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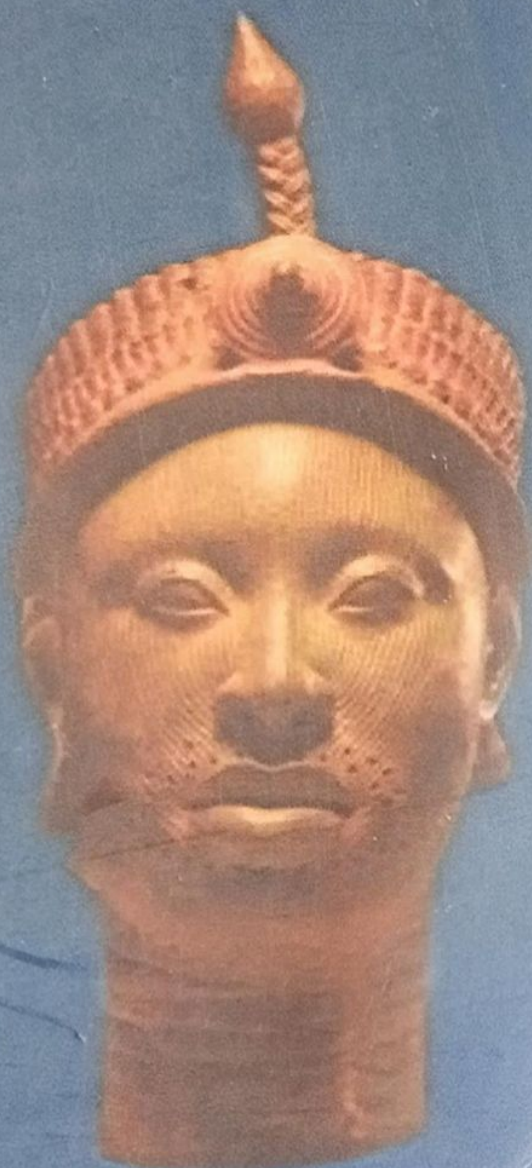


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A Critical Stylistic Study of the Cultural, Linguistic and Religious Symbolism of <i>Òbò</i> (monkey) and <i>Orógbó</i> (bitter-cola): Insights from <i>Ifá</i> and Yorùbá Proverbs Olúwolé Tẹwógboyè Òkékándé	1
Tyap Pluralization Strategies Olabisi Bamidele Sanni	20
Internet Memes in Nigeria: Socio-semiotics of Humour in Covid 19 Awareness Discourse on Whatsapp Media Platform Nneka Chinyere Sule	37
A Pragmatic Analysis of Selected Humour on a Nigerian Social Online Platform: A Case of the Covid-19 Pandemic Adamu Paul & Paul A. Ekele	54
Emancipation in Bernard Shaw's <i>Arms and the Man</i> and Moliere's <i>Tartuffe</i> Adeleke Emmanuel Babatunde & Adebisi James Azeez	86
Women in Yorùbá and Hausa Folktales Daniel Ibrahim	102
Yoruba Traditional Culture and Hubert Ogunde's Theatrical Performances Bakare Babatunde Allen	119
Linguistic Analysis of Place Names in Ewe: A Focus on Ziope Traditional Area Sampson L. K. Yekple, Felix Ahorlu & Clever Susuawu	134
Writing Tragedy in Twenty First Century Africa: The Drama of Ahmed Yerima Nicholas Tachia	158
Paranoia, Linguistic Ambivalence and Erotic Sexuality as Postmodern Techniques in K. Sello Duiker's <i>The Quiet Violence of Dreams</i> Akinsete Charles Tolulope	174
An Analysis of the Effects of Nigerian Pidgin English on the Writing Skills of Niger Delta University Students Daniel E. Ekoré & Michael Gunn	192

From Folklore to Folk Script: Dramatizing the Legend for Today's Hindsight in Emmy Idegu's <i>The Legendary Inikpi</i> Andrew Aondofa Nyikyaa	201
Lexicalization of Pragmatic COVID-19 Lexemes in the Yorùbá Language Felix Abidemi Fabunmi & Jethro Akinyemi Adejumo	221
Historiography, Theory and Methodology: Some Matters Arising in Central Nigeria's Print Media Studies, 1970 – 2017 Musa Mbalo Abdullahi & Fred Ekpe Ayokhai	251
Resourcefulness of Figurative Language in Selected Essay Discourses of Niyi Osundare and Ray Ekpu Isaiah Aluya	281
Apartheid and Xenophobic Tendencies in South Africa: A Revisit of Dennis Brutus and Joseph Eureka's Poetries Nafiu Abdullahi	306
Rapport (Mis)management in Online Social Media Commentaries Fredrick Osaro Ojo & Felix Nwabeze Ogoanah	318
Ritual of 'Ìbálé' (Virginity) at the Footpath of Fate in Nigerian Films: Gender Issues in Tunde Kelani's Film <i>'The Narrow Path'</i> Victor 'Túnjì Táíwò & Nkemdirim Olubunmi Adedina	339
Violence and Vengeance in Richard Ali's <i>City of Memories</i> and John Elnathan's <i>Born on a Tuesday</i> Oluwakemi M. Emmanuel-Olowonubi & Chinaza Blessing Ogbonna	358

Ritual of 'Ìbálé' (Virginity) at the Footpath of Fate in Nigerian Films: Gender Issues in Tunde Kelani's Film *The Narrow Path*

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Abstract

This paper is a study on gender attributes possessed by women despite the general notion in a society in which men hold primary power and dominant roles of political headship, social privileges and moral authority in countries like Nigeria especially the Yorùbá society as represented in video-films. Primarily, this paper is to examine the exemplary heroism exhibited by the female character, thereby challenging the Yoruba cultural beliefs concerning ritual of Ìbálé (Virginity) as a passport to marriage at the footpath of fate as portrayed in video-film. Is losing a ritual of Ìbálé (virginity) before marriage a disqualification to marriage? How relevance is the ritual of Ìbálé (Virginity) in this present day Yoruba society? These are parts of the crucial questions this paper sets out to answer. Thus, this paper examined selected video-film of Tundé Kèlání (TK), a renowned Yoruba filmmaker, with the aim of ascertaining and understanding the place of women at the footpath of fate in the face of marriage as an existing type of Yoruba cultural element, focusing on symbolic action - ritual of Ìbálé (Virginity) in the video-film. One of TK's video-films with Yoruba cultural elements and settings was purposively selected and content analysed within semiotic theory to extract cultural content depictions: *The Narrow Path*. The data extracted were qualitatively discussed within the purview of this paper. The study reveals that the ritual of ìbálé virginity in today's society is no longer cultural subjectivity, rather, the practice of occult arts for money ritual among others.

Key Words: Ritual of Ìbálé (Virginity), Footpath of Fate, Yoruba Culture, Film, Semiotics

Introduction

The conception of ritual, gender, culture and film are quintessential societal subject matters in today's public spaces. There is barely any group of people or community where these concepts are taken with levity. Upon the fact that ritual and culture are cardinal to humankind particularly gender situations in every society from time immemorial film then becomes suitable as a result of technological development after perfecting the projector in 1885 by Thomas Armat (Ayankoroma, 2014, p.27); a cultural artefact created by specific culture as an identity. In consequence, ritual then becomes a concept that "transmits the cognitive categories and dispositions that provides individuals with important aspects of their sense of existence as a people" (Bell, 1997, p.2). Variegated notions, discussions and arguments have been geared towards ritual viewing the concept as a form of cultural communication. Thus, mass communication, and undoubtedly, the film has been a remarkable tool in the growth and advancement of heterogeneous cultures, perpetuation and maintenance.

Communication becomes inevitable to the society with the use of cultural images and symbolism. In this regard, communication codes rely on the cultures of the people within the society to determine the level of affinity that exists among the people with diverse culture and communication. These are used in shaping the society, also as the riding path that permits the individual to open up and connect with other people within the community. Through culture, the philosophies, beliefs, societal norms, value systems, and rituals of a society or community, particularly, gender issues, are shared and transferred from one generation to another. Gender issues then become prevalent in the society concerning the way women relate, their activities and the way men treat them, that is, having power over women. Atanda (2019, p.558) explicates the idea of Ukadike (2013) describing such power by regarding women indirectly as "weak vessels", and that men are "stronger" vessels, but this is with "subjectivity". This notion is subjected to culture, tradition, politics, religions, and practice of occult arts among others pervading human society. Heroines like Èṣùṣètán Aníwùrà of Ìbàdàn, Èṣùnróyè Tinúbú of Lagos-Ègbá in Yoruba nation

had stood up against the situations to oppose and resist the reasoning and contention of the 'subordinate' that a woman represents in the face of culture. Hence, from the above views, ritual as a form of cultural communication, gender issues in marriage contexts are crucial visual ingredients in films and their importance in film productions cannot be overemphasised. Therefore, this paper investigated the depiction of cultural identity in Yoruba video-films with focus on the film productions of Tunde Kelani (TK).

The Problem

Film, unarguable, is a crucial aspect of communication from the past to this contemporary period. It is an essential means of relaxation and entertaining the viewers. Film serves as a conveyor of effective messages. The audio and visual characteristics of film enable the viewers to hear and see the motion images embedded. It permits them to put the sound and visual together for effective meanings. Olayiwola (2010, p.) sees film as a "veritable index of culture", which is used to highlight and portray culture of the society as it evolved. It is the totality of what makes up the life and living styles of a group of people co-existing within that same geographical area. Horatio-Jones (1979) had stressed that film is used in projecting culture through the language, actions and other visuals that are displayed in the film production for audience consumption. In other words, film becomes a means of telling the stories of the people, recreating their cultures as mirrored to the society through which Yoruba film is no exception.

However, Adeleke (2003, p.51) explains that the early filmmakers, with focus on Yoruba producers, exhibit rich aspects of culture in their productions, but, due to certain constraints, such as "economic crunch and non-professional training", the issue of cultural portrayal has been inadequate or neglected to some extent. Ogundeji's (1997) contribution to maintenance of culture becomes important aspect of Yoruba cultural identity of images as communicative relevance in terms of a collection of objects to convey a message meant to be decoded by the receiver as displayed in films.

Apart from the contributions of the Yoruba filmmakers in the development of Yoruba culture, language, actions and other visuals are key ingredients of film-contents that help to highlight culture, which Drewal (1992) describes as the dynamics by which people make and remake their world in the Yoruba film production category. Thus, Taiwo (2020, p.9) has recently raised a question: "to what extent are socio-religious ritual and cultural images prominent in Yoruba cultural films?" This paper, therefore, investigated the portrayal of women at the footpath of fate in the face of marriage as an existing type of Yoruba cultural element, with cynosure on symbolic action - ritual of *Ìbálé* (Virginity) in Yoruba video-film production of Tunde Kelani – *The Narrow Path* (2006).

Ritual and Its Relevance to Culture

Culture envelopes identity, history, agency, practices and rituals. It forms an integral part of a system that represents a society. The dynamics of culture with time brings about ritual identity as new formation into the community or society. With this, Turner (1977, p.183) postulates that ritual "is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests, and performed according to set sequences." The sequences in this regard are related to the prescribed cultural images of traditions created within a society with symbolic meanings as expression of rituals to reflect the culture of such community socially or religiously. Such rituals elements could be inform of veneration in structured order, religious sacraments, rites of atonements, oath-takings, rites of coronations and inaugurations, worships at religious places, burial/funeral rites, processes of initiations into cultic and non-cultic groups, marriages of traditional practices, and some other various purification acts of passages inform of ceremonies. These are aspects of communication that are culturally defined as elements of rituals.

In consonance with the foregoing, 'liminality' becomes fundamental rites of passage of ritual activities as identifies by Turner

(1969, p.94). This reflects the level of transformation that individual experiences in the process of moving from one stage of life to another. Such could be from birth, coming-of-age, marriage, up to the death period. The period of transformation could as well be initiation period into various groups not tied to a formal stage of life like fraternity that is quite pronounced in cultural community. Ritual therefore, reflects the characteristics of rite, practice or observation, especially in a religion or socio-cultural ceremony, such as marriage patterns or activities. This shows the belief of the people through ritual and its relevance to culture.

Film as Paraphernalia for Cultural Sustenance

Okunna (2002) contrives that film is one of the preponderance means of communicating cultural images and messages to the people of a community and, is an agent of socialization and information. It has also become a productive spring of entertaining the audience. Film, as a modern mode of communication, becomes a paraphernalia used by every individual to express feelings, thoughts and intentions based on portrayals of cultural images with symbolic meanings. Fosudo (2017, p.23) reveals that film "is a medium of telling a story using sound and moving pictures, shown at a cinema or on a television ...on which image is focused by a lens may be recorded." This shows the importance of film with its unique language of images as channel of communication. The cultural ideas and images become crucial to the film. In other words, most of the cultural ideas are extracted from the literature of the people as cultural images created in cultural in films. In corroborating the views above on film as a paraphernalia for cultural sustenance, Uduakobong, Olatunji, & Alawode (2018, p.152) reiterates on the supporting explanation of Heuring (2004) as affirms that "if you want something permanent that can be seen, and maybe re-purposed for new display technologies in 20years, film is far superior archival medium than any known analogue or digital video format." This clearly indicates as this paper intends to identify the cultural portrayal of ritual of *Ìbálé* (Virginity) as Yoruba cultural element enacted in selected Yoruba video-film productions of Tunde Kelani.

Nature of Yoruba Ethnic Group and Culture in Nigeria

The Yoruba race is a prominent cultural entity notable from the primordial past to the present. The Yoruba speaking ethnic group forms one of the prominent cultural heritage groups in the present day Nigeria. The group inhabit the South-Western part of Nigeria and located in the states such as Oyo, Ondo, Ogun, Osun, Ekiti, Lagos, Kwara, and Kogi States, and are also in Edo, Delta and Niger States of the country. By virtue of this spread, many have settled in some parts of West Africa like in Republic of Benin, Togo, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ivory Coast respectively. Speakers of the language could equally be found in places like Brazil, Cuba, United Kingdom, United States of America, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago (Olatunji, 2013, p. 24); (Makinde, 2004, p.164); (Ogungbemi, 2017, p.309); and (Adedina & Taiwo, 2018, p.161). In this regard, the Yoruba ethnic group has a population estimated at around forty million. This makes them one of the largest groups in Sub-Saharan Africa (Abimbola, 2006, p.35). Nevertheless, one key feature that marks the Yoruba people is their culture, which is exemplified through systems, such as communication, religion, worship, rituals and some other significant social obligations inherent in their daily living practice or activities. The Yoruba people are prosperous and rich in culture created through their traditional images replete in meanings and symbols. They also have many outstanding cultural traditions in their socio-political and economic heritages. These are dominant in their religious and social ceremonies and full of aesthetics that remains the hallmark of the people. Thus, it is a primary means of social communication and interrelatedness preponderance in the entire Yoruba society, (Taiwo, 2020, p.4).

However, the nature of Yoruba culture in this regard seems as a 'window' on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds. For instance, ritual is fundamental to the society as an aspect of culture, in accordance with their cultural beliefs. These reflect in the use of Yoruba cultural elements like libation, sacrifice, taboos, covenant, prayer, and oath, as performed at a particular place (temples or shrines) with symbolisms – colour, carvings and words symbolisms among others (Adewale, 1988, p.37).

Yoruba cultural images are the traditional visual representations of ideas through arts that reflect the aesthetics and values of Yoruba culture. They are also artefacts that depict visual perceptions of traditional practices within the Yoruba society, and are creative endeavours executed either along with, or in support of Yoruba indigenous architecture, which is relatively permanent in structure (Àmòlè & Fólárianmi, 2017, p.171).

Thus, culture and cultural images are parts of the inherent entrenched values of the people, which is a way of life of such people, visible in virtually all areas of societal or community endeavours. Culture and cultural images are crucial aspects of the visual elements of film. This is because film, as a communicative art, is located within the content of a cultural background (Olugboji, 2019) and its importance cannot be overemphasised as ritual of *Ìbálé* (Virginity).

Ìbálé (Virginity) as a Gender Identity

Virginity *Ìbálé* in Yoruba culture is a gender identity that involves the state of maidenhood, chastity, untouched and unsullied among females. It indicates that a particular female individual never had sexual intercourse before marriage. A virgin is a young woman who has never experienced sexual intercourse. Being a virgin could also be a young girl who had not yet reached the stage of puberty. This indicates the vulnerability and mysterious period in the life of a girl-child due to lack of being considered as a complete female, in which she can become as at the time she begins to experience menstruation periods and sexual intercourse. Thus, cultural and religious traditions or beliefs place premium on the values and importance of virginity with predominant philosophy of expectation from female-child being unmarried. Hence, the virginity of such female is believed to have been intact as it bestows honour, dignity, purity and worth on her. By virtue of it, "virginity was not just a period passed through by young girls, but a state in which a woman could remain for her whole life, and one which sanctified her ..." (Addison, 2010, p.72) for socio-religio cultural activities.

Etymologically, the word '*Ìbálé*' in Yoruba socio-cultural context can be split-up regarding its word formation. According to

Mustapha, Oyerinde, Alagbe & Adebawale (2004, p.97), it means *‘ba ni a ni ilé’* meet her at home. *Ibale*, that is, the maiden has not known a man by having sexual intercourse. Hence, *ibálè* virginity is a set-up of Yoruba cultural identity that can be auspiciously illustrated as a prime aspect of cultural identified element. It is a reflection of gender nature of a woman being pure and untouched until the appropriate time for the ritual of virginity as an integral part of marriage rites as tradition demands. Gbadegesin (2017, p.727) captures the essence of *ibálè* virginity. He expounds

After this ritual ceremony of feet washing, the bride would be kept in the senior wife's room at night until the groom, who was supposed to be absent, returned. Then she was led to his room where she spent the night. They slept on a mat (nowadays it is mattress) covered with white cloth, and the bride was expected to prove her virginity through a blood stain on the white cloth. If she was found to be virgin, the husband paid “virginity money...” (p.727).

The above assertion indicates the proof of ritual of *ibálè* virginity on the part of a bride as demanded by Yoruba belief. This forms the traditional standard and cultural requirement for either the under aged and upper aged alike female species found *‘virgo intacta’* (Fadipe, 1970, p.83).

Methodology

This paper employed qualitative research that uses descriptive content analysis method since it is aimed at eliciting information/data from video-film media. In this regard, content analysis was significantly adopted because it is the fitting method that could meaningfully identify ritual as an element of Yoruba cultural identity embedded in the video-films of Tunde Kelani by way of viewing of the content of the film systematically and noting the remarkable identified element to authenticate the level of accuracy of the depictions. A video-film of

Tunde Kelani with Yoruba cultural paraphernalia was purposively selected

Data were qualitatively analysed and discussed in consonance with the Yoruba belief and cultural practice

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is underlined within semiotics theory. Semiotic is signification of theory that investigates signs system and relation to the way messages are passed and the code usage to signify sign meaning. Semiotics is related to the use of signs, symbols, process, and signification used in communication, in accordance with the elements of communication. It includes how meaning is constructed within the sign by encoding which is then transmitted and understood by decoding of the sign. Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce were the founders of modern semiotics. Saussure (1974, p. 33) as the founding father of linguistics used the expression “*semiology*” and proposed a two-way model or dyadic approaches: *signifier* (the form of the sign) and *signified* (the mental concept of the idea or picture the sign represents). Also, Peirce (1931, p.58), an American logician, mathematician and philosopher devised his system and generalised theory of sign relations as “*semiotics*.” He describes it as an action or an influence, thereby using a triadic model of the sign to explain his points. He made reference to the form, which the sign appears in as *representamen* which he argues may not certainly be the material (or physical form of the sign); rather, *interpretant* (not interpreter) as the perception or feelings about the sign, and *object* is refers to as what the sign stands for as cultural norms within the culture of the people. In the context of this paper, semiotic theory becomes relevant in analysing the significance of ritual of *ibálè* virginity as symbolic in Yoruba cultural beliefs.

Analysis and Discussion

Synopsis of the Film *The Narrow Path* (2006)

The Narrow Path, a film produced in 2006 by Tunde Kelani of Mainframe Film and Television Productions, adapted from *The Virgin*, a drama text by Bayo Adewale, with mixed setting (Urban and rural) to reflect the Yoruba cultural beliefs concerning marriage rituals in all ramifications. There is no doubt about it, it is always the prayers of parents that their daughters get married into a wealthy family and have a place of succour in their married lives. The video piece narrates and depicts the dilemma of a young delectable lady named Awèró, who must choose between three anxious and fervent admirers and followers of a particular woman for relationship, with a view to marriage, that is, Odejimi, the brave hunter, Lapáde, a wealthy man and Daúdà the childhood friend.

Awèró chooses Odejimi, a preferred suitor among the competitors. But a hunting experience, expectations of the family rituals and cultural beliefs turns her wedding into a nightmare on the wedding day with Odejimi. This is due to the failure to meet up with the marriage ritual prerequisite that would make her a virgin. Awero's inability to be a virgin makes her being tagged a broken pot. Awero dreams to witness the day she would be gorgeously dressed and be escorted to a groom's home. This is as result of watching Mọladun, a newly married bride at Šàgbẹ market who comes to execute part of the ritual duties of a newly married bride. As tradition demands, three months after marriage ritual, the new bride would be subjected to sweeping the compound and visiting the relations' places or market place.

At Šàgbẹ market, Lapáde, the goldsmith from *Aku* village expresses his love for Awèró more when he saw her aside from their first meeting during festival at *Orita* village. But Daúdà, a deceptive city rascal with his sugar coated mouth, sweet-talks Awèró and forces himself on her as a way of raping her before her marriage rites could be completed. He as well breaks her pot, that is, disvirgins her, and absconds to the city. This creates a heart sour on her mind as she nurses it all alone considering the consequences that await her ahead.

In the midst of all these, the suitor, Odejimi finds love in Awero and marries her. Awero is never happy as the day she been longing to witness draws nearer. She cries in the corner of her room and heap curses on Dauda for turning her to subject of ridicule as *ikòkò ọ̀fíkù* broken pot. In her curiosity, Awero realises through Madam Abigail a government worker from the city who liberates the village women in the hands of government oppressors. She came to the village as a government representative on assignment to survey the village for the government's proposition to build a modern school in Orita village. Madam Abigail reveals to Awero that Dauda is in prison as arrested for buying and smoking Indian hemp. Awero feels so restless and unhappy with the report, but she was unable to reveal her reason for searching for him.

On the D-day, at the bride's place, the preparation for the marriage ritual is on high tempo in readiness for the bride to be escorted to her husband's home. The marriage ritual ceremony begins proper as relatives, friends and well wishers assemble to felicitate and partake in the ritual. The bride looking so unhappy on her wedding day, with her facial expression seriously reflecting fears, as she reluctantly appears in her marriage ritual attires of *aṣọ-òkè* a weaving cloth common at marriage ceremony as part of Yoruba culture.

Expecting the arrival of the bride, Odejimi moves to his uncle's place to stay pending when the bride will arrive. This is in tandem with the Yoruba culture that the wife must not meet the groom in the house. On her arrival, prayers are observed along with the ritual of washing of the feet which leads her into the groom's room waiting for their first meeting of ritual of sexual intercourse. For the ritual confirmation virginity (*orò ìbálẹ̀*), Awèró is lying on bed thinking of the humiliation, while Odejimi is anxious as he goes into the room with the white apparel cloth to be laid under Awero to absorb the blood drip as evidence of being a virgin and making Awero a woman. In the room Awero refuses Odejimi to touch her despite the fact that Odejimi is being mild with her. As it takes longer than expected, Odejimi forces himself on her to have his way into her. Unfortunately, Awero did not make any painful sound. At this point Odejimi realises that Awero is a

broken pot *ikòkò àfòkù*. Awero begs him to keep her secret but to no avail.

This act causes war between Orita and Àgbède villages. But a group of women springs up in a protest to challenge the erroneous notion that it is not a new thing for a woman to lose her virginity. Therefore, a woman who loses her should have a life to live beyond being a virgin. This puts an end to the war between the two villages as they submit their weapons; embrace peace and sanity is fostered in the two villages.

Ritual of *Ìbálé* (Virginity) as Yorùbá Cultural Beliefs at the Crossroad of Fate: Discussion

Ritual of virginity *orò ìbálé* as an imperative aspect in Yoruba ritual traditional marriage is the chief event of the 'bridal night' where the bride does prove her esteem of being found *virgo intacta*, (Fadipe, 1970, p. 83). The meeting between husband and wife does come up three days after the ritual of traditional marriage. But in some division of Yoruba nation like Oyo and some other parts of Yoruba land, it does come up that very night. In the inner room where the ritual of defloration is to take place, a piece of white sheet is laid for the bride and the groom to sleep on it. Then, two women usually sleep outside the door of the bride's room where they would be straining their ears to catch any exclamation of pains coming from the bride in the course of ritual of defloration. The symbolic nature of this is to serve as witness to the action that will transpire between the bride and the groom. A bride found *virgo intacta* (that is, her virginity still intact) used to be the cause of rejoicing by the husband, herself, the relatives of both families, especially the bride's parents. This symbolises the bride as being well trained by the parents and to have kept to oneself till the moment of ritual action. The white sheet laid smeared with blood as the ritual object will be sent in a covered calabash to the parents of the bride that night or the following morning. Such will be accompanied with ritual items like *owó* (some money), *akeègbè ẹmu* (a full gourd of palm wine), *ẹfín* (white chalk), *ìṣáná odidi* (a full box of matches), Daramola & Jeje, 1975, p.41). The symbolic nature of such is to

appreciate the parents for taking good care and training their female child till the period of ritual of marriage. But if found *non virgo intacta* (that is, if she had lost her virginity before ritual of marriage), the women outside and their *ẹgbẹ* (associates) would take to their heels and look for their safety because the bridegroom could vent anger violently on them as a result of disappointment, especially over a woman he loved greatly. The bridegroom would send an *àrokò* (Yoruba indigenous emblems) as messages to the bride's father symbolising the shame and insult brought upon their family through their daughter. The items are *akeègbè ẹmu ààbò* (half gourd of palm wine), *èédú* (black charcoal), *ìṣáná àkún/ààbò* (half box of matches).

In the video-film under review, the ritual of defloration, which is, losing of virginity experienced by Awero was not to her pleasure, rather as a result of forceful act, or better still, 'rape' as exhibited by Dauda, a city guy who does not believe in the tradition of marriage rite. This singular act forms basis for the problems encountered by Awero. Eventually, Awero was betrothed and got married to Odejimi and who won his co-suitors in the game of love towards Awero. As the custom demands, the ritual of *ìbálé* virginity as parts of marriage rite was to be observed, unfortunately, Awero had turned '*ikòkò àfòkù*' broken pot. It symbolically indicates that she has been flirting around before marriage rite as a result, losing her *ìbálé* virginity.

In the days of yore culturally, this subjected her to disqualification of marriage rite, at the crossroad of fate, as a practice that is peculiar to the female gender. Culturally, women are regarded indirectly as "weak vessels", and that men are "stronger" vessels, but this is with "subjectivity". In this regard, subjectivity becomes the philosophy, belief system of an individual having power over other less powerful individual. Such notion was displayed in the film when Òbénbè, the government official was oppressing the town's people at the local market place in which Abigail, a city lady accused him of his oppression. In this same vein, Dáúdà was able to take advantage of Awèró by forcing himself on her in form of 'rape' which symbolises the feature of women as a 'weaker vessel'; while the acts of Dauda and Òbénbè are symbolic significations of 'strong vessel' as

nature of men. The ideologies of 'weak vessel' and 'strong vessel' further validate the nature of women as culture symbolised them to honour and respect their husbands as slaves honour and respect their masters, because "husband is the head and head of the family" (Adewale, 1988, p.88) in the face of cultural "subjectivity" at the footpath of fate.

In addition, the cultural 'subjectivity' further regards women as 'weak vessel' at the at the crossroad of fate in the course of achieving ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity in which a man with his manly strength as a 'strong vessel' will force himself on a woman to have her body in order to satisfy his sexual urge without her consent. Such was enacted in the film under review as Ojumu who married Awero legitimately could force himself on her regardless of the pains she has been subjected to as a result of trauma inflicted on her by Paada's act. This triumph and clearly indicates the level of cruelty that women are exposed to at the crossroad of fate in the name of tradition and culture.

The cultural 'subjectivity' also establishes that ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity is a form of standard and rule for both higher and lower alike being found *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* (Fadiga, 1972, p.83). This, indirectly shows that when a woman loses her virginity before marriage, such woman is not qualified for proper marriage. In the context of the film under review, such is displayed when Ojumu found out that Awero had lost her *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity before marriage, she (Awero) was humiliated, her family disgraced and her village, Orna village turned a subject of ridicule in the face of culture at the crossroad of fate. It also degenerated to war between the two villages taking advantages to wage war against themselves. This clearly shows the disagreement in terms of bilateral relationship binding the villages against the backdrop of fostering peace.

In the present day society, the issue of ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity is becoming unpopular regardless of the cultural 'subjectivity' as a result of westernised culture that has crept into our society. Albeit, this has created so many problems ranging from dressing styles, body arts, habits, moral decadence and the height of it all is the issue of 'rape', particularly, with girl-child which could involve fathers on their step or

biological relationships, either husband or stepfather and stepmother as perpetrators (Egbe & Ilesanmi, 2002) in (Ayo & Adebayo, 2010, p.79). Yet, still then be responsible to the ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity (Egbe & Ilesanmi, 2002). The ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity in *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ*'s *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* is not without cultural and social values, the practice of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* is not without cultural and social values.

Even the practice in this contemporary society is not without values in the form of ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity, however, majority of them selectively lose their virginity before marriage. Such exposure to the practice is not without the culture of civilisation, development and progress through the modern technological advancement.

Conclusion

This paper has been able to take a look at ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* (virginity) as predominant in Yoruba cultural belief system. It explores the practice before now, although, not so popular in this present time. The ritual of *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* (virginity) is a practice that describes a woman's body pure and untouched until the appropriate time for the ritual of virginity as an integral part of marriage rites. This is in accordance with the traditional beliefs and philosophies of the Yoruba people. It also examines the nature of the act that takes place in the inner room after marriage ceremony between the husband and the newly married couple. It equally looks at *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* (virginity) as a gender identity, Yoruba race and culture in Nigeria. The kernel of the paper is that *ᐱᐱᐱᐱ* virginity forms an integral part of Yoruba existence and life patterns as a cultural practice of checking the girl-child not to be involved any sort of immorality before marriage. In as much as the culture tries to check this, the adverse effect then subjects the maiden to ridicule for not being a virgin before marriage. But in some cases, men expose women to this danger through 'rape' act which renders most of the women not being virgin before marriage. In this contemporary time, most maidens lose their virginity before getting married. Factors like rape, peer influences, hard labour and many others are the major causes of maidens losing their virginity before marriage rite. The paper further interrogates the idea of women being "weaker" vessels, and that men are "stronger" vessels, due to cultural "subjectivity" at the footpath of fate.

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