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Evaluation of Nigerian Film Productions in the Representations of Igbo Royalty

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Abstract

Over the years, the institution of Igbo royalty has featured prominently in Nigerian film industry, which as a leading source of entertainment in Nigeria, may thus influence how people view the royal institution. Hence, this study focused on the evaluation of representation of Igbo royalty in Nigerian films. Situated within the framework of social representation theory, the study adopted critical discourse analysis (CDA) and key informant interview (KII) as the design. Four Igbo royalty films were randomly selected, while three key informants were interviewed. Analysis was qualitative. Findings revealed that Nigerian films have represented Igbo royalty as an important aspect of Igbo cultural setup, portraying royals as playing vital leadership role – political and religious – in their respective communities. It also showed factors that have shaped portrayal of Igbo royalty in Nigerian film industry to mainly include cultural pride and commercial considerations. It was found that sources of ideas of Nigerian film producers in their construction of Igbo royalty mainly included personal observation of Igbo cultural realities and Igbo oral and written literature. It was concluded that representation of Igbo royalty in Nigerian films tended to reflect some dominant discourses of power, class and gender in Nigeria. It was recommended that filmmakers should do more in the area of research towards better portrayal of Igbo culture in their works.

Keywords: Evaluation, film, Igbo, representations, royalty

1. Introduction

In our consumption-oriented and mediated society, much of what comes to pass as important is based often on the stories produced and disseminated by media institutions. How individuals construct their social identities, how they come to understand what it means to be male, female, black, white, royal, common –even rural or urban, is shaped by commoditised texts produced by media for audiences (Brooks, 2011). Media, in short, are central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities. The way certain groups of people are represented in the media can have a huge social impact on audience. When media producers want the audience to assume certain things about a character, they play on existing representations of such a character. At other times, media producers can change the way certain groups are presented, and thus change the way audience see that particular group.

The Igbo tribe is one of the three major and popular ethnic groups in Nigeria with the largest group of people living in southern Nigeria in their unique culture. For this ethnic group, political administration of the communities before the coming of the Europeans was a collective responsibility of all heads of individual family units who passed on their decisions to the youths for implementation (Anyaele, 2011). Onwumechili (2000) equates Igbo traditional governance to the scientific culture, according to him; it recognizes no kings and chiefs with divine knowledge. In Igbo communities, as in science, he says, "promotion is by achievement." And since everybody has the right to attend and express his views in a scientific seminar, in Igbo village assembly, everybody has the freedom to express his views, and decisions are arrived at by consensus. However, this is not to say that kingship was totally unknown in Igbo land as there are Igbo communities known to have had monarchies before the colonial contact. Notable among these are the Obi of Onitsha and Eze Aro of Aro communities, the latter being a powerful and territorially ambitious monarch (Nnadozie, 2014; Okachie, 2016). But a larger proportion of Igbo communities acquired their monarchy as a result of the colonial institution of warrant chiefs; a native governance system intended to serve the administrative convenience of the imperial British power (Nnadozie, 2014). Today, the royalty system has come to stay in Igboland. Most, if not all Igbo communities, now have their own kings, who preside over their traditional and cultural affairs.

The royal institution in Igboland, like in other Nigerian societies, still occupies an important place as a symbol of cultural heritage and pride, a governing authority on cultural matters, an agency of political power and a driver of social development (Okachie, 2016). Hence, the royal institution acts as the custodian of culture when, for instance, the kings exercise their prerogative as officiating heads in the New Yam festival in Igboland. It acts as the traditional governing body when, for example, kings settle disputes, imposes sanctions and regulates communal life generally. The royal institution also acts as an agent of political power when, for instance, kings influence political decisions or are invited to offer advice as seen with the Advisory Committee of Chiefs and Elders in the former Eastern Region. Lastly, it can also act as an agent of social development when, for instance, kings attract government projects to their community, mobilise the people for communal work or otherwise influence developmental initiatives (Okachie, 2016).

In view of this crucial position of the royalty system in the contemporary Igbo society, the media's role in representing it becomes vital knowing that media representation is a powerful element that shapes social experience (McQuail, 2010). Given the

glamour and sensationalism that are usually associated with royalty, it has become an attractive subject for media producers, generating its discursive dynamics (Baldin, 2012).

In today's Nigeria, the local film industry has emerged as an important agent of representation being that it has become a popular media channel amongst the indigenous audience (Omijie, 2015; Osundu, 2016). The emergence of the Nigerian film industry in 1992 following the release of the blockbuster, *Living in Bondage*, has been greeted with enthusiasm by scholars and stakeholders who see it as a monumental opportunity for Nigeria (and by extension Africa) to tell her story by herself as against the "biased" representation by foreign (largely Western) media and books (Ikiroma-Owiye & Somieari 2014).

All this interest about representations in Nigerian film industry is hinged on the fact that the industry has emerged as a dominant site for cultural production; a popular source for the construction of meaning and a powerful creator of memory. Consequently, its representation of any aspect of the people's experience is to be taken seriously (Omijie, 2015; Omenugha, Omenugha & Duru, 2016). Royalty, as an aspect of the people's cultural experience, also comes under this consideration.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The media without doubt represent the major channel of image constructions in the mind of the audience. Thus, the images, perceptions and value judgement of the general audience concerning royalty could, to a large extent, be influenced by the media. This media channel (film) can be seen as representing the emergent cultural aesthetics that play vital cultural roles as producers express themselves, and their cultures by mapping out their own space of articulation based strictly on their emergent aesthetic principle. A study of the Nigerian home video productions should in no small way make one understand the sum total of being a Nigerian, the people and their cultures. The very fact that the topic of the Igbo royalty exists so much as part of Igbo common sense makes it an important and worthy area for academic attention; for a culture's common sense represents a heterogeneous body of understandings, knowledge, values and practices into which members of that cultural community have been socialized (Malmood, 2013). The way royalty is constructed and portrayed in Nigerian films thus matters. It is arguably compelling to empirically examine the way Igbo royalty has been constructed in Nigerian films. It is pertinent to find out the pattern of Nigerian films construction of the images of Igbo royalty to her audience by critically examining the extent to which royalty characterisations, costume, settings and themes are depicted and constructed in Nigerian movies.

The purpose of this study was to examine the portrayal of Igbo royalty in Nigerian films over a period. More precisely, the study aimed to:

- Ascertain how Nigerian films have constructed Igbo royalty.
- Determine factors that have shaped portrayal of Igbo royalty in Nigerian films.
- Examine the sources of ideas of Nigerian film producers in their construction of Igbo royalty.

The following research questions guided the study:

- How is Igbo monarchy constructed in Nigerian films?
- What factors have shaped portrayal of Igbo monarchy in Nigerian films?
- What are the sources of ideas of Nigerian film producers in their construction of Igbo royalty?

2. Literature Review

The concept of representation has come to occupy a new and important place in the study of culture. It is the way in which the media portray particular groups, communities, experiences, ideas or topics from a particular ideological or value perspective. Representation is a fundamental key factor by which a meaning is produced and shared between members of a culture which involves the use of language, signs, images and most importantly intention to represent things. According to Hall (1997), representation is produced by two systems that complete each other to form meaning, the mental representation which includes all objects, people, concepts, and language, which allows us to describe these objects, and people, and, concepts producing meaning that could be communicated through signs like words, sounds, images and objects.

Ekenyerengoz (2014) asserted that the earliest feature film made in Nigeria is the 1926's *Palaver* produced by Geoffrey Barkas; the film was also the first film ever to feature Nigerian actors in a speaking role. As at 1954, mobile cinema vans were used to play to at least 3.5 million people in Nigeria, and films being produced by the Nigerian Film Unit were screened for free at the 44 available cinemas. The first film entirely copyrighted to the Nigerian Film unit is *Fincho* (1957) by Sam Zebba; this is also the first Nigerian film to be shot in colour.

Obiaya (2015) narrated that after the decline of the Golden era, Nigerian film industry experienced a second major boom in the 1990s, marked by the release of the direct-to-video film *Living in Bondage* (1992); the industry peaked in the mid-2000s to become the second largest film industry in the world in terms of the number of annual film productions, placing it ahead of the United States and behind only India. They started dominating screens across the African continent and by extension, the Caribbean's and the Diaspora, with the movies significantly influencing cultures, and the film actors becoming household names across the continent.

Royalty in Igbo land embodies all virtues and the people see it as a symbol of purity. This is outwardly confirmed by the fact that kings in Igbo land always wear white regalia. Eke (2009) notes that there are certain modes of behaviour which are characteristic of kings in Igbo land. For example, the king's mouth cannot be seen while he is eating; neither does he eat in public places. He is regarded as a representative of the ancestors, who is above human errors and as such, is seen as an embodiment of truth and justice.

Okodili (2014) recalls that in the yesteryears, the royal household is usually served by three servants known as *Ngbaloto Eze* meaning the naked servants. They are responsible for the king's needs and must be naked while attending to him. They are usually very young boys who are considered virgins. Their heads are uniquely shaved in a traditional manner. One serves as the king's interpreter while the other two are always in attendance during an audience; standing at both sides of the king bearing the royal sword.

Eze (2015) took a cursory look at the evolution of the kingship system in Igboland and the criteria set out by successive administrations for selecting and recognizing the Igbo king. The methods adopted in the work are historical, analytical, expository and critical. He then compared the Igbo king with his counterparts in other parts of Nigeria, in particular, the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba kings. He realized that Igbo communities now have their own kings (Traditional Rulers), who preside over their traditional and cultural affairs. The Igbo king reflects the republican character of traditional society, where the Council of Elders took charge of political governance of the community. As such, the Igbo king rules in concert with members of his cabinet, made up of some selected prominent members of the community. Unlike the Hausa/Fulani Emir, or the Yoruba Oba, the Igbo king does not possess communal land, and he is not even paid any royalty for usage of the land. The Igbo king may be respected, revered and paid obeisance as father of the community, but he does not possess extraordinary wisdom or intelligence. He is just like every other person, and therefore, cannot swing the

pendulum one way or the other. The Igbo king reigns but does not rule. In a normal situation, the Igbo kingship stool is for life. However, on the passage of the occupant, the stool could be an object of tussle and litigation, even when there may be an existing constitution that clearly spelt out the mode of occupying a vacant stool. Even in trying to meet with the ideal, the Igbo king still mirrors the republican character of traditional Igbo society.

Ekwenchi (2015) delved into how the popular culture industry, Nigerian film industry, represents colour difference in today's Nigeria. The article, through an analysis of three Nigerian film industry's feature films: *White Hunters*, *John Bull My Son* and *Brain Masters* gave some revelations. Ekwenchi employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as well as historical analysis and identified binary opposition and stereotype as dominant strategies used by the makers of the three feature films in representing 'whiteness' and 'blackness'. The article argued that as discourses of racial difference, while the three feature films may have made some efforts at reversing some stereotypes of the black race, they have mostly, however, managed to domesticate, reinforce and legitimate dominant racist images of Africa and African people circulating in western popular culture.

Asiegbu Bature-Uzor (2017) examines rituals in Nigerian film industry films as statements on the life patterns of the Nigerian society. This research involves a textual analysis of the video film text, *Issakaba 1*. The choice of this film narrative is informed by the thematic content in relation to the ideologies of the Nigerian society. The findings reveal that rituals are part of the culture and belief systems of the Nigerian society. In that case, Nigerian film industry films can only present their narratives against the backdrop of culture by relating content to existing situations within the society. The paper therefore recommends that for proper critical assessment of rituals in Nigerian film industry films, an understanding of the culture and belief system of the Nigerian society is important. This is also the case with the present study as the understanding of the Igbo society's culture is necessary in developing a filmic narrative of the Igbo monarchy to viewers.

Nsereka & Enyindah (2018) investigate the perception of female movie audience about the portrayal of women characters in Nigerian film industry movies. To achieve this broad objective, a combination of survey and in-depth interview methods of research were employed. The survey data were analysed using frequency distribution tables and percentage while views from the in-depth interviews were presented using explanation building. Findings show that gender discrimination and moral decadence accounted more for the way in which women are portrayed in Nigerian film industry movies. Based on this, it is recommended that movie producers and directors endeavour to always edit their movies, especially new ones to ensure that negative portrayal of women characters are balanced or curtailed; that gender-based films should be properly critiqued before their release to the viewing public; and that the Nigerian Video and Film Censors Board screen contents of Nigerian film industry movies so as to ensure that only the acceptable Nigerian/African cultural values - in content and in costuming - are retained in the movies.

Onyenankeya, Onyenakeya & Osunkunle (2019) seek to examine various ways women are depicted in Nigerian film industry films, including physical appearance, domestic and family life, occupational life and interpersonal relationships over a 20-year period spanning the video film era. The research employed a quantitative content method to analyse 10 films while the coding sheet that contained established content categories served as the data gathering instrument. A multistage sampling technique was used to draw the sample. The findings revealed that although there is a higher percentage of women than men in Nigerian film industry films, women still play diminished central roles, and continue to be portrayed less frequently in roles that reflect current social realities than men, especially regarding the professions. Nigerian film industry continues its penchant of depicting successful and powerful women in social and domestic settings as dangerous and doomed for destruction. This characterisation apart from the potential of discouraging females from creating a niche for themselves, simultaneously severely hampers the critical role of generating new cohorts of outstanding independent and powerful females in business, politics or the professions. It can be concluded that the representation of women in Nigerian film industry has not witnessed any radical departure from the traditional preconception of women roles in societies over the two decades. Roles and contemporary treatment of women in Nigerian film industry films should rather emphasise current accomplishments or successes of women in several spheres of life and do away with negative representations which only help in accentuating and perpetuating stereotypes.

The social representation theory, propounded by Serge Moscovici, is a theory about the role of representations in communicative practices, particularly in the transmission of knowledge and the presentation of identities. It is found appropriate in building a theoretical framework for this study. Since the study is all about representation of a phenomenon - Igbo monarchy in the media, the theory of representation is apt for interrogating the nature and dynamics of this process. Nigerian film industry film, like any other media of expression, is a form of representation; and like other instances of representation, it embodies the beliefs, biases and ideologies of the producers as individuals and those of the society as a collective (Hall, 1997; McQuail, 2010). Thus, from the perspective of this theory, Nigerian film industry film depictions are viewed as originating from and rooted in a given context of meaning making - culture. Therefore, the social representation theory provides a conceptual framework for inquiring into the beliefs, biases and ideologies that tend to underlie representations of Igbo monarchy in Nigerian film industry. It will help in looking at these representations beyond their manifest (surface) manifestation in order to reveal their inner (connotative) meaning as embedded in ideologies.

3. Methodology

This study employed qualitative research methods: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Key Informant Interview (KII). CDA offered some interpretative depth to the analysis. KII was added as a further data collection method used in getting data from filmmakers. Four Nigerian films were purposively selected for critical discourse analysis (to showcase pre-colonial and contemporary era of the Igbo people). For the KII, 3 key informants were chosen because of their training, experience and position which makes them "informed" and "reliable" sources for the particular information sought (Kumar, 1989). Therefore, the researcher purposively selected three key informants: a film producer, film director and scriptwriter.

SN	Title of Film	Year of Production	Director	Producer
1	Ojadike	1996	Ojiofor Ezeanyeuche	Ojiofor Ezeanyeuche
2	Egg of Life	2003	Andy Amaechi	Ojiofor Ezeanyeuche
3	Royal Tears	2007	Ikenna Aniekwe	Charles offor
4	Royal Favour	2015	Ugezu S. Ugezu	Precious Okafor

Table 1: List of the 4 Selected Films

Source: Fieldwork (2021)

Synopses of the Selected Igbo Films

3.1. *Ojadike*

The film *Ojadike* is a story of power play characterised by betrayals and intrigues. The 1996 film is set in the pre-colonial time. King Ojadike who rules over the people of Umuoba is portrayed as a great king, brave and invincible in battle. But unknown to the king, his brother, Egwu, spurred by inordinate ambition, is plotting to take over the throne of the kingdom from him.

The birth of the king's only child, Obiora, is a thing of joy for him and a significant development for the Ojadike dynasty as the successor to the throne has been born. This development is, however, not pleasant to Egwu who is bent on becoming the king. King Ojadike, who is completely ignorant of these secret plans of his brother, goes on preparing his little son for the throne by educating him on matters of tradition and kingship. Egwu, meanwhile, has unsuccessfully plotted to have the life of Prince Obiora ended by persuading him to go to "the land beyond the valley" which unknown to the little prince is inhabited by the notorious Agunze warriors – rebels who were exiled from Umuoba for attempting to usurp the throne of Ojadike. Obiora, however, becomes lucky to return with his life.

One day, Egwu asks Obiora to come and meet him in the bush. Egwu leaves Obiora behind and runs and informs Ojadike that the Agunze warriors are descending the hill and invading Umuoba. The king and Egwu run to meet the rampaging warriors. When the two sides meet, a fight ensues. However, unknown to the king, his brother Egwu is a traitor working with the Agunze warriors. Soon, Egwu stabs the king from behind and he drops dead. He then instructs the warriors to seek out Obiora and kill him as well. However, Egwu is able to meet Obiora before the warriors are able to find him. He convinces the little boy to run away and never to return to Umuoba as the circumstances of his father's death are such that people will believe he murdered his father and so put him to death. While Obiora escapes, Egwu asks the Agunze warriors to pursue him and kill him. Though they eventually fail to catch up with him, they returned and lied to Egwu that the prince has been killed. With all obstacles out of the way or so he thinks, Egwu takes over the throne. He imposes a dictatorial rule, killing those that challenge him, selling people into slavery, forcefully taking people's wives and engaging his subjects in forced labour.

Meanwhile, Prince Obiora remains in exile where he continues to train himself in fighting. He meets two musicians in the bush who became his friends and constant companions. He grows to adulthood and becomes a formidable brave and invincible fighter like his late father. Following the apparition of his father as shown to him by a priest he met in the bush, Obiora storms Umuoba with his fighters, defeating and killing Egwu, thus deposing him, taking over his father's throne and liberating his people from his dictatorship.

3.2. *Egg of Life*

Egg of Life is a film which centres on the desperate effort of the people of Efuru Kingdom to save the life of their crown prince who is bound to die unless a perilous journey is made to the land of *Ogbanje* to bring his life force – "egg of life" to the kingdom. Produced by Ojiofor Ezeanyaeche and directed by Andy Amaechi, the 2003 film revolves around the themes of determination, courage, bravery and sacrifice as particularly exemplified by the seven maidens, who were sent to go and seek for and bring the egg of life.

The king of Efuru has been without a child. However, his wife, the queen, conceives at last after nine years of fruitlessness. The childbirth turns out successful, after a moment of anxious wait by the king. The male child is named Ikemefuna and the king is at last fulfilled that a successor to his throne has been born.

However, as Ikemefuna grows, certain strange occurrences are noticed around him. He falls seriously sick from time to time bringing anxiety to his parents especially the mother. At times, he is seen appearing to be chatting, playing or eating with some unseen characters, and when confronted about this, he denies interacting with any invisible entities. This leads to the suspicion that the prince is an *ogbanje* – an evil child that comes to the world to torment his parents by falling sick all the time and dying prematurely. However, the king would have none of the suggestions that his son is of such evil.

One day, Ikemefuna falls sick again, this time becoming unconscious with all efforts to revive him failing. The priestess of Efuru is invited and she confirms that the boy is an *ogbanje* and that his time on earth is up; "his soul is in limbo"; he must die unless his life force i.e., egg of life is brought from the land of *ogbanje*. It is an extremely perilous journey through "the land of the dead", to be embarked upon by seven maidens who are to be chosen by Efuru the goddess of the pure and innocent.

As expected, the journey turns out to be an eerie and deadly adventure. Five of the seven chosen maidens lost their lives to evil forces as the team struggle their way through the forest of Ekwensu. Eventually, only Amarachi and Chioma return successfully with the egg of life. However, Chioma dies as soon as they arrive at the palace having sustained a fatal injury in one of their numerous fights with the malevolent entities encountered on their way back. It is with mixed emotions that the king and others welcome back the hero Amarachi as well as mourn the other heroes who could not make it back, safely. With the egg of life, the priestess of Efuru revives Ikemefuna, who rises energetically, brimming with life. The king, in fulfilment of his earlier pledge, betroths Amarachi to the prince – she is to become the royal bride. He also gives her some substantial amount of wealth as also pledged.

3.3. *Royal Tears*

Royal Tears tells the story of how a royal family meets their tragedy as a result of the king's insistence on forcing his daughter to marry a man she does not wish to marry. Produced by Charles Offor and directed by Ikenna Emma Aniekwe, the film's plot is woven around love, class difference, vindictiveness and its evil consequences. Princess Olaedo, an asthmatic young woman, is so much loved by her father who would do anything just to please her. One day, against the wishes of her father, Olaedo goes to the Iyigbu Lake to swim. Soon after she has jumped into the water, she begins to drown, requiring the timely intervention of Kasie, a young man washing by the lakeside, to rescue her. The princess has been seized by asthmatic attack and she is gasping for breath. Kasie runs to the palace to get her inhaler and succeeds after serious exertions that see him fall on his way back. This role played by Kasie in saving Olaedo's life brings the two an affinity that eventually develops into a love affair, which the king is not comfortable with for the reason that Olaedo has been betrothed since her childhood to Cassidy Nwabueze, a son of a senator whose status is considered befitting of a princess. However, the princess continues her friendship with Kasie secretly.

Eventually, Cassidy Nwabueze returns from Texas, United States. His dressing, speech and mannerism bear an exaggerated imitation of the style of trendy young Americans. He is also rude and impulsive. Olaedo does not find him likeable and they cannot get on smoothly. However, the king is determined to ensure that the marriage between him and his daughter materializes. He would have no commoner in the person of Kasie jeopardizing the marriage.

As the wedding approaches, Princess Olaedo persuades Kasie to attend, a request he hesitantly obliges. On the D-day, events take a new twist when Olaedo, instead of presenting the traditional cup of drink to Cassidy, presents it to Kasie. All hell is let loose as Cassidy pounces on Kasie and the wedding event ends in disarray. It is at this point that the princess confesses that she is pregnant for Kasie.

Now living with Kasie as his wife, Olaedo continues to nurse his early pregnancy, and soon a fresh trouble surface. She is diagnosed with a health condition requiring that the fetus in her womb be expelled through dilation and curettage (D & C). The couple

cannot afford the 100 thousand naira charged by the hospital for this surgical procedure prompting Kasie to approach his father-in-law, the king, for help, but he flatly turns him down. His mother equally goes to plead on his behalf; still the king would not budge. However, there is a miraculous turnaround of events as the doctor declares that Olaedo's condition is improving and that the D & C may no longer be required.

Having attended a job interview with success after a long time of being unemployed, Kasie requires a reference letter from his traditional ruler to proceed. He approaches his father-in-law for this, and he completely declines. His erstwhile school principal equally goes to plead with the king on his behalf but to no avail. Kasie consequently loses the job offer.

Again, the pregnant Olaedo is hospitalized and money is required for an intervention. Kasie again approaches his father-in-law but he once more declines. As the delay in treatment continues, Olaedo's condition degenerates and eventually she needs some blood. Kasie donates blood and his wife is cured. However, he eventually dies of shock owing to his history of heart condition for which he ought not to have been a blood donor. Upon hearing of Kasie's death, Olaedo's father who has become remorseful pays her a visit to condole with her and ask for forgiveness. His daughter, however, rebuffs him for being wicked and insensitive. He goes home devastated, only to die of stroke shortly after.

3.4. *Royal Favour*

Royal Favour focuses on the matrimonial intrigues that ultimately destroy a prince and leave his family devastated. Produced by Precious Okafor and directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu, the film tells the story of how a family suddenly assumes a royal status as a result of the decision by the town of Urukpeleke to replace her long-time tradition of hereditary kingship with a rotational arrangement. Thus, royalty is taken away from the Ugwu family where it has resided since time immemorial to the Umugoagu village where Chief Onyenna is chosen to become the first king under the new rotational arrangement. This results in a sudden change of status for the Onyenna family as his wife, hitherto an ordinary poor village woman, becomes the queen, while his son, Nosike, a graduate who has unsuccessfully searched for job for three years, becomes the prince. However, this change of status immediately becomes a source of ordeal for Chinenyenwa, Prince Nosike's fiancée, as the queen suddenly begins to see her as backward and lacking the class to be married to the prince. All efforts made by Prince Nosike and Chinenyenwa to have the queen change her hostile attitude and accept her as part of the family fail.

The visit to the palace by Chief Ilodibe, the most influential man of Urukpeleke, alongside his beautiful daughter, Jane, would worsen the ordeal of Chinenyenwa, as the queen immediately becomes impressed with what she sees as Jane's classy personality and starts to work towards having Prince Nosike marry her. Jane succeeds in luring the prince under the influence of alcohol to sleep with her and thereafter she reports that she has become pregnant; a development that eventually forces Prince Nosike to marry her. However, this marriage becomes a source of constant pain to the Prince and her family, as Jane, the new bride, becomes insolent and aggressive towards everybody. After months of hide and seek, luck finally runs out on Jane, as her pregnancy is discovered to have been faked. Finally, the whole truth is let out by Jane who confesses that it is her father, Chief Ilodibe, that hatched the whole conspiracy to get her married to the royal family where she would work to destroy the family so that kingship would be taken away from them and given to the Ilodibe family.

Meanwhile, as Prince Nosike and his family mourn their losses, Chinenyenwa, his erstwhile fiancée, who has moved on following the marriage of the prince to Jane, is working hard to build her life by pursuing her small fish farming business. She finally makes a life-changing breakthrough when, through the help of her friend, Afoma, whose husband is an official of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, she is appointed to head a Youth Engagement Scheme of the ministry.

3.5. *Analysis of Discourses*

In analysing the films, the researchers looked out for discourses that emerged dominant in the films' representation of Igbo royalty. The discourses, as observed by the researchers, were as follows:

6. *Discourse of Power*

Dominant across the selected films is the theme of power as exercised by the royals. This discourse of power projects the royals as either dictatorial and ruthless or democratic and kind in their exercise of power. In *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life* – two films set in the pre-colonial times – the monarchs are generally presented as possessing absolute powers including the power to order execution and banishment of subjects. For instance, King Ojadike tells his brother, Egwu, who is about to walk out on him: "Never you turn your back on me or I will order your execution". In another instance, as he departs for battle and leaving Osondu in charge of his little son, he warns: "If anything happens to my son, your head will go off." In *Egg of Life*, the king's dictatorial powers are manifest in his insistence of banishing the friend of the queen for suggesting that his son, Prince Obiora, is an *ogbanje*. It is an incident that portrays the king as a law unto himself; he can take actions of such magnitude in the heat of passion, totally at his own discretion and no one can question or fault it.

On the contrary, in *Royal Tears* and *Royal Favour* – films set in the post-colonial period – absolute powers are not depicted as a legitimate attribute of monarchs. The royals are presented as less dictatorial and more tempered in exercise of power. In fact, they do not possess absolute powers like their counterparts of films set in the pre-colonial times. In *Royal Tears*, for instance, the king appears to be handicapped in the face of the continued "intrusion" of Kasie into the palace. Similarly, in *Royal Favour*, both the king and the queen can do little about Chinenyenwa's similar stubbornness as she fights to become married into the royal family. Such defiance, apparently, would have earned these two some ruthless punishments were it to be in the setting seen in *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life* where the monarchs exercise more dictatorial powers and routinely take drastic and cold-blooded decisions.

The discourse of power in the films also juxtaposes power as a function of physical strength and valour and power as a function of moral and legal authority. In the two films set in the pre-colonial times – *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life* – royal power is represented much more as a function of sheer physical strength and valour. In *Ojadike* in particular, the king's bravery and pedigree as an unconquerable warrior are continuously foregrounded all through the film. He embodies an image of a formidable fighter. He easily pulls his sword, ready to crush any adversary. The image of masculinity dominates the discourse of royal power. In *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life*, the king is portrayed as invariably unemotional, not showing fear or compassion. This quality, instructively, is a recurring theme in the discourse of nobility and greatness in Igbo cosmology as found in Igbo folk tales, proverbs and idioms (Okwenna, 2013). Absence of emotionality is associated with masculinity across cultures (Hall, 1997); thus, masculinity becomes dominant in the discourse of monarchical power in these films.

While valour and physical strength are not emphasised in the films set in the post-colonial period– *Royal Tears* and *Royal Favour* – such theme is not entirely absent. The tiger skin in the costume of the kings in *Egg of Life* and *Ojadike* re-appears in these latter films, but this time more subtly – in the dressing of royals who sometimes wear flowing tops with images of tiger head (*isi agu*) dominating their designs – a trademark attire for Igbo titled men. Thus, re-emerges the symbolism of tiger – connoting physical strength and valour – as an element in portrayal of royalty. But generally, these latter films tend to deemphasize valour, physical strength and violence as royal attributes. Interestingly, aggressiveness is legitimized as a royal attribute in *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life*, while the opposite disposition is delegitimized as a sign of weakness.

7. Discourse of Class and Privilege

The discourse of royal class and privilege is realised in the films through portrayal of the royals as some form of special breed among other humans. This attribute tends to be privileged over every other attribute that culturally earns one respect and privilege, such as age. Thus, in *Ojadike*, the elderly Osondu has to defer to the child Prince Obiora, addressing him as “Your Highness”. The little prince, in turn, will not hesitate to shout down on the old man who appears to be of higher age than his father; “stop complaining!” he sharply rebukes Osondu when the latter is expressing his discomfort at the little prince’s strong-headedness. On another occasion, the prince commands Osondu to climb a tree and pluck a fruit for him. All this shows privileging of royalty over age and seniority; a royal’s class and privilege transcend whatever advantage age can confer. Arguably, this is even more instructive in an Igbo setting where age is so much upheld as a determinant of respect and privilege (Nnadi, 2008; Anumba, 2017).

The privileging of royalty over age continued in the other films. In *Royal Favour*, Prince Nosike’s age is not a barrier to the influence he exercises as seen in the way he confronts Chief Ilodibe when his marriage with the former’s daughter starts going sour. The same obtains with Princess Olaedo in *Royal Tears* where the princess always enjoys her royal privilege apparently without any encumbrance for reasons of age.

In *Ojadike*, the king warns his disrespectful and overambitious brother Egwu that the only thing stopping him from pronouncing a death penalty on him is the fact that he possesses “royal privilege” as a prince. In other words, being born a royal confers on one something that makes their life more precious than that of any other person.

In *Royal Tears* and *Royal Favour*, this discourse is so emphatically entrenched in the narrative of royal matrimony around which the plots of the two films are woven. In the former, a commoner like Kasie is considered too lowly to be married to Princess Olaedo, while in the latter, Chinenyenwa is equally seen as too much a commoner to enjoy the space of the royal matrimony by being wedded to Prince Nosike. In contrast, Cassidy, the son of the rich and illustrious Senator Nwabueze is portrayed as the worthy groom for Olaedo, while Jane, the daughter of Chief Ilodibe, the wealthiest man of the town, is considered the suitable bride for Prince Nosike, with the queen constantly reminding Nosike; “you are now a prince and you should know your class.” In a particular scene where the queen finds Nosike and Chinenyenwa together in the sitting room, she addresses Nosike sternly: “You dare not allow her bring you down to her level... This *thing* beside you ... The pronoun “thing” as employed by the queen in reference to Chinenyenwa aims to emphasize her non-status in the presence of royals. In other words, by being close to the prince, she is merely intruding into the reserved space of royalty.

Furthermore, in a bid to distinguish the royals from the pack, wealth is portrayed as one of the attributes that makes a royal. However, in the films set in the pre-colonial times, this is only implied, as wealth is only silently enacted in the discourse of royal class/privilege. In *Egg of Life*, for instance, the only allusion to wealth as a feature of the royal family is when the king promises to give great wealth to whoever that succeeds in bringing back the egg of life. Contrarily, wealth as a royal attribute is so much foregrounded in the films set in the contemporary time. Cassidy and Jane are portrayed as coming from very rich families; an important credential that qualifies them for royal marriage in *Royal Tears* and *Royal Favour* respectively. In contrast, the queen repeatedly refers to the “wretched” Chinenyenwa as unworthy of getting married to Prince Nosike.

In *Royal Tears* and *Royal Favour*, the palace houses are magnificent pieces of modern architecture. The royals in the two films ride in exquisite cars, often in a convoy; clutching expensive gadgets like smartphones and iPad, and with their houses lavishly furnished– all symbols of affluence. This contrasts with the portrayal of royals in the films set in the pre-colonial times – *Ojadike* and *Egg of Life* – where the palaces are simple compounds with small huts and no fences. The association of Igbo monarchy with wealth, according to Alozie (2013), is a recent phenomenon founded on capitalism and increasing worship of wealth in our contemporary society. The author argues that government’s meddling in the traditional monarchical institution has brought about politicisation of what is otherwise an apolitical entity. “Traditional rulers now run after government contracts and all sorts of largesse. They are now bribed and can be manipulated for selfish political purposes by politicians. Money now rules them” (Alozie, 2013, p.21). He regrets what he terms “devaluation” of Igbo royalty and chieftaincy institution in general.

Generally, the pattern in the discourse of royal class and privilege suggests that the filmmakers view the Igbo royalty culture as dynamic and evolving with the pre-colonial and post-colonial worldview exerting their influence on this evolution. Therefore, the elements that conferred royal class and privilege in the pre-colonial times ought to give way for the intervening elements derived from colonialism to fill the space. This, arguably, leaves room for controversy over the possible cultural imperialism implications of this pattern of representation.

8. Discourse of Gender Power Relations

The discourse of gender power relations in the films under study reveals a dichotomy along the lines of the settings of the films. While the films set in pre-colonial times portray a monarchy that is gendered almost entirely towards masculinity, those set in the post-colonial period infuse some femininity in the gender set-up of the royal power. In *Royal Favour*, the queen exercises some visible degree of influence, while in *Royal Tears*, the only female royal, Princess Olaedo, is projected as the most important character.

Contrarily, in *Egg of Life* and *Ojadike*, the queen is hardly visible as most actions revolve around the three male royals of King Ojadike, Prince Obiora and Prince Egwu. In fact, there appears to be little distinction in status between Queen Akunne and the maidens in the palace. The king unhesitatingly banishes the friend of the queen with the queen having no negotiating power in that moment of dictatorial finality. In contrast, the friend of the princess in *Royal Tears* appears to enjoy much more protection as the queen proves twice that she is able to shield her friend from her father’s occasional hostility. Furthermore, the queen shows the capacity to disagree and argue with her husband regarding the choice of Prince Nosike’s bride. This would have been unthinkable in *Egg of Life* and *Ojadike* where even the child princes appear to earn the respect of the kings more than their mothers can earn. The women are constantly subjects of scolding by the kings who rule the home with an inviolable authority. “Get out of my presence, woman,” the king howls at Queen Akunne when the latter provokes him with the suggestion that Ikemefuna is frail.

But instructively, the power and influence exercised by female royals in the films set in the post-colonial era are largely of domestic, supportive and unofficial nature. In *Royal Favour*, the queen's influence is realised only in her bargaining power in determining the choice of a bride for her son. This reflects the predominant pattern in literature which shows that women are represented in Nigerian films largely in roles that entails powerlessness (Osunkeye, 2014; Adekeye, 2010; Omenugha, 2010).

Very noteworthy is the pattern wherein female royals are portrayed as possessing undesirable characters. This pattern, which runs through the development of the plots of *Royal Favour* sees these feminine royal figures represented as treacherous, wicked and intolerant. They are the moral villains who negate the moral nobility that ought to characterise the royal space. In *Royal Favour*, the queen is the prejudiced fellow, whose lucky sudden rise to royalty has made her arrogant and intolerant of a low-class person like Chinenyenwa. In view of the foregoing analysis, it may be admitted that the filmmakers, in their portrayal of gender power relations in the context of Igbo monarchy, are responding to the changes in real life social structure.

Nevertheless, it is also the truth that Igbo royalty in real life is a largely masculinised institution. It is dominated by a male monarch – the king – who rules in concert with his entirely male cabinet. Even though some communities have started introducing few women into their royal cabinet, generally, male dominance is the norm. Further, the position of the king's wife, *lolo*, is more of a domestic helper and of little or no political significance, which mirrors the familiar scenario seen among political office holders (especially governors and the president) whose wives, first ladies, are mere appendages to their husbands and wield no real or independent political power (Aromona, 2017). Instructively, the title *lolo* is not reserved for a king's wife but generally borne by wives of chieftaincy title holders. Incidentally, the position of a queen – in the sense of a female monarch – seems generally absent in Igbo cosmology. What is usually translated as queen – *eze nwanyi* – refers more to a priestess (usually of water spirit connection) than a monarch. Currently, there is no recognised female monarch in Igbo land (Anumba, 2017). It may hence be stated that the filmmakers were guided by this cultural worldview in their gender construction of Igbo royalty.

9. Key Informant Interview (KII)

The key informant interview (KII) involved 3 respondents who are not always restricted to the roles reflected here; the directors also get involved with production and scriptwriting, while scriptwriters also may get involved with production and directing and so on.

10. Motives for Making Igbo Royal Films

Royal films have become so ubiquitous in the Nigerian movie industry (Osondu, 2016), so the filmmakers were made to address the question of what motivates them to produce such genre. Their answers pointed to cultural protectionism as one of the motivating factors; they felt the urge to project their cultural heritage as Igbos and which they believed royalty is part of.

On his part, Wendy Imasuen, a director, reasoned that the royal position in Igbo land is too significant to be left out while setting film in Igbo culture. He said:

Royalty is a normal setting in any movie that has the Igbo background, there are some hidden narratives that we need to bring out about the Igbo people, and you cannot just do that in isolation from the ruler of a society you are trying to present to the audience...If you are starting a story about the Igbo community, Igwe should be your number one, the ruler, our guide.

Ernest Obi, a producer, in the same vein, concurred that what is presented as royal films in Nigerian film industry helps in boosting sales. According to him, "it works for marketers" irrespective of the fact that "historically we are telling the wrong story to the people" given that royalty is not traditionally a part of Igbo culture.

Stan Amadi, a scriptwriter agreed with the assertion that a strong motive behind the rising profile of Igbo royal films in Nigerian film industry is commercial in nature. His words:

The recurring theme of Igbo royalty in Nigerian film industry movies is a part of the holistic package because without it, it will be so parochial. It will be so narrow that it loses a kind of appeal within some market or area of consumption. I also think it is a point of sales in marketing the movies because the splendour of the Igbo royalty projected in the movie is a form of sales enhancement. It is of immense business and economic appeal.

Thus, sales and profit become an important motivation determining what is released for public consumption. This, to any extent, may align with the arguments of the Frankfurt School that economic logic is the major determinant of content and aesthetics in popular culture. Literature suggests that media focus on royals, particularly in the context of the British monarchy, has been an important strategy of increasing audience patronage and maximising profit for media establishments (Baldin, 2012).

11. Source of Idea of Igbo Monarchy

The key informants pointed to their personal observation of everyday cultural practices as an important source of the idea which they reproduce in Igbo monarchy films. In other words, the idea of what they represent as Igbo royalty is drawn from what they have personally observed from their Igbo environment.

Nonetheless, Ernest Obi and Stan Amadi argued that the ultimate source of royalty idea represented in films set in Igbo culture is other cultures outside Igbo land, as Igbos originally did not have monarchy. Obi contended that "historically, monarchy never actually existed (in Igbo land) ... because every freeborn felt he has a right over his immediate family so ... we could have clan leaders but not kings." This view in part aligns with the position in literature that most part of Igbo land originally had no king prior to European contact (Afigbo 2000).

The foregoing view does not necessarily contradict the view that filmmakers gain their idea from their observation of their environment and through oral and written literature. It rather insists that wherever this idea is gotten from, it must have originated from other cultures ultimately. In other words, observable contemporary Igbo practices as well as oral and written literature cannot be the original sources. If this view is upheld, then what goes on in the Igbo monarchy films is cultural hybridisation. Cultural hybridisation explains the process whereby elements of one culture mix with those of others whether in practice or in representation in art forms such as literature, film etc to generate a supposedly new cultural experience (Idogho, 2015). Generally, the reality of cultural hybridization in Nigerian film industry films has been widely admitted in scholarship (Agba, 2014; Idogho, 2015; Omijie, 2015).

The key informants claimed that in leveraging these sources of idea of Igbo royalty, they engage in research. According to Wendy Imaseun, this research is key in his role as a director. "When I direct a movie, I do research, consult books, the Internet and ask a lot of questions to guide me through the production." Similarly, Peace Egwu stated; "We grow, we want to know more, we ask questions, and we want to teach the younger ones how it was done in the ancient days. This is what actually informs our going deeper and digging

deeper to bring out those things of the ancient times." Stan Amadi described such research as indispensable, advising that filmmakers should prioritise it in their attempt to portray aspects of Igbo culture including royalty.

12. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that representation of Igbo monarchy in Nigerian film industry films strikes the chord of some dominant discourses of power, class and gender in Nigeria. The monarchs of the pre-colonial era were portrayed as very powerful and dictatorial while their counterparts of the post-colonial era were portrayed as possessing less power and subject to the authority of the government. Similarly, royal class was constructed based on movies obtained in the two aforementioned eras, while gender as related to monarchy was constructed following the same pattern. Hence, the idea of monarchy as found in the films could be said to be a function of ideas borrowed from the environment of the filmmakers. This corresponds with the admission of the filmmakers that they have gained their idea through personal observation of the trends in Igbo land and encounter with Igbo literature – oral and written.

The foregoing implies that in representing Igbo royalty, the filmmakers cannot be isolated as independent actors, but should be considered as part of a network of actors and variables that influence meaning in society, such as socially held beliefs about monarchy, cultural biases of the film producers and commercial imperatives of the film industry. Incidentally, all these contributory factors were revealed in the course of the key informant interview (KII). This conclusion aligns with the representation theory which conceives media text as a product of culture itself; as a reflection of biases, interests and other factors in society (Machin & Mayr, 2012). This study has thus validated the position of this theory in the precise area of representation of Igbo royalty in Nigerian film industry films.

Nonetheless, there is need to encourage production of films that faithfully promote indigenous culture as it relates to Igbo royalty and filmmakers should endeavour to engage the audience with their works by making the works more critical part of their lives. Filmmakers should go beyond thinking what momentarily satisfies the audience but start figuring out how their audience use their work to get knowledge, and with that comes the shift from a passive one-way relationship from a maker who just wants to make money to a fan who just want a momentary escape to an active participatory relationship between an instigator and the community they are part of. If filmmakers know how people find and react to their works, they can unleash their power of creativity to fully engage them.

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