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EDITORIAL POLICY

Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA) is a peer-reviewed journal, published bi-annually by the Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria. The journal welcomes manuscript of original articles, from scholars around the globe, in the various areas of Liberal Arts. The articles may be product of descriptive or analytical research, field research notes, reviews of publications and printed materials, drawn from, but not limited to Languages and Linguistics; Law; Environmental Sciences, Education; Management Studies; Cultural and Literally Studies; Theatre Arts; Philosophy; Religion; History and Strategic Studies; Archaeology and Heritage Studies; Developmental Studies and Social Sciences.

All manuscripts submitted for publication should adopt APA 8th Edition Style of referencing. The manuscripts should be typed double-spaced with sufficient margins and should count between 4,000 and 6,000 words, including the abstract, references, and appendices. The Manuscripts should not be under consideration for publication in any other research outlet.

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EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Editorial Board of *Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts* wishes to announce the new Edition of its esteemed Journal after a short break. This Edition is made up of twelve well-researched articles drawn from seasoned colleagues and academics.

In the first article, Emmanuel Adeniyi examines the comic aspect of COVID-19 pandemic while Hauwa Mohammed Sani, in her article looks at the ethnographic study of language as a tool in resolving conflicts in Kaduna State.

Osakue Stevenson and Edorodion Agbon focus on the alternative paradigm of indigenous language film in Nigeria through *Agbon-Evuebo*, Muhammad Reza Suleiman examines Arts as drivers of African bilateral relations and regional integration. On their own part, Nura Lawal and Muhammad Rabiu Tahir (co-authors) and Isa Umar Al Musawi concentrate on the study of Hausa Proverbs and Hausa/Ganda burial rites respectivily.

Participatory approach and sustainable development of world heritage sites in Nigeria retains the attention of Olufemi Adetunji while in their article, Abdulrasaq Oladimeji and Oluwaseun Yusuf Afolabi look at the teachers' perception of the integration of information and communication technology in public and private secondary schools with special focus on Kwara-Central Senatorial District of Nigeria.

In the area of French studies, Peter Akongfeh Agwu, Diana-Mary Tiku Nsan, Ashabua and Derick Achu carry out an evaluation of the influence of Africa in the poetic works of Charles Baudelaire. In a similar way, Babalola Jacob Olaniyi and Adelowo Kayode Olubukola study the contrastive linguistic divergence of nominal verbs in French and Yoruba languages.

Jamiu Saadullah Abdulkareem takes interest in the Arabic novel. In this article, Jamiu brings out the ideational dimensions and stylistic features of Abdul-Aziz Abdulkarim Burhanuddin's novel titled *Jamilah*. To round this Edition up, Nasiruddeen Ibrahim Ahmed studies the pragmatics of deixis in the poem "Independence of exploitation" of Salihu Alagolo.

It is important to note that the view and opinions presented in these articles are solely those of the authors. It is the hope of the Editorial Board that this Edition will enrich your curiosity.

Prof. Abubakar Sule Sani
Editor-in-Chief
31st May, 2023

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CONTENTS

Postcolonial *Agbon-Evbuebo*: An Alternative View of an African Language Film

Osakue Stevenson Omoera & Edorodion Agbon Osa

Abstract

The discourses on Africa and African films by many Euro-American scholars and film critics or experts have often been governed by the doctrine of 'Otherness,' which unfortunately has been the bedrock and overarching thoughts of anthropology, sociology, and Hollywood films. The 'savage' African values, norms, beliefs, and cultural practices have often been used to validate the 'civilised' high culture of the West – a practice that is encased in the West's colonial expansionism and missionary crusade that flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries in Africa. Employing the imperial gaze theory as enunciated by Ann Kaplan (1997) and Melissa Thackway's (2003) theoretical model of the centrality of Eurocentrism in the perception of African films as the "exotic, fundamentally 'Other,'" this article uses content analysis and historical-analytic methods to examine how the 'Other' looks back in indigenous African language films. In doing this, it dialectically reverses the 'Otherness' through a postcolonial reading of Agbon-Evbuebo (The White man's world), a two-part Benin language Nollywood film directed by Ayonmi Young Emiko (2015). The study critically interrogates western orthodoxy and endorses African cultural practices, norms, values and beliefs, with concrete evidences as depicted in Agbon-Evbuebo.

Keywords: Agbon-Evbuebo, Euro-American scholars, Benin film, Postcolonial reading, Nollywood.

Introduction

In a futuristic film set in 2033, Sylvestre Amoussou, a France based filmmaker from Benin Republic, interrogates the Euro-American narrative of African immigrants by reversing the role of illegal immigration (Murphy, 2007). The film, *Africa Paradis*, was exhibited at the Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou (FESPACO), the biennial Francophone African film festival in Burkina Faso in 2007. In the film, Africa is transformed into a giant country known as the United States of Africa. A ship is seen docking at the shores and illegal immigrants disembark from it, hoping for a better life in their new abode. However, they are met with brute force by immigration officials, who shoot at them, round them up, and place them in a holding centre, from where they will be deported. These are not Africans that have come to be associated with illegal migration but desperate Europeans that are escaping war and economic

devastation. They are in Africa to seek asylum but with their incarceration at the immigration detention centre, the prospect of the asylum being granted looks grim. Some of them escape from the deportation centre and disappear into the shadow economy, where they are engaged as drivers, maids and in other lowly paid jobs in private households (Murphy, 2007).

Africa Paradis mainly focuses on the trajectories of a young couple that are befallen by divergent situations. Olivier and Pauline are amongst those who escaped from the immigration detention centre. While Pauline finds work as a maid in the household of a top politician and integrates into society, Olivier acquires the identity of a dead white man who was legally resident in the country but still finds himself on the margins of society (Murphy, 2007). As their different pathways play out in the film, the influx of illegal European immigrants sparks a heated debate in the African parliament. Expectedly, Amoussou states that the dominant cinema chains in France rejected the film because 'it isn't what they expect from Africans in cinema … they want us to do films about African villages and poverty' (Murphy, 2007). The rejection clearly reflects the lingering legacy of old colonial typecasts that still reinforce contemporary Western imagery of Africa in films. Despite the rebuff, Amoussou was able to feature his film to a different global audience at FESPACO. His action is instructive of how modern post-colonial African filmmakers are now using their films to tell their own stories and to challenge the normative discourse of Africa as the 'Other' in a heavily mediatised and globalised era (Thackway, 2003). *Africa Paradis* is a work of fiction produced in French language, but this article deploys an indigenous language film produced in Benin (Edo) language in Nigeria to examine how filmmakers from Africa are now turning the gaze on the social fabric of France and the West more generally, using the African moral values as paradigm.

Theoretical and Methodological Concerns

The discussion of non-Western films and cinematic narratives by Euro-American scholars, and those that they heavily influence including some African scholars, based on the philosophy of Hollywood, is rooted in the imperial gaze theory advanced by Ann Kaplan (1997, pp.156-159). Drawing extensively on Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975, p.6), Kaplan, in her seminal work, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*, moves Mulvey's gaze argument from gender to race, noting that Hollywood's

construct of non-Western cinematic narratives is replete with the colonial remnant of Otherness that is underpinned by the desire of the West to conquer and control the rest through the imposition of Western conventions as the global norms. The language deployed by Branislaw Malinowski, who is widely regarded as the father of ethnography, to describe his rationale for embarking on the mission to understand the culture of the Trobriand Islanders exemplifies the desire to enthrone this Western dominance of the 'Other':

> What interests me really in the study of the native is his outlook on things, his *Weltanschauung*, the breath of life and reality which he breathes and by which he lives. Every human culture gives its members a definite vision of the world, a definite zest of life. In the roaming over human history, and over the surface of the earth, it is the possibility of seeing life and the world from the various angles, peculiar to each culture that has always charmed me most, and inspired me with real desire to penetrate other culture, to understand other types of life. (1932, p.517)

As stated, Malinowski's account above was an attempt to explain his reason for studying the culture of the Islanders. As he notes, studying cultures besides one's own helps to provide a wider appreciation of humanity's diverse knowledge. However, his desire to 'penetrate other culture' placed him in a patriarchal position of authority, and the 'Other' in the passive position of another to be penetrated. Such unequal approach to the study of non-Western societies by anthropologists of Malinowski's era helped to reinforce the hegemonic imperial doctrine of the West at the time and was used as justification for the colonising expansionist agenda of 'civilising' the 'savage.' Western film producers quickly adopted the imagery of non-Western societies as the 'Other.' Kaplan argues that Hollywood's representation of non-Western cultures is anchored on the coincidence of the cinema coming of age at the time colonialism was in its full splendour in the twilight of the 19th century, thus, serving as a vital medium for the colonialists not only to subjugate, control and brainwash the mentality of the oppressed non-Westerners but also "to … document the 'primitive' cultures they had seen and found" (Kaplan, 1997, pp.157-158).

Furthermore, in her critical work on Francophone African cinema, *Africa Shoots Back: Alternative Perspectives in Sub-Saharan Francophone African Film*, Melissa Thackway (2003, pp.17-21) makes the point that Eurocentrism has been integral to the perception of African films as the "exotic, fundamentally 'Other'"

by Western film scholars, and because they still perceive Western epistemology as the "normative centre," it is difficult for Euro-American scholars to acknowledge and understand the important socio-political and moral messages embedded in the 'beautiful images' coming out of Africa and the critical metaphorical topics that African filmmakers deal with in their films. This position privileging European ways of thought means that Western producers and distributors also reject any African film that does not fit into the narrative of Africa as the exotic other. She suggests that although some pioneer African film producers unintentionally made films to reinforce the idea of Africa as the exotic for their films to be accepted in the West (2003, p.20), many contemporary filmmakers from the continent now adopt the lens to challenge the stereotype and negativity of Africa, 'and to make people understand that white people have lied through their images' (2003, pp. 37-48).

Despite many of the modern films emerging from the continent and its diaspora reflecting the bi-cultural influences shaping the lives of the filmmakers, Thackway (2003, pp.120-146) argues that they also interrogate and engage with Western sociocultural, moral, and political values from the African standpoint. Through the portrayal of inter-racial marriages and other social contacts with Western mores, some of these African filmmakers use their films to denounce the hegemonic paternalistic depiction of Africa in Western films (Thackway, 2003, p. 145) while others are intent on deploying the medium to redefine themselves and to tell their African upbringing (Thackway, 2003, p. 41). Thackway's work focuses on the interplay between France and its former African colonies, which forms the foundation of Francophone African cinema. Nonetheless, given the similar colonial experience of the entire African continent, it also becomes a useful resource for the discussion of other film industries across the continent, including the Nigerian video film industry (Nollywood), with a specific reference to the Benin language film.

This article uses content analysis and historical-analytic methods to do a postcolonial reading or theoretical reassessment of the 'Other,' using an African language film, *Agbon-Evbuebo*, as a counterpoint. *Agbon-Evbuebo* (The White man's world) is a two-part Benin or Edo language film that revolves around the marriage life of Frank (a Benin boy who travels to France) and Alice (a French woman who marries him) and how, through a series of filmic events, he is able to culturally and ethically stand his ground despite his disadvantaged position as a migrant without the requisite paper permit to live in France. Although Alice

capitalises on his illegal status to try to do him in, he remains resolute that if she is not ready to abide by his African values and norms, their marriage can go. It is this conflict of cultures that constitutes the plinth of our discussion of how Africa is looking back at the West via "the art of video-film that has come to democratise the Nigerian and African cinematic experience" (Omoera, 2019, p. 96). This is so because in postcolonial Africa, "Africans have generally refused to be bystanders or victims of the transformations in spite of their impoverishment and weak observance of their basic human rights (Mano, 2015, p. 2), which in actual fact are fallout of colonialism that was chaperoned by the West.

Africa as the 'Other' in Early African Films

The steady beating of the war-drums grows stronger. An exotically painted black face peers out behind a bush. The African porters drop their packs and cower in fear, but the tall, courageous white hunter forces them on. Suddenly a spear flies out of the bush and hits a porter in the chest. The rest of the porters, screaming, disperse into the jungle, only to be cut down by the savages. With his trusty gun, the white man fends off the brutes and retreats to a nearby cliff. As the tension mounts, the audience sits spellbound. (Dunn, 1996, p. 149)

This narrative from the 1931 film, *Trader Horn* (directed by Woodbridge S. van Dyke), constituted the bulk of the diet of the 'jungle' films served by Hollywood (and other Western film industries) in the early and middle parts of the 20th century (Pfaff, 1981.p. 98; Ukadike, 1990, p. 14; Dunn, 1996. p. 153). Films such as the *Tarzan Series* (1932, 1934, 1936, 1939 and 1989)*, King Solomon's Mines* (1937)*, Stanley and Livingstone* (1939)*, and Storm over the Nile* (1955) created the images of Africa and Africans so unreal that they only helped to reinforce and perpetuate the dominant ideological interests of the Europeans and Americans at the time. This era was characterised by colonialism and the social upheaval heaped on Europe and America by the Great Depression. Thus, there was the need to create the 'Other' (Africa) from the 'Self' (Europe and America) by European countries such as Great Britain and France, and the United States of America (USA). Film, which coincidentally emerged as a powerful medium of education and entertainment at this time, became readily available in this regard and it was used to create a virgin Africa yearning for 'discovery' and its people desperately desirous of 'civilisation' (Diawara, 1987; Ukadike, 1990, p. 19).

Euro-American filmmakers of this period used their lenses to conjure up a continent flourishing with vast and impenetrable jungle, devoid of cities and modernity, and its people as 'primitive', 'savages', loyal servants and lazy. These images keyed into the socio-political, economic and cultural realities of Europe and America at the time. The Great Depression was wreaking social disharmony on Europe and America and racial and class tensions where rife as white men lost their plum jobs and the privileges associated with them. As there were few plum jobs available, there was a scramble for the menial jobs that were hitherto the exclusive preserve of the non-white population, in particular black people (Pfaff, 1981, p. 98). In close proximity to this development, colonialism was at its zenith and Africa was pitched to European and American audiences as a virgin continent teeming with opportunities for those strong and determined enough to brave the perilous jungle and subdue its savage people. So, in this sense, the continent was portrayed as a place "where white men still dominated and were in control" and an escape route from the harsh social realities caused by the Great Depression in Europe and America (Dunn, 1996, p. 152).

While the socio-political and economic realities in Europe and America are no longer the same, Africa is firmly rooted in a postcolonial globalised world that is typified by 'the network society' (Castells, 2006, p. 4). These images of Hollywood's narrative of Africa have endured even in the 21st century. Recent Hollywood productions such as *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), *Blood Diamond* (2006), and *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980) are still invested with the doctrines and philosophies that undergirded the early to mid-20th century films. In the *The Last King of Scotland*, for example, the depiction of Nicholas Garrigan bears similarities to the portrayal of Horn in *Trader Horn*. The spinning of the map to reveal the 'Other' Africa, instead of Canada (which was initially revealed), is symptomatic of the imperialist representation of the untamed Africa used as the backdrop in *Trader Horn* (and other films of this era). And just like the continent served as an escape route from the social chaos brought on by the Great Depression, here, Africa is revealed as an escape route from the harsh realities of the Scottish class system. Africa and Africans in this film are portrayed as everything that the Scottish society is not – wild, uncivilised, lazy, and untrustworthy savages with debased cultures that are ready to be explored and exploited, thus, still burdened by the images that were universalised in the 1930s (Swank, 2010, p. 10).

But the intervening period has revolutionised and democratised media (film) production so phenomenally that Manuel Castells terms the late 20th century and beyond the 'network society', where 'microelectronic-based, networking technologies…provide new capabilities to an old form of social organisation', such that these organisations are able to reach beyond their immediate confines in ways not possible in the past (Castells, 2006, p.4). And now, regions of the world that were considered 'the Other', and which were previously on the margins of film production, have seized the opportunities presented by globalisation and computerisation to propagate their values, norms and beliefs, and tell their own stories in their own ways (Adejunmobi, 2007, pp. 1-2; Omoera, 2013). Nollywood, the Nigerian video film industry, exemplifies this democratisation and the industry uses its themes to tell stories that are relevant to Africans from an African perspective.

Founded in troubled economic circumstances in 1992 (Haynes, 2007, p. 1), Nollywood supports a class of experienced, fulltime professional filmmakers who are taking advantage of the cheapness in technologies involved in video film production and since then, the industry has grown exponentially to become the second largest film industry in the world, behind India's Bollywood (United Nations, 2018, pars. 1-6; Okome, 2010, p. 26; Omoera, 2014, p. 4). While the majority of Nollywood films are produced locally, that is within the Nigerian geopolitical space; and in the dominant English language genre, a growing proportion are now being produced locally and transnationally in Nigerian indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Ibibio and Benin (Edo) (McCain, 2013, p. 3; Omoera, 2015, p. 259; 2017, p.175). One of such indigenous language films, *Agbon-Evbuebo*, a transnational Benin language film production by Ayonmi Young Emiko (2015), provides the basis for this article and serves as a prism for the 'Other' to critically examine the sociocultural milieu of the 'Self'.

Agbon-Evbuebo: The Assertive Narrativisaton of the 'Self'

Manuel Castells (2006) states that the 'network society' has not only revolutionised and democratised technologies, it has transformed the modes and speed of global movements of goods, services and people, and blurred the socio-politically constructed boundaries imposed on Africa and Africans by the early Euro-American filmmakers. Thus the 'Other' can now interrogate the 'Self' based on first-hand experience and the plotline and language codes of *Agbon-*

Evbuebo are firmly situated in this "site of contestation where difference is played out in the travel of discovery" (Okome, 2013, p.41).

In the opening scenes of the film, viewers are confronted with the panoramic view of King's Square, the bustling commercial hub of Benin City, southern Nigeria, and the family of Frank, the main protagonist, praying fervently and hoping that he gets to his destination safely. Frank is then seen emerging from Lyon train station in France and he is immediately enthralled by the glamour of his new abode, but his fascination soon disappears when he unsuccessfully tries to phone his brother, Paddy, who is already settled in France with a French wife, to come and pick him up from the train station. He is left to sleep in the doorway of a pub in the cold; bemoaning the nonchalant attitude of passers-by to his plight. After a while, he crosses the road to try and see if anyone could help him locate his brother and comes across two young ladies speaking in his native language (Benin). His spirit is lifted, in the belief that these young ladies will be able to assist, but his enthusiasm is immediately dampened when the young ladies refuse to help him, telling him that they do not know Paddy. In the midst of his despondency, he saunters a little further and comes across a young man speaking in his native language on the phone. He moves closer to the young man and finds out he is Steve, a childhood friend. Steve takes him to his house and promises to take him to Paddy the following day.

Once home, Steve goes to the kitchen to start making dinner for his girlfriend who is out shopping. Frank is in disbelief. He walks into the kitchen, finds Steve cooking, and he is disappointed; saying that it is a chore reserved for women in Africa. As promised, Steve takes Frank to Paddy's place the following day. Paddy is surprised to see his younger brother in France. He takes him in and thanks Steve for his help. Moments later, Tessy, Paddy's French wife, arrives from work and Paddy introduces Frank to her and informs her that Frank will be living with them for a while. Tessy objects and asks Frank to leave. Incandescent with rage at Tessy's temerity, Frank storms out, hoping to move back to Steve's. This time around, Steve turns his back on Frank, saying 'this is Europe.'

Disappointed and with egg on his face, he goes back to Paddy, who lambasts him for storming out in the first place, again expressing, 'this is Europe.' This time, Tessy allows him to stay. The following morning, Frank wakes up, walks to the kitchen, and finds Paddy doing the dishes. Shocked, he chides Paddy for doing the job meant for ladies but Paddy lashes out at him for not offering to help, as the

younger brother. Later, we see Paddy and Frank walking in the street. Paddy sights a wallet left behind in the phone booth. He picks it up and puts it in his pocket to the disdain of Frank, who reprimands him for an act that was uncharacteristic of him in Africa. In the following scenes, we (viewers) learn that Frank has started working, first in a hotel, and later as a grounds man (gardener) in an apartment complex, where he meets Alice Spencer, a successful French lawyer of African descent who passionately resents Nigerians but is attracted to him. After working for some time and in fulfilment of his promise, viewers see Frank phoning his parents to let them know he has bought them a car.

In the beginning of the second part of the film, Frank is accosted by some strange men, who beat him mercilessly. Frank is wondering what he has done to deserve the beating. He blames it on racism but we later find out that the men were hired by Alice's ex-boyfriend, who faults Frank for Alice's decision to break-up their relationship. Back home and covered in bruises, Frank interrogates Tessy on why racism and discrimination against black people are so rife in France, but Tessy assures him that what happened to him is not a reflection of French society. Moments later, we see Frank walk into Alice's apartment and is shocked to discover that she smokes. He berates her for compromising her health and tells her it is socially unacceptable for ladies to smoke in Africa, but Alice reminds him that he is in Europe, not Africa. She warns Frank to stop 'lecturing' her on how to live her life but Frank sees this as impudence. He walks away and promises not to come back until she dumps the habit. Later, Alice realises that she needs a strong-willed man like Frank as a husband and she goes in search of him.

Frank's visa to France is about to expire and he is deep in thought, as he does not want to be deported to Africa. Alice agrees to marry him so he can become a French citizen. After the marriage, Alice convinces him to stop working as a grounds man, giving her position as a prominent lawyer in the society, and Frank agrees. But later, after quitting the job, he is irritated at Alice's attempt to transform him into a househusband, something he sees as un-African. In the next scene, we see Frank walk into Alice smoking again and he is in rage, but Alice threatens to report him to the immigration authorities about his legal status if he does not stop trying to nanny her. Frank does not take kindly to this threat and he retorts by insisting that he would prefer to be deported to Africa than live with a wife who smokes. He walks away from the marriage and moves back to Paddy's place, where he meets them celebrating Steve's acquisition of French citizenship.

There, Paddy and Steve educate him on the sociocultural differences between African and European women. Later, we see that even though Frank is emotionally drained because of the difficulties in their marriage, he perseveres. Alice eventually comes back to plead with him to give their marriage another chance and promises to stop smoking for good. They reconcile and live happily after.

Retelling the African Story

Onookome Okome (2013, p.144) suggests that transnationally produced films such as *Osuofia in London* interrogates the postcoloniality of the twenty-first century. They bring into sharp focus the imperial gaze of the colonial era by appropriating media technologies of the globalised era to reverse the gaze on Western societies. *Agbon-Evbuebo* clearly belongs to this genre of films. Through the main character, Frank, it speaks to the ideological and cultural differences between Benin in Nigeria and France, thus shining more light on the 'civilising mission' mantra of the colonial powers in Africa. These differences are well articulated by the main character, as he tries to negotiate the moral quandary confronting an African raised in a patriarchal society but who suddenly finds himself in an entirely different society built on different social norms and values. As in most parts of Africa, Benin society is built on a patriarchal structure that grants different roles to men and women. Although the structure described by Egharevba (1949, p. 13), where the *Odafen Noyanwa* (husband who owns the house) holds the moral authority, provides for, and protects his family, has experienced changes over the years (Osezua 2009, pp. 155-159; Omoera, 2014), it is still largely expected for example that the main responsibility of the wife is to cook for the husband and look after the home (Makama, 2013; Omoera, 2014). Some scholars are of the opinion that many aspects of patriarchy are detrimental to the socio-political, economic, and cultural mobility of women (Makama, 2013; Osezua & Agholor, 2019; Omoera, 2020), but it is the system that Frank was socialised into and through its prism, he determines what is morally right or wrong. Through Frank, the film, *Agbon-Evbuebo*, reverses the colonial narrative gaze by recasting and privileging the African story.

Frank's perception of the French way of life as incongruous to Benin moral values is obvious throughout the film. First, he objects to Steve and Paddy cooking for their partners, arguing that it is morally debasing and un-African for men to be 'seen' in the kitchen, let alone be cooking for women. He sees their action as a pollution of their masculinity and a compromise of the moral values

bequeathed to them by the Benin *Enikaro* (ancestors). Steve and Paddy's constant stressing of 'this is Europe' is an attempt to make Frank realise that moral values are not one-dimensional; that is there are many ways of conceptualising values, norms, and beliefs. More importantly, their emphasis draws the viewers' attention to the negative impact of patriarchy on the female gender in Benin in particular and Africa more generally. Osezua (2009, p. 27) claims that in pre-colonial Benin, once married, women were considered as "an inversion of the ideal." And in a polygamous relationship, they were confined to their own quarters and were subjected to various *awua* (taboos). Marriage also transformed them into the property of their husbands. As stated, whilst many aspects of this Benin traditional life have been transformed with time by colonialism, Western capitalist economic ideology, globalisation, and the socioeconomic decline in Nigeria from the mid-1980s onward (Osezua, 2009, pp. 28-29; Omoera, 2013, p. 41, Onifade et al., 2013, p. 53; Emejulu & Amadi, 2014, p. 277), the core parts endure even in the twenty-first century and some of them are what *Agbon-Evbuebo* depict. Paddy's further action in the film seems to validate Frank's position in relation to French moral debasement. When Paddy steals the wallet from the phone booth, he violates the Benin moral code, which abhors stealing or taking possession of what one is not entitled to. Frank's rebuke is aimed at reframing the colonial narrative of African culture as 'non-reality.' That is, as a belief system that has no cultural value (Babalola cited in Thomas, 2005, p.43), but it is also a timely reference to the universal African moral philosophy of *Ubuntu*, which resonates with many Benin moral codes.

Peter Genger describes the South African concept of *Ubuntu* as part of a wider African moral language, which means "my humanity is inextricably bound up in yours. We belong in a bundle of life" (Tutu cited in Genger, 2018, p. 24). At the core of *Ubuntu* thinking, as it is with Benin moral values, is the notion that every member of the community has the responsibility of ensuring that their actions and pronouncements are intended at protecting, guaranteeing, and enhancing the well-being of oneself and other members of the community (Genger, 2018, pp. 24-26). Genger explains that *Ubuntu* detests injustice, oppression of the poor by the rich, violence, corruption, stealing, and the abandonment of the spirit of oneness in the community. Thus, Frank's repudiation of Paddy's unacceptable behaviour speaks to the immorality of stealing, but it also affirms the broader concept of *Ubuntu*. This is discernible from his reference to Paddy's character in Benin as opposed to his un-African lifestyle in France. In fact, Frank's objection to the French way of life starts from the beginning of the film, when we see him coming out of Lyon

train station and being stranded at the doorstep of a pub. His lamenting of the indifferent attitude of people passing by and oblivious of his state in the cold winter day is a commentary on the contrast between the Benin moral value or *Ubuntu* philosophy of communalism and the French capitalist economic ideology of individualism. The *Ubuntu* philosophy of communalism promotes good ethical relationship between individuals in the community with the aim of creating a cohesive entity (Venter, 2004, p.152), but individualism withers the intimacy between individuals in the community and promotes the notion of the next-door neighbour as "an unwarranted intruder" (Mencher, 1947, p. 258). The behaviour of the two young ladies speaking in Benin (Edo) language illustrates this conflict between communalism and individualism. The two young ladies were raised in the communal but patriarchal Benin society, but now find themselves in a liberal individualistic French society. Their attitude suggests that many Africans living in the West have to deal with this conflict on a daily basis, by subordinating their traditional moral values to the socioeconomic reasons that informed their migration to the West. This point is further illustrated in the video film by the action of Steve, when he turns his back on Frank, who attempts to come back and live with him. More widely, it also expresses the freedom of African women from the constraints of patriarchy and the benefits derivable from living in a more liberal Western society.

In contrast to the patriarchal Benin society, Tessy's objection to Paddy's decision to let Frank live with them for a while inverts the notion of *Odafen Noyanwa* as the moral authority in the home. She sends Frank packing. Her subsequent decision to revert her objection transforms the docile role of the wife in patriarchal Benin into that of an active participant and equal partner in liberal France. It also brings to the fore the problematic patriarchal inheritance practice. Osezua and Agholor (2019, p. 412) contend that women are excluded from inheriting estates of their deceased husbands or parents and are also marginalised from owning properties in any form in Benin. Tessy's action shows that in France, wives have as much or even more right in the ownership and control of properties. It also confirms the freedom enjoyed by women in a liberal capitalist economic society. In the following scenes, thugs sent by Alice's former boyfriend beat up Frank but he blames it on racism in French society. Racism is of course an ongoing postcolonial social problem in Western societies more generally, but his beating symbolically represents the colonial denigration of African cultural values. Part of the 'civilising mission' of colonialism in Africa was to

Christianise Africans. Many missionaries and the colonial officers portrayed Africans as savages and their beliefs as inferior in order to convert them. They also stereotyped African traditional beliefs and practices as fetish and even demonic (Merz, 2008, pp. 207-209). Thus, Tessy's attempt to explain Frank's beating as not a reflection of French society highlights the postcolonial efforts of France and other colonial powers to redress the past misdeeds in Africa.

Agbon-Evbuebo also addresses the crisis of identity of second-generation African immigrants in Western societies. Frank's girlfriend, Alice, is French but her heritage is African. Brettell and Nibbs (2009, pp. 680-681) argue that second-generation immigrants selectively adopt and externalise or bring together parts of their ethnic and cultural heritage and those of the host countries in the West at different points in time to self-identify. They contend that because of the challenge of being 'pulled in opposing directions', children of immigrants engage in "lived hybridity." That is "the practices and decision-making processes by which migrants bring together elements of their ethnic, racial and American [or Western] lifestyles, at times simultaneously, to form a distinctive way of being" (Brettell & Nibbs, 2009, p. 680). As in many parts of Africa, the smoking of cigarettes is part of gender distinctions in Benin, and women who smoke are perceived as moral transgressors. But Alice's smoking is an expression of her freedom as a woman born and raised in a liberal French society, where gender distinction, as a mark of morality, is not as clear-cut as it is in patriarchal Benin.

However, the subsequent scenes suggest that the freedom and independence of a liberal woman have limitations when they encounter an African man steeped in patriarchy. Alice tries to transform Frank into a househusband but Frank is having none of it. She then threatens him with deportation if he does not stop trying to baby-sit her but Frank calls her bluff. In the end, the Benin moral values founded on patriarchy prevails over France's capitalist socioeconomic liberalism, when Alice realises that she deserves a resolute man like Frank in her life. She eventually apologises to Frank, promises to abandon her smoking habit, and to submit to Frank's authority. Her decision to let Frank become the *Odafen Noyanwa* also means that when it becomes necessary for the second-generation female African immigrants in the West to choose an identity in a marriage, the African heritage trumps Western identity. The film can be examined from many perspectives, one of which is the economic angle that is alluded to by Frank in his phone call to his parents informing them that he has bought a car for them, and his determination to acquire legal status in France. But it is the sociocultural

importance that makes it relevant to this discourse. As Okome argues (2013, p.145), video films such as *Agbon-Evbuebo* "deregister one episteme, the colonial discourse, and reframe another in its place." Thus, in this film, the colonial narrative of African cultural values as 'non reality' is transformed, as the Benin moral values, with the 'flawed' patriarchy, triumph over the 'flawless' French liberal capitalist socioeconomic values.

Conclusion

The colonial discourse of Africa dominated the themes of the early films of Hollywood and other Western film industries. They portrayed Africa as a continent waiting to be civilised and its people as primitive and uncouth. But technological advances in the later part of the twentieth century and the concomitant globalisation of the global economy afforded filmmakers from the continent the opportunity to alter this narrative. The Benin language film, *Agbon-Evbuebo*, is one of the indigenous African language films that have attempted to address this discourse. Through its characterisation, the film interrogates the conflict between the Benin moral values based on patriarchy and the French social norms and ethical behaviour founded on the liberalism of the Western capitalist economic ideology of individualism. It identifies the 'flaws' of patriarchy that seem to repress or marginalise women in Benin such as from inheritance, playing a role in the running of the affairs of the home, and constraining women with taboos. It also classifies the advantages of the French liberal social norms and values, which include the freedom of women to express themselves and to participate in the affairs of the home on an equal basis with men, and the opportunity to determine their own futures.

However, *Agbon Evbuebo* also illustrates that the freedom and opportunities afforded by the liberal French value system have their shortcomings. It suggests that these drawbacks are identifiable in the compromise of good moral conduct, such as stealing, the jeopardising of female health through smoking, and the ability to protect the interest of other members of the community. The tension arising from the clash of the Benin or African moral values and those of Western societies is particularly difficult for African immigrants, who have to continually negotiate it by selectively identifying with aspects of both moral conducts at different points in time. The challenge is articulated by the actions of the two ladies speaking in Edo language, when they had to choose between the Benin moral code of communalism and the French individualism in the refusal to help Frank, Steve, when he turned Frank down at the second attempt to live with him,

and Alice, who had to abandon her French identity in order to marry Frank. In the end, despite the 'flaws' of patriarchy, *Agbon Evbuebo'*s privileging of the Benin moral codes is an attempt to reclaim and retell the colonial narrative of an African society that is domiciled by savages and of no cultural values or significance. Unlike the early Hollywood films, it proves that African social values and moral codes can hold their own when they come in contact with Western epistemology.

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