or else the king will either be exiled or be requested to commit suicide.

The search for the brass crown brings in Lagata to head the king's special military squad. The Youths are overpowered by Lagata army but trouble rages on. Lagata eventually uses the opportunity to stage a military coup which results in the death of Lapite. But the Youths are never in support of Lagata who appears to be a worse dictator and oppressor. They muster serious efforts, with the support of the chief priest, to locate Ayangalu's new abode, implore him to introduce the spiritual dimension of Saworo Ide in resolving the age-long issue. However, one of the youths by the name Kangudu betrays them by serving as a feeder for the king. Ayangalu is abducted and imprisoned so that the king will be sure that no one will beat the mysterious drum. But providence and the use of magical power resident in Ayangalu lineage's connection with Saworo Ide bring Ayangalu's son who is equally capable of beating the Saworo Ide. The event on Lagata's coronation day takes a bleak turn when Saworo Ide sounds and the self-imposed king, who never fulfills kingship rituals, suffers terrible migraine that eventually terminates his life. The movie, therefore, ends on the note of societal victory over personal aggrandizement and oppressive rule.

The succeeding film, *Agogo Eewo* also opens on a musical note with the footage of a man dancing vigorously to the rhythm of Bata drum ensemble. This significantly expresses the cultural bias of the film, revealing its emphasis on the musical as a factor for forging societal stability. This musico-dance footage serves as the montage on which the opening credits are mounted, thus vigorously highlighting the musical code as instrumental to the entire semiotic configuration of the film. The actual story begins with a shot of three children racing up the stairs leading to the peak of a rocky hill. The next shot reveals a man reciting the praise names of Jogboland as the three children listen with rapt attention. This gives the impression of the man being the narrator of the story, probably to the children. This is followed by the footage showing an old woman, presumably the wife of the first old man, leading the children in a

famous folk song. The feeler here is that the succeeding enactment is a story, like all moonlight or folk tales, meant to teach certain moral lessons.

The story is a continuation of Saworo-Ide. The king makers approach Bosipo in his farm to inform him of being nominated as the next king of Jogboland. He initially refuses but agrees after much pleading, especially when his wife in another scene shares the same notion. However, contrary to the chiefs' expectation, Bosipo is poised to effect positive changes rather than collaborate with them to defraud the kingdom. He invites the forestry workers and warns them of colluding with chiefs or charlatans to impoverish the land to satisfy their inordinate greed. Disenchanted against his new reforms, the chiefs sponsor a rally against the throne. But to their great dismay, rather than speak in their favour, the rioting mob cease the occasion to accuse the chiefs of defrauding them of the money they contributed for food and *aso ebi* (corporate dress) during the king's coronation ceremony. The king promises to inaugurate a high power committee to investigate the allegation and thereafter bring culprits to book. When this ploy by the chiefs did not work, they devise some other means of implicating the king but all to no avail.

When king Bosipo realizes that corruption has become endemic in the majority of his chiefs, he invites the palace priest, Baba Mawo, to inquire if there is any ritual like the one binding the king to Saworo ide that could be used to stem the tide of corruption among the chiefs. The priest responding in affirmation, advises a re-awakening of the ritual of Agogo Eewo (Taboo Gong) which precludes any chief from corrupt practices. Whoever is found wanting, on taking an oath by drinking a special concoction from Agogo Eewo dies except he or she confesses the ill-act. The ritual is re-instituted, though amidst confrontations from the erring chiefs, and the culprits are brought to book.

The first semiotic element employed in the two movies is musico-dance code. The story is woven around musical instruments, revealing the spiritual dimension of drums and musical percussions. While *Saworo-Ide* is built around a special "Iya-Ilu" to clamp down on despotic, corrupt rulers, *Agogo Eewo* is coined around a special gong which is employed to punish evil among the chiefs. The two films, admittedly, explicate rather profoundly the spirituality of musical emblems in the discharge of justice and entrenchment of order. In *Saworo-Ide*, the refrain: "*Aso funfun nii sunkun aro, ejigba ileke nii sunkun ekeji tantantan*" explains the spiritual connectivity between the king and his subjects, preventing him from using his office for personal enrichment at the expense of the people. In this way, musical code is employed not as a social entertainment but spiritual element. In *Agogo Eewo* as well, apart from the Agogo Eewo scenario in which the special gong is used to punish evil among the chiefs, there is a special dream scene in which king Bosipo is told the story of how a masquerade dancer wins a special contest despite all distractions. This sequence, rather than merely provide musical interlude as the case in most Indian films, suggests spiritual solution to the lingering problem. Apparently, it is the dream that makes the king to invite the priest for spiritual advice. The musical code, as made obvious above, is therefore significant to the deploy of the message(s) in the two films. It is practically difficult to imagine a story of such spiritual depth without music and dance because they signify the true essence of African religious observances.

The setting and costuming codes are expressed by the use of set and characterization in such a discreet weave that hinges upon the exploration of Yoruba culture in the wake of modernity. The setting portrays a replication of a traditional society that struggles against the infiltration of the West while at the same time trying to maintain its own. The use of traditional palace, houses as well as interior decors (artifacts, drawings, sculptures) and accessories combined with some elements of westernization such as cars, cushion chairs and tables, modern photographs, television etc helps to signify a town that is not alien to change yet maintaining its cultural essence. The costumes are both traditional and contemporary. The kings, chiefs and some town's people are robed in traditional, sometimes elegant, attires while English dresses are worn by journalists, policemen, some traders and passers-by to signify a semi-urban community. The symbolic undertone of this blend of the old and the new is the need in every society for openness, or some sort of cultural diffusion, while at the same time gate keeping to prevent outright cultural erosion (Owolabi, 1999). That is why, in finding solution to the endemic corruption problem, the story does not seek recourse in the law court or democratic order of the West but in the people's culture. The semiotic import of this is simply that, solution to a people's problem resides primarily in their culture.

The various systems - costume, decor, movement, word, tone, gesture, light etc - coming together, correspond and are foregrounded within the scenes to create the *mis-en-scène*. The lighting shows a tint of realism while costumes, decor and other elements corroborate it. Except in *Agogo Eewo* which features an observed crave towards cultural propagation at the expense of coherence of the filmic discourse, there is a meticulous mix of signifying systems in a way that imposes upon the narratives both denotative and connotative submissions. At the denotative level, the story is that of a town which at the cross roads of modernity fights the scourge of corruption and wanton misrule. But at the connotative plane, as argued by Akinleye (2006), it symbolically captures the different phases and epochs in Nigerian socio political development.

The deploy of both the visual and the linguistic codes in the exploration of the themes is worth stressing. The two movies can be credited to have enjoyed pictorial and linguistic density. The messages are communicated in very rich pictorial codification, mingling the realist with the surrealist as the characters navigate both the terrestrial and celestial planes. The use of the montage at the beginning and at certain points in the narration helps to create a unique richness that places great premium on the picture. For instance, while the old man, presumably the first Onijogbo, commands the convocation of a ritual of Saworo-Ide, the narration attains transcendental and pictorial depth as the story is interspersed with relevant pictures, ensuring a marriage of voice and sound in such a discreet semiosis that appeal to both sight and ear. Nonetheless, the linguistic still enjoys subtle premium in the movies. For instance, there is an opulent display of Yoruba's oratorical expertise in the words of the priest, Ayangalu (the chief drummer) and some chiefs. Their words are laced with proverbs and traditional wits that even the modern Yoruba person brought up in the city may depend on the English subtitles to decode. This is because, in Yoruba traditional society, an elder does not speak in plain language but revels in the use of proverbs and idioms. Hence, it is apt to contend that, in *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Eewo* both the linguistic and the visual codes are mutually conflated in such a dexterous blend that non is accorded any superfluous emphasis.

## **BOJU BOJU: IN SEARCH OF NEW FOLKLORICISM**

Diawara (1988:8) has argued extensively that "The appropriation of popular culture by the fiction film in Africa creates a movement away from Western film language" and establishes an African narrative mode. In an attempt to negotiate a unique style, African filmmakers have favoured a preponderance of popular cultural elements in their bid to localize film language within their cultural enclave. Ekwuazi (1991) however foresees a tendency to lapse into over-indulgence of culture, arguing that most Yoruba folkloric cinema are guilty of over-glorification of the past. The films, beginning with Ogunde's *Aiye* and *Jaiyesimi* are said to over eulogize Yoruba cultural past and celebrate our traditional values and wherefores before the advent of the whites which, as observed in the films, caused things to fall apart. Modernist film critics of African decent are however, of the strong opinion that, for film to perform its cultural and ideological roles within the changing world, African films should be used in addressing the post colonial problems of Africa rather than sheer over-glorification of the past.

It is in the light of the above that *Boju-Boju* appeals to us as a stringent departure from most Yoruba films caught in the web of 'over-glorifying the past'. The film is a detective story that explores the anguish of Teju, a young police detective, who suffers demotion from DSP to ASP status as punishment for allowing a culprit to escape from detention. He is equally posted to a suburban town - Ori Owo - which incidentally is where his parents and fiancée reside. This event coincides with the notorious and gruesome murder of the wife and son of a prominent business tycoon in the land by means of poison. The onus thus falls on Teju to investigate this case and find out the offenders. More importantly, it will absolve him of the previous blackmail.

The story is shrouded in a web of events that make it suspense-filled and precludes the principal culprits from easy discovery. Three suspects appear at the beginning - Iya Ibeji and her friend as well as Peju. Iya Ibeji is portrayed to be in secret love affair with Raji Adedeji, the husband and father of the deceased. A fierce quarrel had once occurred between her and the late Mrs. Adedeji over this issue.

Another person is Peju who qualifies as Bayo's (the deceased son) girl friend but for a fight that broke out between them, making her a prime suspect too. Peju had sworn to deal with Bayo for using her and dumping her for another girl.

The story is also spiced up with two sub-plots, though linked with the main story, to create some diversion and further heighten the suspense. First is the story around Segun Akinlolu who is employed by the township school to tell folktales to school children every evening. A series of scenes reveal his activities and how he attempts to assist Teju in unravelling the mystery surrounding the murder. There is also a love dimension added to the main story in which Teju's fiancée decides to quit the relationship if her fiancé refuses to resign from the police force. This is as a result of the various threats to their lives by those from the wrong side of the law. The quarrel is later resolved at the end of the story.

The film is well conflated with folkloric elements that make it a unique cultural piece. Though revolving around events which are espoused within the modern era, the story enjoys a meticulous blend of the old and the new, the ancient and the modern in a unique web of interconnectedness to provide a distinctive narrative form. The film does not employ the folkloric to elucidate the glamorous culture of African pre-European past but uses it as a means to solving the contemporary problems. From its title, we are introduced to a 'hide and seek' game common among African teenagers which is seen as analogous to the 'cat and mouse' relationship between the police and men of the underworld. This is further enunciated in a scene where Teju and his fiancée, Peju, watch a group of boys perform the 'hide and seek game' (Boju-Boju). Peju's lines in this sequence provides the audience with a vivid comparison.

Apart from the use of folktales, the film also utilizes the musical code. In this case, the songs are more commentative than modal, basically used to pass social comments on the unfolding events. The lyrics are tintured with the tonality of African folk music, employing traditional percussionist elements for its embellishment. The other forms of signifying systems employed -costume, set, light, props and decor- though obviously modern, are a true depiction of Yoruba society in post colonial era in which African cultural patterns are subsumed in the motifs of European modernity. Well furnished sets, delectable cars and glamorous dresses are used to reflect the personalities of Adedeji and Ojuolape, co-business men, as rich and influential persons. The Youths are clad in English dresses- shirt and trousers, skirts and blouses - while the police wear uniform or, sometimes mufti to disguise their identity.

The linguistic code also dominates the codification of the filmic content. The story is primarily expressed through the spoken language while the images assumed secondary role. It is quite apparent that the film will lose its main mode of narration if the audio is turned off in favour of the images. Hence the main import of the story is expressed through the spoken word. The filmmaker seems oblivious of the supremacy of the image over the spoken language in filmic codification. As Luigi pirandello allerts: " one extracts the thought from the image..." (Ekwuazi, 1991:7). The writer of the script (and the director) seems to have thought more in words, rather than in images.

Although they all explore Yoruba folklore, *Boju-Boju* departs significantly from *Saworo-Ide* and *Agogo Eewo* in its ability to adapt well known folkloric elements into a modern play. While the other two films celebrate the uniqueness of African past and therefore use the traditional to elucidate the modern, *Boju Boju* maintains a perfect fusion of the old and the new. It explores a modern narrative through the cultural eye of the traditional story-telling. Again, *Boju-Boju* does not overstress the need to explore African culture at the expense of good narratology as observed in *Agogo Eewo*. The need to artistically explicate some adored cultural values of the Yoruba is well expressed in *Agogo Eewo* so much that the scenes devoted to this purpose stand out in the movie like a sore-toe. The filmmaker did not blend them with the rest of the story. Hence, we are presented with a mish-mash or a port-pouri of events that are not logically linked.

The use of the cartoon to illustrate the tortoise story narrated by Segun Akinlolu, the musician, shows the filmmaker's ability to transform the traditional Hollywood film codes and localize them within Yoruba culture. The cartoon sequence ably invokes the African image of the tortoise as he cunningly exploits other animals for his gains and eventual peril. The folktale used also emphasizes the didactic bent of African story telling, since in Africa, art is generally functional rather than merely entertaining.

In a sense, *Boju-Boju* infuses a new trend into Yoruba folkloric cinema. Rather than over-celebrate our cultural past, it uses the past to enunciate the present. It explores a post-colonial subject within the matrix of culture, creating a decolonized mode of telling a contemporary story while at the same time defining its cultural source. Apart from its over dependence on the linguistic code which may make the film un-intelligible to those outside its linguistic frame, *Boju-Boju* provides us a new and unique form of Yoruba folkloric film that is well aligned with the dynamics of a changing human society.

## **LINGUISTIC EXEMPLIFICATION IN *MADAM DEAREST***

*Madam Dearest* is one of the video films produced and directed by the ace filmmaker, Tade Ogidan. The fact that Tade Ogidan received formal training in filmmaking in the U.S and is noted for quality technical production qualifies him as an icon in the Nigerian film industry. His debut movie, *Hostages* brought the radical limp of Nigerian video films to the high pedestal of quality and serious movie-making. Having won a number of movie awards, Ogidan is no doubt one of the rare professionals Nigerian movie industry celebrates. However, a semiotic reading of one of his films portrays his vexed interest in the linguistic code as the primary means of story-telling. *Madam Dearest* narrates the striking and emotional ordeals of Bukola and Biodun, an unfortunate couple that remains childless after eight years of wedlock. To avert this marital woe, Bukola consults herbal medicine men to support orthodox medicine which they had consistently used to no avail. But Biodun condemns their use of native medicine and orders his wife to throw the lot away.

Biodun is portrayed in the film as a harmless but hot tempered person who only barks but does not bite. He has a minor quarrel with his mechanic and threatens vainly to kill him for refusing to repair his car on time. On a particular night, he agrees to help a dying man who suffers injury from a 'hit and run' vehicle by taking him to the hospital. The man eventually dies as a result of the hospital officials' refusal to treat him unless N25,000 deposit is made coupled with a police report. Coincidentally, the dead man turns out to be Sule, the mechanic he threatened to kill. Biodun is finally arraigned in court for murder, reckless driving and drunkenness. He is found guilty of the offences and sentenced to 85 years imprisonment. But luck works in his favour, his former school mate is the head of the prison where he is kept. He is kindly treated by the warders and allowed to relate with his wife even sexually, regularly. However, a change of prison head creates the unexpected gap between him and Bukola, his wife, who is under serious family pressure to remarry and bear children.

The pressure on Bukola later escalates as her family members and her only friend, Seyi, impresses on her to at least bear a child through whatever means. Her elderly mother becomes seriously ill, constantly praying her to provide her a grand-child. The spiritual dimension is introduced into the story through the characters of a pastor and a lunatic-prophet who inform her that she will bear a child by means of another man, someone living on her. This person is later interpreted by her friend, Seyi, to be Daniel, her Ghanaian house boy. Machinery is set in motion, against Bukola's will though, by Seyi and Bukola's mother to woo Daniel. The relationship eventually results in the birth of a child, Kofi Junior and a supposed marriage between Daniel and Bukola, since Biodun is unlikely to return.

The story however takes a dramatic turn when Biodun appears out of the blues three years into his jail term, claiming to have been granted amnesty after the real offender has confessed. This spells doom for Bukola and Daniel. While Bukola is cumbered by the need to cover up the secret, having told her husband that the child is his, Daniel suffers the pains of demotion; his relegation to the former position of house help hits him like thunder bolt. Daniel eventually abducts the child, Opemipo (a name given to him by Biodun), to his friends house but cannot take him to Ghana, his intended destination, for fear of being arrested by policemen who have pasted his photograph and the child's at the nation's borders. He later agrees with his friend, Kwesi, to send the boy to Ghana through Rebecca, Kwesi's wife. Unfortunately, Rebecca's exit with the child coincides with the Nigerian customs raid on the vehicle smugglers and Rebecca is killed in the scuffle between the two warring factions - the custom and the smugglers- but the child is unhurt. The ringleader of the gang of smugglers, Gandolu, moved by pity for the baby adopts him as his child, having married for years without an issue; the child is renamed Dosu

Gandolu. Dosu grows up and secures admission to University of Ghana after his secondary school education. Gandolu's wife had given birth to some other children. He has also married another wife, who also bore him children. But while the first wife is very caring and humane, the other wife is very stubborn and terrible. She hates Dosu with an uncontrollable passion. When Gandolu eventually dies of a cancer-related disease, she confronts Dosu openly with the reality of his true parentage, calling him a bastard. The story thus takes a dramatic turn with Dosu at the centre of events as he seeks his true parentage. At this time, he has been introduced to Daniel through Nene, Kwesi's daughter, who is now Dosu's classmate. He asks Daniel, who has become a minister in Ghana, for a job so as to sustain himself in school. But the latter wonders why his condition suddenly deteriorates to that level since he has once described his father as a highly influential man. This forces Dosu to narrate the events surrounding his birth and his eventual adoption. The story finally confirms Daniel's feeling of a family tie between them, especially, considering the unusual facial resemblance between them. Having known that Dosu is truly his long lost son, Daniel offers him a job in his house but warns the stewards to always prevent him from doing any work.

Concurrently, in Nigeria, both Biodun and Bukola have grown old, yet with no child. Bukola therefore muses over the where about of her son taken away by Daniel. She makes fruitless visitations to him. Biodun has also become suspicious of his wife's strange behaviours. He therefore approaches an intelligence bureau officer to assist him in unravelling the mystery. He later gets to know that it was Daniel, his former house boy, who impregnated his wife, giving birth to a baby he has been calling his. This eventually breaks up the union. At the end, when Bukola goes to answer Daniel's urgent call, she is surprisingly introduced to her son, Dosu, after a tiring recapitulation of the previous events in the story by Daniel. The three of them are eventually re-united amidst tears and joy.

It is indeed a long story spanning about six hours of screen time in two movie - parts. The story, admittedly, explores the significance of children in Yoruba society. According to Adeoye (1986), children are regarded by the Yoruba as marital blessings while the lack of them is considered as a curse. It is not unfounded for a childless couple, or one of them, to attempt such ignoble step treated in the film even in modern Yoruba setting because of the importance attached to child - bearing. However, the film suffers cultural deficiency when, after Biodun has been jailed, his wife seemingly remarries Daniel (because their relationship glides towards that) in the same house. One wonders if the husband has no living relations to have allowed such an anathema to take place. Yoruba, being a typically communal society, is certainly alien to such occurrence. Even in Lagos, with its cosmopolitan setting, neighbours will still frown at it, if his relations are far- flung. We wonder if Tade Ogidan has not imported some typical western idea into a purely Yoruba story.

The interplay of semiotic codes employed in the film - music, images, sets, decor, gesture etc - are indicative of a post - colonial Yoruba society. The film presents to us a similitude of a Nigerian society that has been transformed by the dynamics of western civilization. The scenery is basically a reflection of a typical modern African cosmopolitan setting, featuring an array of modern buildings, contemporary settees and interior decorations. The cars and other props used are such that can be conveniently found in contemporary Nigeria. The movie is indeed a typical reflection of the modern Yoruba society, constantly amenable to global transformations while at the same time maintaining the basic essence of her cultural life. It is not surprising to see the likes of Auntie Seyi, Bukola's mother and Baba Onikoko upholding the utmost importance placed on children by the Yoruba.

However, in the discharge of this cultural belief of the people, the film over - celebrates the linguistic code above other signifying elements as though the Yoruba lack other communicative means other than language. Unlike a viable deploy of the gestural in *Jogunomi* and the pictorial density in *Saworo Ide* and *Agodo Eewo*, the film dwells mainly on the use of the linguistic in communicating the story line. Where the gestural code is utilized, it is often treated as an appendage of the linguistic, rather than assuming a self - dignifying communicative essence as in *Jogunomi*. *Madam Dearest* favours the employ of long, sometimes repetitive speeches, downplays movement which Bare (1979) considers as the chief characteristic of film, from which it derives the name "motion picture". Kracauer (1960) also argues copiously that a good film speaks in images rather than words, emphasizing that when a film over - depends on speech to deploy its messages, the evolving movie becomes stagey or rather "theatrical". In *Madam Dearest*, one is not only bothered by the preponderance of speech but also the length of such



speech - driven scenes like the opening scene, the prison scene and most importantly the court scene. In the latter, Biodun, the defendant, when allowed by the judge to make his defense before final pronouncement, talks repetitiously for nothing less than four minutes of screen time. This is no doubt over stressed in a medium that is chiefly pictorial, especially when the speech does not provide additional information other than what the audience already has. The last scene is also fraught with the same linguistic cliché. We see Daniel in this scene practically narrating the entire film all over again, creating nothing but some sort of boring anti - climax that makes the film to end rather badly.

Conclusively, a semiotic reading of *Madam Dearest* reveals its gross bias for the linguistic, the oral expressive mode rather than the visual on which a truly cinematic film should be premised. The lines are not well structured as we have in *Boju - Boju* or *Agogo Eewo* to allow for the interplay of other communicative codes. The import of this is that the film has limited its viewership, precluding non -Yoruba audience from enjoying the movie without total recourse to the sub-titles. Lessons could be learnt from early Indian films that pungently appeal to us in spite of linguistic difference. In the words of Horatio - Jones (1979:74), the cinema is the only industry whose market is the world". The reality of this statement impinges on the need for film makers to communicate to the entire world while still expressing their culture.

## CONCLUSION

Yoruba film industry is in a transitory state. It is undergoing series of transformations in a quest to evolve its own unique language but much of the efforts have been on film contents. The practitioners are yet to evolve a unique form through which they explore their folkloricism (Ekwuazi 1991). However, the video texts studied reveal concerted efforts by the leading practitioners to marry form with contents by decolonizing the medium to reflect the totality of African worldview. This is revealed in their use of the story telling style, total theatre tradition and a plot structure that is steeped in African cultural sensibilities. In spite of these professed attempts, majority of the practitioners are still involved in 'trial and error', employing film as a medium of cheap commercialism without understanding the fundamental peculiarities of the art form.

Since majority of the practitioners in the industry cross-carpeted from Yoruba popular theatre, most of their productions still reveal an obsessed allegiance to the oral arts of the traditional performers or local bards. However, through training, constant practice and modifications to reflect the nature of a medium which is primarily pictorial, the industry is potentially capable of evolving its own film language that has been freed from all the vestiges of foreign domination.

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