

Traditional and Contemporary Ethnic Dispositions to Women as Leaders in Yorùbá Films

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Abstract: *An ethnic group determines not only its worldview, but also the self-awareness of the members of its group. This is as a result of the social-acculturation to which each individual person in the group is corporately exposed to. As evident from the films of the Yorùbá people of the South-western part of Nigeria particularly, the female is largely taken and related to in almost all spheres of life, as a second fiddle, if compared with the male gender. This patriarchal attitude had being in the past and it continues to rear its ugly head even in present time. Though there has always been moves by females to reject being besmirched by the males, this paper brings to the fore that, agreed that there are gender-specific roles in all societies, the (African) Yorùbá social cultural ethos and norms needs to be re-viewed and reworked in such a way that the female is bred in a cultural system where she becomes self-aware and self-assertive to an extent that she fully compliment the opposite gender's effort to bring about advancement to her society and the world at large. The males of her society are to recognize, appreciate and relate to her as an essential part of the whole.*

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Culture, Women, Yorùbá, Leadership*

1. INTRODUCTION

The word 'ethnic', as used and described by sociologists and anthropologists, distinguishes human groups primarily in accordance with the distinctiveness of their life styles. Eriksen (2002:23) sees ethnicity as:

...relationships between groups which consider themselves and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive.

The idea of ethnicity places a great emphasis on culture. More importantly, groups bound by ethnicity usually have a belief that they have a common myth of origin and therefore share common ancestors, and potentially common racial characteristics (Haralambos and Holborn 2004:159). It is also possible for racial groups (like the Africa-Americans) in the Diaspora to become ethnified by deciding to adopt cultural characteristics which might distinguish them as an ethnic group, (Haralambos and Holborn 2004: 161; Falola2012: 14).

Fenton (1999:12) is of the view that ethnic identification has degrees of intensity. These he categorizes as Hot and Cold ethnicity. Hot ethnicity appeals to blood and passion. It can be mobilized in support of nationalist movement and conflict between ethnic groups. Cold ethnicity on the other hand is less impassioned and emotional. It is usually used for support and identification with a group, especially for personal gains.

The Yorùbá as an ethnic group is predominantly found in Lagos, Ògùn, Oyo, Oşun, Òndó, Èkítì and Kwara States; the South-Western part of Nigeria. They can also be found along the West Coast of Africa in countries like Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana and Ivory Coast; a resultant effect of the partitioning of West African land by European colonists. Slave trade, academic pursuits, economic drive, diplomatic relationships and other factors and reasons for relocation and migration, have also made it possible to find Yorùbá descendants across the Atlantic, in places

like Trinidad, Tobago, America, Brazil and Cuba (Falola 2012:8 – 28). Odùduwà is the heroic progenitor of the Yorùbá and they claim Ile-Ife in present Osun state to be their ancestral home. Wherever found, the Yorùbá are easily identified by being cultural- minded. Their sociology is such that their socio- cultural, religion-political and economic life patterns are related and interwoven. They have norms and ethos generally accepted by all, as determinant factors in their inter-relationships. The nucleus of the inter-relationships is the family unit, where (traditionally) the husband is the head of the home, having virtually the final say in all family matters. Thus, he basically determines the fate of women and children. He also represents his family in the macrocosm society, where women have very minor representation as a gender, and are generally put in charge of matters that concern their own sex and that of children, albeit often under male supervision.

To the Yorùbá, gender is taken generally to mean whether a person is a male or female and behaviour as sex is concerned, is either masculine or feminine. The idea of a third sex or gender role with epicene characters like *berdache* as it exists among a number of North American Indian tribes (Harlambos and Holborn 2004:99) will sound anomalous to the average (African) Yorùbá person.

The Yorùbá ethnic group like many others globally, is a patriarchal one, wherein the culture is slanted in such a way that the male is taken to be superior to the female, who as such, is treated like a second fiddle in social, economic, political and religious spheres. While religion theorists opine that male's superiority is ordained by God (Genesis 2:23; 4:16), Aristotule, Reiss, Engles, Rousseau and Mitchell (in Adagbada 2005:18) contend that a woman's inferior status is as a result of her physiology, and this adversely affects her public productivity. Ruthven's interpretation of Simon de Beauvoirs view (cited in Adagbada 2005:17) is to the effect that *Alterity*; the idea of man being the *Self* and the woman seen and related to as the *Other*, led to her being oppressed subjugated and seen as a threat. Socio-biologists like Wilson and Barash, going beyond Darwinian theory of evolution have also argued that "it pay males to be aggressive, nasty, fickle and indiscriminating" (Haralambos and Holborn 2004:96 – 97) because behaviour like physical characteristics, evolve; governed by genetic instructions to maximize the chance of passing genes to future generation by breeding, as a means of ensuring offspring's survival.

These scholars' opinions have being criticized at various quarters to the effect that religiously, there is (patriarchal) distortion in the compilation of the present Bible about creation stories (Idumwonyi, 2002:92; Adagbada 2005:16) have criticized Wilson and Barash's view as naturalistic fallacy and spurious attempt to provide scientific justification for male power. In our opinion, gender roles are culturally rather than biologically or religiously determined, as comparisons between different cultures show that behaviour and roles of each gender are highly variable, and these are learned through acculturation and not inevitable result of biology.

A very good way of knowing about the political, economic, religious and social situation of a group of people is to examine their literary creativities. This is because literature is the reflection of the society wherein it is produced, as it mirrors the aggregate of the sociological set up of such society. Of all the segments of literature, drama is that which most structure human life in forms that are active, intensive and immediate. Film, with its basic affinities with the stage drama - the literature that walks and talks, has become the most influential and relevant art of present time. Its forms and contents are shaped by the changing or evolving contexts of human lives. This is why Andre Bazin (cited in Maccabe,1992) opines that if it must be realistic, film must locate its characters and actions in a determinate and historical setting. This is not just a mere rendering of reality, but that of a reality made more real by the use of aesthetic device. As a result of all these, film, with its great effect of immediacy, presentness and aesthetics as a form of entertainment, is a useful tool for orientation and re-orientation.

The thrust of this study therefore, is to examine the traditional and contemporary ethnic dispositions of the Yorùbá to women as leaders, as evident in their (the Yorùbá) films. This is to be achieved by examining women as objects and subjects in the themes and characterization of some randomly selected gynocentric Yorùbá films. The theoretical frame-work, around which this study hangs, is Womanism as opined by Clennora Hudson-Weems (1993) and Mary Kolawole(1997). This is to the effect that the African woman seeks self-fulfilment, wants self-respect, active roles and dynamic participations in all areas of social development and dignity

alongside men. These she hopes to achieve within the context of the African culture which emphasizes the centrality of the family unit, unlike what obtains with white Feminists' values which though have resemblance with Womanism, have distinct characteristics which differ from African values.

2. CULTURE, SOCIETY, CHANGE AND YORÙBÁ FILMS

Ralph Linton (cited by Haralambos, Holborn and Head 2004:viii) opines that:-

The culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.

Clyde Kluckhohn in the same text is of the opinion that culture is a design for living, held by members of a particular society. These definitions point to the fact that culture has two essential qualities. First, it is learned, second, it is shared. Olatunji (2008:8) has also added that culture is caught and not taught, it is cumulative and meaningful because of its symbolic quality, it depends on the society for its existence, it also depicts the aggregate of people's development and it is relative to time and place. Apart from these, culture is dynamic, and it rises and declines gradually. These characteristics point to the fact that without culture there would be no human society, as people would not be able to communicate, co-operate nor co-exist. This would result into confusion and disorder.

The young generation of a society imbibes the culture of their ethnic group by primary socialization from infancy. This usually takes place at the family level. Educational (institutionalized or otherwise), occupational and peer group interaction further enable the young child to learn the rules of social life in his community. Among the Yorùbá, virtues like greeting, respect for elders, hygienic behaviours, co-operative existence, forgiveness and dignity of labour, among other ones summed up as *Omólúwàbí*, are caught at this period. As the child grows older into youth and adulthood, he continues to learn the norms and values of his / her society, by receiving positive or negative sanctions as rewards or punishments for his / her behaviours. The Yorùbá youth also learn about the statuses and roles ascribed to, achieved and commanded by age, gender, royalty, position and professions. This is because statuses and roles are culturally defined and they help to regulate and organize (human) behaviour.

Human societies have been viewed by many scholars to evolve. They have passed through distinct broad phases of development. Sociologists refer to these phases as **Pre-modern** and **Modern societies** (Giddens 1997:29). Haralambos et al (2008) have identified hunting and gathering societies, Pastoral and Agrarian societies and non-industrial civilization as the three main types of pre-modern societies. Lew and Newby (cited by Haralambos and Holborn 2004: 6) have argued that Industrialization, Capitalism, Urbanism and Liberal democracy characterize Modern societies.

In recent years, many fundamental changes have taken and are taking place in the world, especially in Western societies. These are making people to have a re-think about modernization. Some of these are damaging effects of pollution as a result of industrialization, nuclear wars and the risk of genetic engineering. This is setting in a new era known as **Post-modernity**.

Oladipo (2002:158) is right in his observation that:

...the traditional Yorùbá world-view and ideals of life ... have not remained static. Indeed, contact with other cultures, particularly the non-indigenous religions of Islam and Christianity, have led to certain changes... There is need for modifications in beliefs, attitudes and values which would be required to make us effective participants in the quest for development ... a world historical process.

Other reasons for cultural changes or advancement apart from contact with other cultures are global expanded consciousness, revolts or protests by a sub-group or category of persons within an ethnic group and positive or negative lessons learnt or derived from existing norms and values of such ethnic group.

Scholars like Awe (2011); Smith (2005); Adágbádá (2006; 2009), have also lent voices in the call for a social re-order of Yorùbá cultural perspectives about the female gender. Such calls have been yielding positive results. Adágbádá (2009:11), for instance, has pointed out Akínwùnmí Ìṣòlá's re-think about his negative portrayal of Èfúnṣetán Aníwùrà the *Ìyàlòde* (women leader) of Ìbàdàn in his text, *Èfúnṣetán Aníwùrà Ìyàlòde Ìbàdàn* and the laundering of this heroine's image in a film that bears the same title as the text. Some Yoruba film producers like Sunday Sóyínká and Síkírù Adéṣínà have also pointed out the negative implications of female oppression in *Ṣó o Mọ́rú ẹ* and *Gbẹwùdání* respectively. A comparative analysis of women as leaders between Yoruba films produced with traditional settings, and those with contemporaneous settings, will reveal whether the utopia of women's liberation from male oppression (among the Yorùbá) has been totally achieved as queried by Susan Faludi (cited by Haralambos et.al. 2004:132).

3. WOMEN AS LEADERS IN YORÙBÁ TRADITIONAL FILMS

Traditional films are films that have their settings based on the ways of life of a people in the distant past. In the Yorùbá film industry, these are films which thrive on the people's tradition, myth, history, legend, metaphysics, witchcraft and oracles. They may also be epic representation of fundamental social, national, ethnic or political truths, which members of a society or cultural group appear to be forgetting or have forgotten. They are used apart from entertainment, to celebrate heroes / heroines who have put footprints on the sands of times in the history of the people, to interpret history or myths and to inculcate certain ideas or virtues by ethicizing melodramatic emotional responses from viewers.

In *Lágídígba* (thick female waist beads), Jádèsòlá is married to a hunter who often goes hunting for several months at a stretch, leaving her with a brother –in law who caters for her needs. The brother – in – law later makes love advances to her in return for his care. After a lot of pestering, Jádèsòlá gives in to the amorous advances and the two of them are caught in the act Jádèsòlá is expelled from Ilú Olórí-Oḍẹ (Head of hunter's town) with men and women jeering at her, singing:

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Àwa ò fẹ o | Wereject it |
| Àwa ògbà o | Wecan notaccept it |
| Àwa ò fẹ kónisíná bá wa gbé mọ | We do not want an adulteress in our midst |
| Ìṣewani | It is our way of life |
| Àṣàwani | It is our culture |

Anathematized thus, Jádèsòlá decides that she has had enough of patriarchal injustice and decides to found a town where all inhabitants will be females. Her wishes are made manifest through diabolic means by a woman she meets on her way out of Ilú Olórí-Oḍẹ. The woman initiates her into witchcraft. At a coven, she is empowered to found the town which she names "Lágídígba" – the name of the beads given to her by the witches. Adégúnjú's (the producer of the film) socio – acculturation necessitates the idea of Jádèsòlá receiving functional leadership powers from witches before she can found and rule a town, because he grew up learning that '*Okúnrinni ó n rólé, obrínrin ni ó n tú ilú*' (It is the male that heads the home, while the female leaves the home desolated after marriage). Jádèsòlá meets other women who also had suffered injustice from men. Together, they found Lágídígba, where Jádèsòlá is crowned as the monarch while the women sing cheerily:-

| | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| È wá bá wa jó gbogbo ayé | Rejoice with us everyone |
| Èyin ènìyàn ẹ bá wa yọ | People, come and celebrate with us |
| A ṣeun teńikan ò ṣe rí... | We have accomplished what was impossible |
| Okúnrin n dádé àwa nàà n dádé | Men are crowned, women have been crowned too |
| È wá wo ìyanu ní Lágídígba | Come and see surprises in Lagidigba |
| Àwa obínrin ni iyọ ayé | We women are the salt of the world |
| Ṣebí àwa la bọkúnrin | We are the ones who gave birth to men |
| Kí wọn tó wá jẹgàba léwa lórí | Before they started oppressing us |
| Àwa ò ní le gbà o ... | We will not succumb to that... |

Lágídígba town eventually comes to naught as a result of Jádèsọlá's temperament, high – handedness, greed, political incapability and economic mismanagement; traits robed on the character in order that the producer may achieve what appears to be his patriarchal impetuous manner of seeing women as weak vessels who excel only in household chores and baby production. It is a misleading characterization of women and the projection of a fictional myth to 'prove' that women consequently cannot be leaders.

Àbẹnì in *Àbẹnì Alágbo Òru*² (Àbẹnì, the midnight herbalist) does not fare better than Jádèsọlá (in Lágídígba) in the hands of men. Àbẹnì rises to the top as a herbalist-avocation she inherits from Fẹhìntọlá her mother, whose prowess as a herbalist is premised on the powers received from witches in a coven where a male- *Ìrànsẹ Orun* (the servant from heaven) has the last say³. If Jádèsọlá's excommunication from Ìlú Olórí-Oḍẹ in *Lágídígba* is as a result of adultery; a vice condemnable among the Yorùbá ethnic group, it is sheer patriarchal jealousy that makes Alápá-òpeḷẹ and other male herbalists of Ayédáádé town, to implicate Àbẹnì in a murder case wherein two corpses are dropped in her compound, and as a result she is evicted from the town. She fares no better in her bid to relocate to another town after her unceremonious exit from Ayédáádé, in other to start all over again. This is because getting to Bórípé, she is faced with male oppression again. Ajíróba (he who is the first to see the king every morning), a fellow male herbalist, feels threatened by Àbẹnì's presence in the town as a result of her esoteric knowledge about herbs, her pay – after – service healing method and the popularity which these accord her. Ajíróba attempts to subdue and tarnish her reputation. This time around, Àbẹnì rises up to the challenges and subdues Ajíróba by blowing open his secret of putting the town in bondage.

Of all the films read for this study, *ErùÀgbà* (an elder's burden) is the only one with traditional setting that portrays women as being capable of leading a community. In the film, a monarch has no single male child from any of his many wives. This means in effect that as wont of the tradition in his town, after his demise, his family as a ruling house will cease to present princes for kingship consideration. To avert this, the king decides to add Ìbídùn (giving birth is easy) to his harem. Ìbídùn is divorced from her former three husbands, for whom she has three sons. She therefore appears to be the likely solution to the king's problem. Unfortunately, Ìbídùn gives birth to a baby girl named Adéborí (crown is victorious), making the king devastated. It is the agony of not having a prince that eventually leads to the death of the monarch, for he continuously reflects on his inability to sire a heir. After her father's death, princess Adéborí, in accordance with tradition, becomes the regent, who normally should vacate the throne immediately a new king is elected. Suspecting Ìbídùn's moves about retaining princess Adéborí on the throne longer than necessary, the kingmakers use diabolic means to instigate Gbótóşò-Adéborí's boyfriend, to impregnate her. This works out as planned and it becomes imperative for princess Adéborí to vacate the throne, since only a virgin can serve as regent. Ìbídùn, with the assistance of other witches, induct Adéborí into witchcraft, thus making her to become awesome and wieldy before the kingmakers. She dares them to dethrone her. This makes it possible for the women to make meaningless, Babaláafin's (the late monarch's cousin) response that:-

O ó rí èfònhá wa yìí, mèsàn-àn lokùnrin ní, méje péré ni tẹyin obìnrin... Obìnrin a máa je adelé şá... Obìnrin tí kò bá tí ì bálágà. A ò máa dóbálẹ fún un, a ò máa pẹ é ni "kábíyèsí".

(See, our ribs, men possess nine, but you women have merely seven...Females can only be regents...Only virgins. We (males) will pay her obeisance and hail her "Kabiyesi")⁴

when earlier in the film Ìbídùn inquires from him why females cannot be kings in Yorùbáland. The women's action brings to mind a Yorùbá maxim that:

Gidìgbà ò şìlẹkùn, àfí èni tí ó bàmú kókóró rẹ dání.

(Being hefty does not give anyone access to a room, it is being in possession of a key that does)

Attempting to destabilize her by asking her to swear to an oath if she is not pregnant, the regent confronts the kingmakers and says:-

...A! Àbòbìnrin le pémi? È gbó ná, oba yín lèmi
o,gbogbo ohun tí mo bá sù so lábé gé...

(What! Are you taking me to be (an ordinary) woman?
Hear this, I am your king and whatever I say must be
obeyed...)

Not to take the king makers by surprise, when princess Adéborí's gestation period is nearing its end, she tells them that it is true she is pregnant, but:-

Olóyè tó bá ditè... eni tó bá fojúdí oba ni, àwówó a wó o...

(Any chief who revolts... whoever is insolent to the
king, such will be crushed...)

As it is, Adéborí, Ìbídùn and other women in the film are able to demystify the taboos placed on women's political space. Fortunately for princess Adéborí, she gives birth to a male child. The young prince thus has the right to his maternal grandfather's throne. As such, princess Adéborí automatically continues as a *regent* (?) until the prince will be old enough to assume the position of a king.

The producer of *Erù Àgbà* by this film, has attempted to inter- relate traditional with contemporaneous ideal in order to justify his stand that whether in traditional or modern political dispensation, it is sheer chauvinism that makes it impossible for women to lead in Yorùbá society, since such role requires no extra – ordinary physical strength.

4. WOMEN AS LEADERS IN CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ FILMS

Contemporary films are modern productions based on themes within the realm of contemporary issues which include modern thrillers. This class of films constitutes a melting- pot for cultural elements of ancient and newly created myths, old and new societal ethos, but surely making use of modern technologies.

In *Ayé Gbegé*, Chief (Mrs.) Abídèmi is a very wealthy person. While being driven around the town by Austine, her only child, she sees Àbíké being beaten by an angry mob for shop – lifting. The mob is ready to set her ablaze when Abídèmi and Austine rescue her. Abídèmi apart from giving her money, thereafter introduces Àbíké to Golden Women's club – a club for very wealthy and sophisticated ladies. Austine Emmanuel, the producer of the film, initially portray the ladies in the club as enlightened and disciplined people, who follow the rules of politics strictly, by stepping out of office when their terms end. At this point in the film, the viewer is bound to marvel at the amiable tone of the organization of Golden Women's Club, that he / she may wish that such women should rule Nigeria in place of the "honourable" men who physically assault one another in the House of Assembly. This wishful thinking and hope is dashed when Chief (Mrs.) Abídèmi assumes office as the president of the club and refuses to leave at the end of her term. With the help of close associates in the club, she seeks for and achieves being in power for another full term. Àbíké her friend, who nurses the ambition of taking over the presidency at the end of Abídèmi's first term, becomes very bitter. This brings about grudges between the two ladies. Despite the steps taken by the first president of the club to settle this dispute, Àbíké sends hired killers to eliminate Chief (Mrs.) Abídèmi and her son. While policemen are investigating their murder, Bólájí, Abídèmi's younger brother, goes to Àbíké's house, pretending to seek refuge in her home while policemen occupy his sister's house for investigation. This is in a bid to avenge the death of his sister and nephew. Women are not portrayed only as political thugs and murderers, but also as stupid beings in this film. This is because unsuspected by the three women, Bólájí dates and impregnates Àbíké and her two daughters. He afterwards poisons their meals and disappears from the country.

Women's portrayal in *Dùgbè Dùgbè ñ bò*(looming catastrophe) is more liberal towards women as leaders, however their (the women's) success is linked and attached to masculinity. There are cult activities going on in a university campus wherein Ládípò Sàlàkó, the son of the Vice Chancellor

(who is away on leave) is killed by a member of the Snakists' Cult. In a bid to join hands in putting an end to cultism in the university, Màyòwá, Ládípò's younger sister, joins the Progressive Union (an anti-cult club), to the disapproval of her mother. Members of Màyòwá's club decide that they must contest for positions in the Student Union Government (SUG), if their intention of ending cultism must materialize. Màyòwá nominates Táyò Akíntúndé for the post of President. The nominated young man does not desire any better candidate to run with him than Màyòwá. He says:-

Mo yan ìwo Màyòwá. Mo yan é gégé bí Vice mi...

(I nominate you Màyòwá. I nominate you as my running mate...)

Due to the socio-acculturation to which Màyòwá, like other females among the Yorùbá are exposed-to see themselves as 'ornamented objects', 'second fiddles', 'fragile objects to be handled like china wares' and 'beings whose specialties are house chores and mothering'; the young woman replies:-

Obinrin lásán lásán lèmi, kò sí nnkan tí mo lè ẹ...

(I am just an ordinary woman; there is nothing I can do...)

She later accepts the nomination and runs with Táyò Akíntúndé. Though Táyò losses the election to Jíbolá, a former notorious member of the Snakists cult, who is planted by security agents to contest for the election in order to apprehend members of secret cults on the campus and to identify the sponsors of cultism in the University, Màyòwá wins and becomes the Vice-President. She is unhappy with Jíbolá emerging as the President and does not mince words when she says it to his face that he is an avowed cultist. She initially refuses to co-operate with him. Jíbolá, now a repentant person, works his way to Màyòwá's heart and they become friends.

Màyòwá fights gallantly and fearlessly in the film to end cult activities on the campus, but it is surprising that Bukky Wright, the producer of film and lead actress (Màyòwá), ties the success of the fight to Jíbolá and the male security officers' bravado. Were it not that Jíbolá sends a guard after Màyòwá (unknown to her), Màyòwá would have been killed when tricked by cultists to a deserted building, to go and see Jíbolá's corpse. Bukky Wright also portrays women as beings who are naturally less intelligent to men. This is because not once does Màyòwá suspect that Kólá, Bímbo, Kúnlé and Akin who are supposed members of the Progressive Union, are really cultists who have been giving their leaders information about her. Her mother too, ironically, hands her over to the Deputy Vice Chancellor (the very person who orders for the murder of her husband) for protection on the campus.

Adétutù in *Arugbá* (she who bears the calabash of sacrifice) has no blue blood in her veins, neither is she elected to any political position. Sheer purity, dedication to community service and determination earn her the status of a community leader. Remaining a virgin even as lettered, beautiful and matured as she is, she is chosen to be *arugbá* for the annual Oṣun (river goddess) festival in Ìlú Ñlá (city). Hers is a covetous position, enviable by both young and old, because for the rest of her life, she will be accorded the respect due to a chieftain. The king of Ìlú Ñlá becomes uncomfortable with Adétutù's fame. He is also jealous because it is not one of his wayward princesses that is made the *arugbá* when the following year, Adétutù, despite being in the university amidst vulnerable youths, maintains her virginity and is chosen again. As Walby in Haralambos and Holborn (2004:117) rightly observes:-

The use of violence or the threat of violence helps to keep women in their place and discourage them from challenging patriarchy...

In a bid to defile her and make her loose her dignity, the king asks Adétutù to be his date. The girl refuses his advances in clear terms. During the celebrations, the king refuses to receive Adétutù and her entourage in the palace while bearing the sacrifice, as it is wont of his position as the monarch.

The dynamism of culture and society as it concerns the importance of women, is evident in *Súnmisólá Òtelémúyé* (Súnmisólá the detective) produced six years after *Dùgbè Dùgbè ñ bò*. This is because apart from other reasons, Fathia Balógun producer and lead character of the film, does

not curtail or streamline Súnmisólá's self-assertion like Bukky Wright does to Máýòwá in *Dugbè Dugbè ñ bò*. Súnmisólá, a police officer, is smarter, more intelligent and very daring. She single-handedly nabs a wanted kidnapper and sets the boy kidnapped free. The boy's father is astonished at her smart and swift actions, which Yorùbá females are usually not allowed to exhibit, and says to her:-

E sé gan an ni o. À! Ọkùnrin márùn-ún tí àwọn tí kò mọ ọn n pè ní obìnrin kan ọ̀so...

(Thank you very much. What! Five men in one, whom the ignorant sees as just a woman...)

Ayòobámi, her male colleague too, once tells her:-

‘Súnmi, ‘Súnmi, you are very smart. I doff my cap.

Among the Yorùbá, females are assumed to be less intelligent than males. As a result, they are referred to as *atèyìntò* (beings who are so daft that they urinate from the rear, unlike men who ‘appropriately’ do so from the front). When a woman show signs of being intelligent, the husband is warned: *Bòbìnrin bágbon àgbónjù, pénpé laṣo ọkọ wọn ñ mọ* (when a wife becomes too wise, her husband's outfits becomes too short). Súnmisólá displays greater wisdom, knowledge and understanding in this film than Ayòobámi her colleague and Gbádéseré her boss who are males. For instance, after interrogating Raphael and Désólá about Chief Thomas' death, Ayòobámi tells Súnmisólá that it appears as if it is Désólá and her friend who kill Chief Thomas. The smart and intelligent woman tells him that Désólá and her friend do not know anything about the murder. To her the person who murders Tega is Chief Thomas's murderer, and that it is likely that Tega's murderer is known to the Chief. If the person knows that Chief is aware, then such a person is Chief's murderer. She is later proved right.

Súnmisólá smartly bugs Gbádéseré's car with radar equipment and with it traces him to the coven of the Aṣako cult. She belongs to the crop of professional, enlightened and lettered Yorùbá females whose self-confidence and intensions are not easily deterred when made to know or understand the unpleasant results or difficulties of their intended actions. Despite the fact that Gbádéseré her boss, stops herself and Ayòobámi from going on with the investigation about the criminals who are involved in selling human parts for money rituals because he (Gbádéseré) is a collaborator, Súnmisólá is bent on concluding the investigation, she tells Ayòobámi:-

Mo ọ̀ wà interested nínú case yen.

Ògá ni *hidden agenda*, mode máa unravel e...

(I am still interested in the case.

The boss has a hidden agenda, and I am going to unravel it...)

Fathia Balógun however does not allow Súnmisólá to take all her deserved glory in the film because though she gets to the cultist coven where she is stunned at the membership of the cult and Adéwùnmí's betrayal, she is caught eavesdropping and is shot by Adéwùnmí. It is her male colleagues whom she earlier phones, who save her life and eventually rounded up all the cultists.

5. RECURRENT ISSUES IN YORÙBÁ FILMS ON WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP

A thorough reading of the Yorùbá films under study show that some issues are common to all of them. These points to some facts about the sociology of gender among the Yorùbá as an ethnic group. There are daring, active and agile women who can take up leadership positions among the Yorùbá as evident from the films. Jádesólá in *Lágídígba* is determined to found a new town and dares to rule like any male king. Àbèní, through the dint of hard labour and keeping to agreed terms of operation, becomes a leader among her male (herbalists) colleagues in *ÀbèníAlágbòÒru*. Máýòwá is bold to join the crusade against the deadly Snakist Cult in her campus and fearlessly accuses Jíbólà the dreaded cultist, of being a member in *Dugbè Dugbè ñ bò*. Súnmisólá too in *Súnmisólá Ọtelèmúyé*, is the stoic, swift and intelligent police officer, to whom males doff their caps. These women are committed to their desires and talks, they walk their talk and in spite of all odds, are able to see them through.

Gbádéseré, AlápáOpèlè and the king of Ìlú Ñlá oppress Súnmisólá, Àbèní and Adétutù respectively, but the women remain undaunted and win their battles. Of importance is that with all

these positive attributes and achievements, a statement uttered by men, which is common to virtually all the films examined in this study, is ...*Obìnrin lásán lásàn* (Ordinary / Mere / Inconsequential females...)

In *Abèní Alagbo Òru*, while Abèní is yet to arrive at the village square, to join others to pay homage to the king during the Ìṣẹ̀ṣe (cultural) day celebration, Alápá Opèlè and his cohorts try to instigate the king against Abèní. They tell him that Abèní is intentionally insulting the king by her actions and that he must punish her, after all she is just an “*Obìnrin lásán lásàn*”.

When Olórí (leader) of the cultists in *Súnmisólá Òtelémúyè* asks Gbádèṣeré why the human parts needed for rituals are yet to be brought, Gbádèṣeré explains that it is Súnmisólá that is hindering his plans. Olórí flares up:

Kí ní ṣe tó jé pé *obìnrin lásán lásàn* ló ma máa yọ wá lénu.....?
Bàtà rè ñ ró laroojú, e tòbe bọ ọ...

(Why must it be an ordinary female who would be disturbing us...? She is becoming too big for her pants, deal with her...)

When the Deputy Vice-Chancellor is informed that Máyòwá is a member of the surveillance team put in place against cultists in *Dùgbè Dùgbè ñ bò*, he asks:-

Obìnrin, Obìnrin lásán lásàn...?

The three male undergraduates who accost Adétutù and her two female friends while on their way to lecture hall, and attempts to beat the girls up, receive the beating of their lives from Adétutù. Taking to their heels, they look back and the expression on their faces is like ‘*What? A girl?...Beats us like that?...‘Obìnrin lásán lásàn*’.

One important point to note about this statement is that women too make it, regarding themselves. For instance, it is the statement initially made by Máyòwá when Táyò Akíntúndé nominates her as his running mate in *Dùgbè Dùgbè ñ bò*.

Another issue that is also noteworthy is that the women, as daring, strong and intelligent as they are in the films examined, do not reject it when their male counter parts offer them assistance. This can be noticed between Máyòwá and Jíbólà in *Dùgbè Dùgbè ñ bò* and also between Súnmisólá and Ayòóbámi in *Súnmisólá Òtelémúyè* when the King of Ayédaadé offers to assist Abèní to be reconciled with her people in her home town, she agrees. Apart from this, it is noticeable too that complimentary efforts of both genders in all the films bring about accomplishment. The greedy Vice-Chancellor is arrested as a result of Máyòwá teaming up with Jíbólà and the policemen, while the women in *Lágídígba* do not know peace until they re-unite with the males they left behind, when founding a new town. It is also the quick intervention of Ayòóbámi and other policemen in joining Súnmisólá at the Ajíko shrine that brings the existence of the cult to an end. In *Erù Agbà* too, the combination of Ibídùn and Adéyórí with the young prince make it possible for Adéyórí to remain on the throne.

6. CONCLUSION

There is no way one can talk about women’s denigration and marginalization without talking about patriarchy. African women in present times are agitating for a stop to men’s oppression, denigration, violence and marginalization. Their desire for inclusion in working towards developing their society should not be seen as something externally derived, imposed by or copied hook line and sinker from other cultures. They are simply demanding for an end to socially constructed cultural ethos and norms of their own society, which relate to females in negative terms. There is no denying the fact that the Yorùbá (African) woman today can be viewed in the light of hybridity, for she is a mixture of the traditional and the modern, also the indigenous and the exotic. She possesses inherent Africaness, but has also come in contact with other cultures, with these she can make rational comparisons through her African world-view.

Each sex is naturally endowed with peculiar biological traits, which to a large extent shape their (social) roles. These should not be used to hold any sex down by the *other*. Apart from this, culture is the means by which humanity controls and regulates their society. By the use of culture, humans do not have to submit passively to myths, nature and past history blindly. The point of

convergence therefore is complementarity, whereby un-progressive cultural norms and ethos of the past must give way to the need of modern times.

From studying the films under discussion, one can infer that what (Yorùbá) women feel comfortable with psycho-socially and which they are demanding for is togetherness, unity, coalition and complementarity. The socio-acculturation of younger generation of the Yorùbá people needs to be re-worked in such a way that all sexes are exposed to ways of life equally, and gender-specific roles be reduced to virtually those that are purely biological. In this way, women like Jádésólá in *Lágídígba*, Abèní in *Abèní Alágbò Òru* and others like them, will not be portrayed as being psychotic or neurotic because they are agile, independent and intelligent.

Notes

1. A mythical story about how Yemòwo (the first female created by Olódùmarè (God), led other women from Ìlúbìnrin (an all-female town) to Òrúnmìlà for divination. They were directed to make some sacrifices. These they did, and men from Ìlúkùnrin (an all-male town) came out of their town to seek the women's hands in marriage (see Lijadu 1972:36-37).
2. Fèhìntólá, Àbèní's mother from whom she inherits herbal health work, has a pact with witches that she will prepare her herbal concoction only in the dead of the night, when she can invoke terrestrial powers. Hence, Àbèní too practices her art in the dead of the night, as a result of which she is given the nickname.
3. Witchcraft is a cult generally known to be controlled by women among the Yorùbá. This is why they are known as ÌyáAyé (mothers of the world with special powers). It is sheer chauvinism on the part of the producer to make a male the head of the coven. This is more evident when one sees that Ìránṣé Ọrun (servant from heaven) doubles as 'Ajíròba' in the film.
4. 'Kábiyèsí' is the salutation given to a king to proclaim and recognize his unquestionable authority over his subjects.
5. Since such a woman will be too intelligent to be cheated. As such the husband will not be able to take undue advantage of her and her belongings.

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Videography

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|----------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Abèní Alágbo Òru | Produced by Alabi, Kehinde Zainab. 2012. | Cultural Heritage |
| Arugbá | Produced by TundeKelani. 2008. | Mainframe |
| Ayé Gbegé | Produced by Cherry Ayilara. 2012. | Corporate Pictures |
| Dùgbè Dùgbè ní bò | Produced by Bukky Wright. 2005 | Alawaye Ventures |
| Erù Agbà | Produced by Rasheed Yusuf. 2006 | Olasco Films |
| Gbẹwùdání | Produced by SikiruAdesina | Afasco Films Prod. |
| Lágídígba | Produced by YemiAdegunju. 2002 | Boorekemase Concepts |
| Şó o Mọrú ẹ | Produced by Sunday Soyinka 2004 | Korede Films Production |
| Súnmisólá Òtelèmúyé | Produced by FathiaBalogun. 2011 | Corporate Pictures |

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