HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE NIGERIAN VIDEO FILM IN YORUBA: A STUDY OF *MUFU OLOOOSA OKO*

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Abstract
The symbiotic relationship between art and history is inevitable. Art and history relate to sustain society. This essay, therefore, focuses on *Mufu Oloosa Oko*, a Yoruba video film to reveal the extent at which history is brought back to the memory lane as an artistic contribution for the survival of the nation from criminalities. The essay adopts content analysis approach of qualitative research method of both primary and secondary data, using Reader-response theory. The paper finds that the historical criminalities displayed in the film are handled in order to deter other interested perpetrators. The paper discovers also that history can be used to propel progress in the country when it is explored in arts generally, and in film, in particular, as a leading popular culture in Nigeria. It contends that there is no justification for criminalities. It also emphasises the relevance of history and art in fighting criminalities in the society. It concludes that the source of the film (history) and the theme are relevant as they provide

avenue for quality assurance in film art in the contemporary Nigerian society. The essay recommends that: 1) government should take histories seriously as they are relevant to the sustenance of the society; 2) criminalities must be tackled efficiently by government to maintain a safe society 3) government should look into the direction of using film as a medium of educating the society in order to eradicate or reduce criminalities in the society; 4) government should provide adequate measures whereby law enforcement agents will not use their positions against the people they are meant to protect; 5) and finally, government should always make sure that any erring enforcer of law is punished according to the laws of the land.

Introduction

Nigeria video film has served popular appeal whereby issues that bother on socio-political, economic and cultural affairs of the people are adequately explored. In addressing this objective, it has gone to the extent of exploring many sources, among which are: social reality, myth, adaptation, and historical accounts, among others to address social issues in general. In the video film under review, history is the source through which issues that bother on criminalities are tackled. This is not new in the Nigerian home video film, especially the ones in Yoruba language. *Afonja* by Biodun Ibitola (2002), *J'ogun o mi* (Give peace a chance) and *Basorun Gaa* by Adebayo Faleti (2003 and 2004 respectively), and *Efunsetan Aniwura* by Akinwumi Isola (2005), among others, are Yoruba home video films that are based on historical sources. Though, *Basorun Gaa* and *Efunsetan Aniwura* were written originally as stage plays by Adebayo Faleti and Akinwumi Isola respectively. The two works are based on histories of Basorun Gaa and Efunsetan Aniwura, the two Ibadan warriors. The plays were later transformed into home video films because of their socio-political and cultural significance.

Ademola Adelakun, the writer of the story of *Mufu Oloóosa Oko s*aw a need in a history of a notorious criminal, Mufu

Oloosa Oko who once lived in and ravaged Ibadan as a comment on history, most especially in this age in the country where crimes are perpetrated by almost everyone. The theme of the film serves a good lesson for the teeming youth of Nigeria. This will eventually pave way for better quality assurance in film making in the country because of the significance of the source of the film.

The Plot Summary of *Mufu Oloosa Oko*

The film begins with the raid by Mufu Oloosa Oko's armed gang of a marriage ceremony where the bride is kidnapped. The kidnapped bride is later gang-raped by the criminals. The police officers locate the scene of the crime and Mufu Oloosa Oko is apprehended. Although, he willingly submits himself to the arrest after he has instructed his boys to disappear. Before he finally submits himself to the arrest, he threatens the police officers, letting them know and understand the high extent of his diabolical strength.

Mufu Oloosa Oko is arraigned before the judge in the court of law. His lawyer tries to persuade the judge that his client is innocent. But Mufu Oloosa Oko declines his lawyer's defence and confesses that the offence levelled against him is true when he is interrogated by the prosecuting lawyer. He explains that what he and his gang did was intentional and with reasons which he is not ready to reveal to anyone, including the judge.

At the end of the court proceedings and hearings, Mufu is sentenced to seven years jail term for being guilty of rape. But Mufu declines the punishment. He gets angry and accuses the judge of taking an undue advantage of his truthfulness, maintaining that that is one of the reasons why the country is worse and retrogressive. Everyone in the court is greatly surprised including the judge himself and he tells the judge that the flip-flop of his will serve the jail term on his behalf. He also warns that if he comes back after seven years and they could not produce it for him; they will all be in serious trouble. He also maintains that it must not be dirty. So, he disappears before their very eyes.

After that, his sister, Simiat is uncomfortable and confused about Mufu's where-about. Then, she rushes down home to let their grand-mother know what Mufu did in the court-room. On getting home, she meets Mufu relaxing as he told them in the court. Simiat is surprised when she sees this and she accuses the old woman of spoiling Mufu's life but the old mother disagrees, maintaining that the society caused it. The flashback of how Mufu's father was murdered by the police officers is revealed because he attempted to sanitise the environment. Thus, Mufu and his grandmother are determined to revenge from the society, most especially the police. So, the groom whose bride is kidnapped and raped is a police officer too.

Mufu cannot be caught and arrested because he is always invisible. No one can take his picture. The police even know that they are chasing a ghost. Consequently, he kills many police officers. But one day he meets corpses of his wife and daughter on the floor of his waiting room. He is told by his grand-mother who is his spiritual mother that the death of his wife and son is a great sign of his end and the deed was done by no one. Then, the warning is that he has to leave the job and Ibadan for a while because his name that is on everybody's lip might cause the tragedy.

Consequently, Mufu moves to Akure where he incidentally meets a female police officer, Toyosi who is also a daughter of a commissioner of police. She is a competent officer who has good records of apprehending ardent criminals. Her father has proposed that she should be transferred to Ibadan so that she can apprehend Mufu Oloosa Oko, unknowingly that the two are now in love with each other. To add salt to the injury, Toyosi is now pregnant for Mufu Oloosa Oko.

In addition, her parents are aware of this new development but they do not know the new husband of their daughter because Mufu always avoids them. When Toyosi goes to Ibadan to meet her parents on an issue, her father suddenly sees Mufu's picture with her. She does not believe this, claiming that her own Wale is

different from Mufu Oloosa Oko. When she returns to Akure, the new abode of Mufu Oloosa Oko (also Wale), she shows him his diabolical kits and asks him whether it is true or not. Mufu (now Wale) tells her that it is true. So, she attempts to apprehend him but she finds it hard to do because of emotions. The duo keep living together under serious suspicions. Mufu is thinking Toyosi can hand him over to the police authorities while she is thinking that Mufu can run away from her. Later on, she is deceived by her father that if Mufu can be caught through her, he will be promoted to the rank of Assistant Inspector General of Police and Mufu will be handed over to him eventually. So, he will use police tricks to set him free.

Toyosi discovers Mufu's diabolical secrets without Mufu's knowledge. She goes ahead to disclose those secrets to her father. Consequently, Mufu is apprehended at a police check-point when he is running away. He is arraigned in the court of law for the second time. The presiding judge tells Mufu that he has cogent reasons, but that should not give him advantage to take laws into his hands. He is sentenced to death by firing squad. Mufu Oloosa Oko does not die by the bullets of the guns. He eventually reveals his life secrets to the police when the pain he is passing through becomes unbearable.

Film Art: Debunking Criminalities

No contention in any quarter as to the leading role film as an art plays in Nigerian literary circle. It is an art that Nigerians consume at a very unimaginable level. This is as a result of technological advancement which spreads and cuts across the world. To this end, film as a leading popular culture in Nigeria has social functions to play. Cheikh Nda'o (Quoted Traore, 123) has once opined that "Art has a social function". So, many video films in Nigeria have not failed in this regard, including the text under examination in this essay, *Mufu Oloosa Oko*.

The story of *Mufu Oloosa Oko* was written by Ademola Adelakun who was influenced by a life history of a notorious

criminal once lived in the ancient city of Ibadan starting from 1974 to 30th of July 1977 when he was killed through firing squad. Adelakun based his story on history so as to teach moral lessons to his Yoruba/Nigerian society, most especially, at this time of our history as a nation when criminalities have become the habits of many Nigerians. The film is produced in Yoruba language and subtitled in English for non-Yoruba speakers. The film is indeed a comment on history. The analysis of a terrible history that ravaged human society is interrogated in the film with some twists to suit artistic consideration. Akoh (94), in "Literature as Memory: Readings in Nigerian Drama", posits that "drama is not a work for the conveyance of mere historical data but rather a comment on such a history. But such comment becomes a memory for posterity".

Mufu Oloosa Oko, the ardent criminal that the film centres on is the main character that attempts to perpetrate criminal acts in the society at will, claiming that he has justification for doing that. In the film, the flashback of how his father is killed by police is presented simply because he decides to alleviate the suffering of the people by renovating a public road. This does not go down well with the Councillor of the particular area. So, he arranges for the police to arrest him. While Mufu's father is in the police custody, he brags that if he comes out he will thoroughly deal with them (the police officers). But he never comes out alive.

Consequently, Mufu begins to embark on a revenge mission on all police officers. At the start of the film, this is what is seen because Mufu and his gang go and attack a wedding ceremony of a police officer. The new bride of the cop is abducted and raped by four of them all, believing that he (Mufu) is retaliating what police once did to his father. Mufu Oloosa Oko is always invisible whenever an attempt is made to get him arrested. But on the occasion of the gang-rape, he intentionally surrenders himself for the arrest. There is a strong and potent traditional power protecting him from the net of law enforcement agents (police).

In a way, in the analysis of history in the film, the Nigerian society is told to learn from history. For instance, the incessant and indiscriminate killings by police are addressed. In the real story of Mufu Ajao, alias, Mufu Gungo, such occurrence did not occur at all. The artist only explored historiography in narrating the story in the film to tackle the menace in police brutality and other social vices in the Nigerian society, . It is an artistic twist of the history and it serves as narrative aesthetics for the film.

In addition, there are cases of police officers murdering innocent souls on flimsy excuses in the country and that act could throw the society into chaos if it is persistent. There was a case of Mrs. Bolanle Raheem, a lawyer that was shot dead at Lekki, Lagos State on the Christmas day in 2022. This case and many others, one can argue, justify the EndSARs protest of October, 2020. What the protest sought to address was an end to police brutality in the country. The recklessness of the Nigerian police has become unbearable. This is because those whose people have been killed by the police unjustly will never see anybody in police uniform as a friend, rather as an enemy that must be dealt with. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) reports that:

> On 3 October 2020, in Nigeria, operatives of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) allegedly shot a young man at Wetland Hotel in Ughelli, injuring him. This incident was filmed and went viral, sparking an outcry on social media against SARS using the hashtag #EndSARS. By 8 October, demonstrations associated with this hashtag had begun to increase in size and number throughout Nigeria, peaking at 26 demonstration events on 13 October.

This is the scenario that played out in the film. So, it is obvious that Mufu Oloosa Oko capitalises on the unjust murder of his father and turns out to become a monster against the entire society with diabolical support from his grand-mother. Thus, many police officers meet their untimely death from him in the film. This

was the consequence that befell the police during the 2020 EndSARs protest because some police officers were killed by the angry mob in a revenge of what police had done to the innocent citizens. The recalcitrant squad of the Nigerian police called SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) has inflicted severe damages on many innocent Nigerians. ACLED reports that "The Special Anti-Robbery Squad, popularly known as SARS, was established as a special police unit in 1992 to tackle increasing incidents of armed robberies and kidnappings for ransom by criminal elements operating across Nigeria" (*Vanguard*, 23 December, 2017).

SARS was set up originally to safeguard the populace but after a while the members of that police unit started acting against the society. ACLED laments that:

> Originally set up to operate independently in order to target criminal groups, the unit's success hinged on its anonymity and mode of operation. SARS operatives conducted covert operations in plain clothes and unmarked vehicles to support police operations responding to community distress calls on armed robberies and other serious crimes. Over the years, however, SARS officials have been implicated in widespread human rights violations and have garnered a reputation for arbitrary arrests, torture, rape, extortion, unlawful detention, and extrajudicial killings.

Another very essential issue raised in the film is the issue of pensioners' remuneration scandal. This is another salient factor that is currently happening across the country where pensioners' entitlements are embezzled. In the film, Adelakun attempts to treat the issue. The perpetrators of the social evil are dealt with as exemplified by the torture melted out on pension manager by Mufu Oloosa Oko. Mufu hijacks the money meant for pensioners originally from the head of pension officials that he has refused to pay to the right owners. He does not go away with the funds for his personal use; rather Mufu shoots him in the right leg to serve as a

memorable sign for the crime he committed. Ironically, the criminal is punishing another crime committed by the unarmed criminal like him. This is an example of an irony in the film. It is a twist of history and eventually becomes part of artistic aesthetics. There was nothing like that in the real history of Mufu Oloosa Oko.

These two issues are brought about in the film to debunk the criminalities that are on the high level in the country. The two matters are very topical in Nigeria of today. Mufu Oloosa Oko does not benefit from the money robbed from the pension manager all alone, he shares part of the money to the real pensioners, locating them and telling them that that is a gift from him and that their entitlements are still with the government. The most recent and not spread in Nigeria is that of John Yakubu that stole about twenty-seven billion naira meant for police pensioners. This is still an interesting topic of discussion in Nigeria till today.

Mufu is portrayed in the film as two-sided: evil and good. He is good because he is generous and sheer giver, most especially to the less privileged. He demonstrates this by giving stolen money to street beggars in the film and to a man in need of help at a hospital to cater for his wife's medical needs. It should also be noted that this helpless man is a civil servant. He has not been paid for the months and his wife is there dying in the hospital. So, Mufu Oloosa Oko rescues him from the impending tragedy. This is also an irony of life demonstrated in the film. The money he shares is a stolen fund, yet he shares it to the needy that have been deprived of their social advantages directly or indirectly.

Mufu is evil because he is an ardent criminal who takes laws into his hands. The case of his father's murder is not enough justification to become an enemy of the society. Even he has no right under the law of the land to hijack pensioners' money from pension manager, though the manager does what is unlawful and illegal as well. What Mufu attempts to do in the film is to justify the position of Silver Lines Movement in *The Campus Queen* that "if you do not take laws into your own hands, the law may go

astray… when it turns to dealing with these rogues, there are no scruples". And Ladele, their president opines that "we have to take money from exploiters to help the victims". This perspective is judgmental and anti-societal orderliness. It is wrong to be a judge in one's case. This is why there is laid-down procedure to secure one's right in the society.

The action of Ladele, Silver Lines Movement President in *The Campus Queen* lands them in troubles because they are eventually apprehended by the people in the position of authorities while attempting to right the wrong using a wrong strategy. The argument of this study is that right procedure should be adhered to in seeking a right request or agitation. This study is against the common saying of "the end shall justify the means". The means should always be lawful regardless the end of the situation. This essay candidly believes that "two wrongs cannot make a right". This is the step Mufu should have taken rather than turning to an enemy of the state because of revenge. The erroneous belief that he would not get justice is instrumental to becoming a fugitive in the society. So, Mufu decides to take laws into his hands because the laws may go astray as it usually occurs in Nigeria, most especially among the ruling elites. But the citizens should always give the ruling elites the benefits of doubt in taking decision unlike Mufu in the film.

Simiat, Mufu's sister is right when she posits that Mufu should not have become a monster to the society because of the illegal killing of their father by the police. She maintains that "I knew about all these issues you're talking about but that isn't enough for Mufu to turn himself into a nuisance and nightmare within Ibadan metropolis" (Translation in the film). After all, their father was not killed by all police officers and no justification can be drawn that all police officers are bad and evil. In the film, it is not only the police officers that Mufu attacks, robs and even kills, he also attacks innocent people as well. The new bride that is kidnapped and raped by Mufu and his gang is innocent. The Hausa man that wants to collect his money for his roasted meat (popularly

called *Suya*) is innocent. Mufu also steals his mother-in-law's golden materials and the old woman is also innocent of Mufu's predicament in life, among others.

It is glaring that taking laws into one's hands is dangerous in any society because such people even if they are right, they will eventually turn to monsters to the society as it is seen in the personality of Mufu Oloosa Oko. This is rooted in the influence of power and domination. Mufu who is fighting for the unjust killing of his father in the hands of police becomes a killer when he finds the means to overpower and dominate the entire society. This is why it is unacceptable to perpetrate self-adjudication no matter the case, right or wrong, in a civilised society.

At the end of the sad but interesting story, Mufu is captured by the police after his spiritual secrets are revealed to the police by Buffalo, one of his gang members who is captured by police and by his new wife (Toyosi) who is also a police officer. Mufu dies at the end, not by police bullets but he is killed after his wife revealed the secret of his spiritual power. The end of Mufu Oloosa Oko is twisted in the film to sustain the interest of the audience and as well to display the potency in the African traditional medicine. Though in the real story of Mufu Ajao he could disappear at will, he possessed that potent traditional power but he was killed by bullets of police by firing squad in Ondo State on the 30th of July, 1977.

The cause of the crisis in the film is from the authority (represented by the Councillor and the police). If they do not unjustly arrest and murder Mufu's father as it usually happens in the Nigerian society, maybe Mufu would not have turned to a monster against the entire society. The film narrates what the irresponsibility of leadership could lead a society to.

Still, upon all these arguments, Mufu Oloosa Oko and his likes have no justification to take to criminalities and become enemies of the society. Such acts are greatly destructive and it is capable of destroying the country's image that the country is struggling to reclaim and rebuild among the comity of nations in

the world. The position and the judgment read out by the Second Judge in the film are worthy of note in the following:

> It is proven beyond doubt that Mufu Olorisa Oko is a notorious armed robber and killer. Also, we can't ignore the defence counsel's argument which hinged Mufu's bad behaviour on a childhood accident. However, the defender fails to convince that Mufu's reign of vengeance was only visited on those who caused him childhood pain. Importantly, the law of this country permits no one to administer justice by himself. It's true that Mr. Mufu did some good, but the manner in which those good deeds were done wasn't lawful. It's good that Mufu has changed for better, but how about the lives he has ruined? What consolation do we offer those families? In view of the aforesaid, the court finds you, Mufu Oloorisa Oko guilty of all charges brought against you and thus sentenced you to death by firing squad (Translation in the Film).

In conclusion, writers that are influenced by history are commentators on history and Ademola Adelakun has demonstrated this obviously in *Mufu Oloosa Oko*. He brought back the history of Mufutau Ajao, alias Mufu Gungo to the present to say that Nigerians should look into the various criminal activities that have thrown our hitherto good image into dust as a nation. Lawal (22) also argued that "writers that make use of history can only interpret it in their own ways". Adelakun has done the artistic interpretation of Mufutau Ajao's history in his own way to warn the society to be wary of its doings. Ikeddeh (205) has noted an observation on writers generally as regards history and he says that "all writers are historians of their time; they are the unconscious recorders of the events and mood of the study. Their final product is a manifestation of experience and events around them". Ngugi Wa Thiong' also contributes to the exploration of history in literary works when he posits in an interview with "The Weekly Review" published on 9th of January, 1978 that:

> History is very important in any people, how we look at our past is very important in determining how we look at and how we evaluate the present. A distorted view of the people's past can very strictly distort our views and evaluations of the present as well as the evaluation of the present potentials and further possibilities as a people (Lawal 23).

If writers are conscious of looking back to bring to the present the memory of the past, most especially in the popular arts like home video film as it has been done in this essay. The work, therefore, recommends that:

i. Government should take histories seriously as they are relevant to the sustenance of the society.
ii. Criminalities must be tackled efficiently by government to maintain a safe society.
iii. Government should look into the direction of using film as a medium of educating the society in order to eradicate or reduce criminalities in the society.
iv. Government should provide adequate avenue whereby law enforcement agents will not use their positions against the people they are meant to protect.
v. Government should always make sure that any erring enforcer of law is punished according to the laws of the land.

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