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## **The City Girl and Sexuality in Yoruba Films: An Assessment.**

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## **Abstract**

The human society is made up largely of people of the two genders, male and female. The roles of both male and female sexes are equally indispensable and complementary in every society. Hence, the issue of sex and sexuality is inevitable. However, the mode of sex and sexuality across culture globally differ greatly. Subsistent norms, ethics and moral values within a given society determine the acceptable and the unacceptable sexual behaviours within each society. Meanwhile, the literature of a society whether oral, written or audio-visual (film) speak volumes about the prevalent culture of the society as it reflects and refracts the existing culture of the society. This paper therefore seeks to assess the presentation and representation of the city girl sexual life in selected Yoruba video films from the feminist perspective. The paper finds out that the city girl sexual life is enveloped with love, dedication and reliability. The young modern city girl is also educated and displays the gains of educational and economic empowerment in her relationship with the opposite sex in Yoruba video films. Meanwhile, Yoruba video film producers display some amount of sexual politics in their films by painting the city girl with some black patches that mar the city girl's image as a violent, promiscuous and dangerous personality. The paper concludes that much as sex and sexuality is unavoidable in the society where male and female are players alike, the city girl needed not to be awashed as a social misfit sexually as some Yoruba films present her. Rather, film-makers should avail themselves to the dynamics of cultural change and globalization as they affect the social and sexual life of the city girl.

## **Introduction**

The issue of sex and sexuality in most cultures of the world differ greatly. It is often placed under moral and ethical issues which each society measure according to her laid down rules guiding or regulating the act. Meanwhile, sex and sexuality has to do with the life style of the individual and the society at large, for sexuality is attached to love and act of showing love to one another mostly to the opposite sex. The different cultures of the world therefore necessitate the divergent permissible and non-permissible acts of sex and sexuality across the world. In which case, perspectives on sexuality in one society cannot be used to ascertain or measure what ought to or ought not to be done in another. For what is considered ethical or moral in one society may not be so in another.

On the one hand, culture to some people is static traditionally and it is dynamic in other situations especially in the contemporary society of globalization. Almost all aspects of human life are now transferable through the internet. Hence, cultures are affected and effected across the globe, the Yoruba society is not an exception here. The young city girl's sexuality is our focus in this paper. She is often seen in most literatures in Yoruba society as the importer of the so called foreign cultures. In another stead, she is seen as one who travels between various cultures of the world. The Yoruba film-makers cannot hide their feelings on the sexual life of the city girl, as they display their sentiments in several films produced on the life style of the city girls. This paper therefore seeks to assess the presentation and representation of the symbol of the city girl in Yoruba video films from the feminist point of view.

## **Culture, Film, Society and Feminism**

Different individuals of varied disciplines have tried to consider the term 'culture' in consonance with their disciplines. However, virtually all their varied definitions of 'culture' seem to anchor on the anthropological definition given by Edward Taylor in 1871. Culture is considered as:

that complex whole which include knowledge, belief, law, art, morals, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society.

(Cited in Thompson et al 1991: 19).

The above indicates that culture is both "shared" and "learnt" in a community or a given linguistic group. Thus, culture is a communal property as it reflects the being of an individual in its totality. Culture therefore gives a group of people its peculiar identity. Irele (1991: 52) also defines culture as the totality of the people's way of life and he goes further to classify culture into the material and spiritual. The spiritual stems from the ethos and it mainly rests on the inner aspect of culture. This includes belief, custom, law, family, ethics vis-a-vis sex and sexuality and the socio-political organization of a society.

More often than not, the sociological aspect of culture is usually reflected in Yoruba literature in oral, written and audio-visual texts. Literary art therefore is an integral part of culture which can be used to organize and boost the culture of a society. This corroborates the sociology of literature view on the inter-relationship between literature and society. According to Ebewo (1991: 60)

Society produces and influences a writer and his work, and the writer in turn through his work influences society.

The above assertion is true of Yoruba video films under study in this paper. The film-makers in a bid to influence their society comment freely through their films on the

socio-political, religious, economic, moral and ethical issues in the society.

On the other hand, literature can be considered as social history of a people. Whatever image the literary artist paints or the script writer presents in films is taken as the subsisting tradition of the people because literature reflects and refracts the society.

Leavis in this instance defines social history as:

The daily life of the inhabitants of a land in past ages which includes the human as well as the economic relation of different classes to one another, the character of the family and household life, the conditions of labour and of leisure, the attitude of man to nature, the culture of each age as it arose out of these general conditions of life, and took ever-changing forms in religion, literature and music, architecture, learning and thought. (Leavis 1945: 80).

In view of the above, film as literature is perceived as an artist documentation of the life of the society. It preserves the realities of the day, the social experience, joy, sadness and triumphs for posterity. According to Bamidele (2000: 70), without the literary witness, a student of society will be blind to the fullness of that society. Film in our own case shall serve this cause to be able to place on record the realities of our day concerning the sexual life style of the city girl.

The Yoruba film industry came into being in 1976 with the production of *Ajani Ogun* by *Ola Balogun*, who had earlier produced *Amadi* in Igbo language in 1975. Until then, the tradition was to watch foreign films in Nigeria cinema halls. The present day Nigerian film industry known as "Nollywood" is made popular and sustained by the video films that came on board in the 80s during the harsh economic programme of Government, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that caused the crashing out of business of many independent-professional film-makers who could not fund the neck breaking cost of producing celluloid film. (Adesanya 1997: 15; Olujinmi 2004: 30). The

video format has since been able to retain the indigenous film audience without losing a beat in the tempo of viewing images on the screen, through the mass audio-visual literature known as video films. Most of the stories in Yoruba video films focus on the family, the bedrock of the society hence, issues on sex and sexually, inter-personal relationship and themes such as love, treachery, oppression, infidelity, violence, rebellion, spouse battering and the likes are shown in the films as it concerns individual in the family.

According to Mulvey (1979: 180), the first journal of feminist film criticism came out in 1972 in California. The first two women's film festivals were also organized in New York in 1972. The events were in response, in terms of film, to early attention paid by women's movement to politics of representation. Before the advent of feminism, the woman is always presented in films as victim, temptress, evil incarnate and mother earth. Cowrie (1975: 134 - 135) says "women's involvement in film is to attack the oppressive representation of women in films which are normally made by men". In short, feminist film is a strategy in the struggle against sexism, separatism and a means of disseminating women's ideology. Ajayi (2007: 139) asserts that patriarchy is the most crucial form of feminine domination, the legitimacy of which ironically rests upon tradition.

The image of the woman as painted in any literary work is an evidence of the nature, growth and development of perspectives in the literary tradition of a society on women. By and large, literature reflects the society, a duplicate of such community reduced into print words of audio-visual in our own stance. The feminists on the other hand, attempt to analyze the place of the woman in the society through the literature of the community. They affirm that the subordinate position of women places a lot of

limitations on their quest for a proper realization of womanhood. It therefore, behooves them to reject through feminist oriented writings, the subjective views of men about the capabilities of the female sex.

### **The City Girl's Sexual Life in Yoruba Video Films**

The City girl's sexual life is presented in an ambivalent form in Yoruba video films. The selected Yoruba video films for this study include *Danfo Driver*, *Ododo Eye*, *K.K.K. (Ko dun, Ko po, Ko pe)*, *E#dunjobi*, *Oore Pe*, *Mayowa* and *Lofelofe*.

*Danfo Driver* focuses on the wrong attitude of parents who insist on their siblings to marry from a particular family or social group. It also treats the influence of money on people when it comes to marital affairs. Alade and Ireti started their love affairs in the secondary school. At the verge of Alade's journey to overseas for further education; he suddenly becomes an orphan when armed robbers killed his parents. He faces several problems, drops out of school without a trade; hence, he becomes a danfo driver. Meanwhile, his love affairs with Ireti now a law student, blossom until Ireti's father, Jide Babs discovers and tries to pull them apart, simply because Alade is a danfo driver. However, Ireti continues to love and support Alade, despite her father's disapproval.

Alade passes through several problems, cheat, blackmail, sexual harassment, deportation from London and incarceration in the police cell. The incident of freeing Alade from police custody brought the two lovers, Alade and Ireti together again which necessitated the renewal and continuation of their love affair. Incidentally, Ireti's father, Jide Babs, has been looking for Alade to collect his father's indemnity from Jide Babs Insurance Company to no avail. His sudden appearance and coming together of the two lovers paved the way for Alade to collect the fund while Jide Babs immediately approves

the marriage of Irete, the lawyer and Alade, the Danfo Driver. Irete and Alade are happy at this. Irete is a great benefactor and a consistent lover to Alade, the hero of the film from the feminist perspective; Irete's behaviour is contrary to Yoruba belief as expressed in this maxim:

Owo lobinrin mo.  
It is money women love most.

Here, Irete ignores the fact that Alade is poor and expresses her love unconditionally for the downtrodden Danfo Driver, whereas a man, Jide Babs, who is Irete's father, displays his love for riches and materialism.

*Ko dun, Ko po, Ko pe* (a.k.a. K.K.K.) and *Ododo Eye* are films that treat the price a woman in Yoruba society has to pay for being affluent or barren. Amope and Rose, the Magistrate are economically buoyant as city ladies. Amope inherits her father's estate, Chief Rhodes, as a young city lady. She marries Tunji Akorede but has no child. The Magistrate in *Ododo Eye*, is a beautiful young city lady, who is successful in business and a competent judge. No man asks for her hand in marriage, and in consequence, she has no child.

Meanwhile, Amope's husband, Tunji Akorede becomes wayward, sleeps about with different ladies in the city and becomes a home deserter. Amope remains unperturbed but her agony increases because of her childlessness and husband's infidelity. She eventually becomes pregnant for her husband after enduring much pain and agony. In the case of Rose, her sister torments her and tells her that her position and wealth cannot be a substitute for her childlessness. In consequence, Rose gets miserably drunk and lures her lowly and semi-alcoholic police orderly to bed, who impregnates her. These ladies triumph in having babies and also endure painful situation. Even when they are economically strong than their lovers, they still stoop to conquer.

In *Oore Pe*, Ebun and Kayode started their love affairs in the secondary school. At the point of paying for the final secondary school examination, Kayode falls sick and hospitalized. Ebun uses her examination fee to pay her boy friend's hospital fee as she abandons her final secondary school examination to cater for her sick lover. Ebun courageously stands behind Kayode, plays the role of financier and supporter to Kayode her lover, till they both complete their tertiary education. Soon after their graduation, Kayode starts dating Adejoke while they are on their National Youth Service Corps (N.Y.S.C.) programme. Ebun, though superior to Kayode financially as a child of a rich man in the city, sees herself as Kayode's supporter by doing everything to make him succeed in life. On the contrary, Kayode sees Ebun as somebody to use to get to the top and later jettison. Kayode marries Adejoke in the film as he dumps Ebun his benefactor.

In *Lofelofe*, *Mayowa* and *K.K.K. I & II*, Mabel, Ireti, Tolani and Wumi are the city girls or ladies whose sexual lives are treated extensively. Promiscuity, prostitution, immorality and blackmail are largely employed in the plots of the films to bring to the fore the sexual life of these ladies. Mabel in *Lofelofe* goes from one man to another to be able to have children for her husband who has a low sperm count. She seduces Kazeem, her husband's friend and Dotun, her husband's younger brother. When the truth becomes known, Mabel is thrown out of the family and she becomes insane. Mabel is here painted as a seducer, sex maniac and an immoral personality in the film.

Ireti in *Edunjobi* possesses a negative attribute that contradicts that of her twin sister, Ibukun. Their father, Jide Babs, over pampers Ireti, allows her to live a frivolous and unguarded life that results in her waywardness, prostitution, lies and greediness in Lagos. Ireti loves money so much that she sleeps with all shades of men. She drinks all

brands of alcohol and smokes like chimney. She ignorantly snatches Dr. Wale, her twin sister's boy friend that impregnates her. She later abandons her little child to live in Akure as a prostitute when Dr. Wale deserted her because of her reckless life.

Coincidence is a common occurrence in films, Ireti runs into Dr. Wale again in Akure. She demands for a million naira ransom from him to avoid blackmail. But unknown to both, Ireti and Ibukun, Wale is married to Ibukun as her husband. Ireti's twin sister, Ibukun unfortunately killed her in an auto-crash. Ireti's sexual life is that of a liar, smoker, cheat, drunkard, blackmailer and above all, a prostitute in the film.

*Mayowa* focuses on the filth and decay sexual life of Tolani as a city lady. The economic hardship of her family forced her to travel abroad in search of greener pasture. In London, Tolani works hard and sends money home to her husband to build a house. She becomes wayward as she has illicit affairs with Jaye. Her relationship with Jaye produces the child named Mayowa in the film. Tolani is unfortunately deported to Nigeria with her baby. She is enveloped in great shame when her husband has to appear at the police station to bail her. There, the secret of her illicit affairs could no more be hidden. Tolani is awashed as an adulteress, cheat and liar for having a child outside wedlock which Africans and Yoruba people abhor. The outcome of the film shows the dangers associated with couples living miles apart on account of searching for economic reward for the family.

Wumi, in *K.K.K*, preys on the desperate desire of Tunji for a son, to inherit his estate after him when his wife, Amope could not bear a child on time. Wumi forces Tunji to sign a document that gives half of his estate to her purported male child yet unborn, She blackmails Tunji with the pregnancy and collects one million naira from him. Wumi

holds Tunji captive in her palatial home for three weeks. She arranges for the killing of Tunji's wife, Mrs. Amope Daniels. She also sends gun-trotting ladies about to threaten any female that attempts to share Tunji with her. Wumi's sexual life is one enveloped in desperation, terrorism, coercion and fraud.

### **Discussion and Assessment**

From the above, it is evident that the sexual life of the city girl or lady is one of the main focus of Yoruba filmmakers. As a personality in the city, the girl or lady here comes under focus because she is considered as future mother who will build the nation. Thus, the filmmakers beam their searchlight on her to educate their audience on the life style of the city girl. One thing that is worthy of note is that the image of the city girls as presented in the selected films is ambivalent: of love and violence. Rose, Irete, Amope and Egun in *Ododo Eye*, *Danfo Driver*, *K.K.K.* and *Oore Pe* respectively are all ladies of pleasant characters. They enjoy a favourable portrait of love, dedication, sympathetic and caring partners to their lovers. They displayed a healthy and pleasant love to their partners in the films.

Rose and Irete for instance, are qualified lawyers, gainfully employed and economically empowered. They choose to marry lowly men, who could not match them as husbands. This shows that these city ladies inadvertently came down from their high horses and stoop to love their husbands. It has been observed by Olujinmi (2004: 258) that empowered women and ladies are often put under the yoke of tradition hence they break their independence or choice of who to marry in most Yoruba video films. Rose uses her wealth and position in the society to elevate the impoverished police orderly by making him rich. The man could have died in penury. Rose succumbed to tradition and

refuses to behave as a lesbian feminist of the Western culture would do according to Jill Johnson cited in Kolawole (1997:5) that:

We (lesbian feminists) don't have to have anything to do with men at all. They've taken care of themselves... feminism at heart, is massive complaint, lesbianism is the answer. Until all women are lesbians, there will be no true political revolution.

Rose could have chosen, as a successful city lady, to live without a man but her choice and life style portray her as a true African woman who can go extra mile to promote and uphold the tradition of her people as it conforms to the African womanist ideology.

According to Kolawole (1997: 30):

The African woman cherishes her role as a home maker as well as her status as a mother or a potential mother.

For the sake of the African culture and tradition, Rose as a typical African lady falls for the man below her status.

Amope, Ebum, Rose and Ireti are equally benefactors to their men. While Amope handed over her father's estate to Tunji, Ebum pays Kayode's hospital bill as against her final secondary school examination fee. Rose gives out substantial money to his orderly to go into business and Ireti is instrumental to Alade's progress in every way. These ladies display sexuality with love, dedication and dependability in their relationship in the face of gross humiliation, provocation and torture or probably disappointment from their men. Theirs is a kind of healthy sexual relationship that promotes peace and tranquility for all.

Unfortunately though, a snag is often attached to the good sexual qualities of the girls. The educationally empowered city girl is made to beg or buy love in the video films. In which case, men stay away from enlightened and well informed girls because

they usually combine intellect with beauty and prosperity. Meanwhile, film producers should not be ignorant of the fact that African men often shy away from marrying highly successful ladies as wives. The fact is that most African men and especially Yoruba people always want to have the supine, passive, submissive and less educated ladies as wives so as to have absolute control on them without much resistance or challenge. Contemporary city girls or ladies are not in this class as educational awareness and empowerment have lifted them up to the level of informed ladies who know what they want or do not like. The Yoruba video film producers seem to continue in the promotion of the societal maxim that:

The man and the world do not change. It is only the  
woman who has to bend or break.

The idea in the above maxim is often promoted in Yoruba video films as they break the economically empowered ladies to marry men below their status or even make them childless so that they would cry or suffer to have one. This kind of message is not the absolute truth of the sexual life of the city girl. There are numerous city ladies who are loving, dedicated, loyal, economically and educationally empowered in charge of homes and with children in our society. Apart from this, there are many decent city ladies who have their personal buildings, cars and children that are not in anyway entangled in sexual immorality. There are also several city girls who are gainfully employed and are occupying top positions in work places that are not involved in immoral sexual affairs as depicted in the films. These are what the film producers are expected to focus and not the negative side that has become the delight of the filmmakers. Yoruba filmmaker should desist from overgeneralization of immoral sexual acts of city girls because of their personal economic gains. It is unfair on the Yoruba nation and to the Yoruba female folk

generally for film producers to paint the city girl in this manner.

The sexual life of Mabel, Tolani, Wumi and Ireti of *Edunjobi* is in contrast with those discussed above. Much as these ladies also show and display maturity in their sexual relationship in the films, it is sexuality encapsulated with ulterior motive. Ireti and Wumi have wrong motives for engaging in sexual activities in *Edunjobi* and *K.K.K.* respectively. Ireti derives her daily income from it as a commercial sex worker (CSW) as she goes about sleeping with men, defrauding and jilting her lovers. For her, it is using what she has to get what she wants. She employs blackmail to extort money and defraud Dr. Wale of one million naira for having a child for her. This act is injurious as both Ireti and Dr. Wale come to unhappy end in the film.

Wumi also employs falsehood, blackmail, extortion, coercion and violence in her sexual engagement with Tunji in *K.K.K.* She lied that she is pregnant for the desperate Tunji who is in dire need of a male child to inherit his estate. She uses the purported pregnancy to collect one million naira from Tunji and also holds Tunji captive for three weeks in order to make him sign a prepared document that gives Wumi half of Tunji's property. This kind of sexual activity is enshrouded with inordinate ambition which cannot do both parties any good. Acts of fraud, violence, terrorism and coercion should not be employed in sex and sexual enterprise under whatever guise because it is anti social and injurious to the society at large.

In the case of Tolani and Mabel in *Mayowa* and *Lofelofe* their extra sexual marital affairs lead them to having a child or in search of one out of wedlock. In an attempt to have a child, probably, to cover the shame of her husband, Mabel employs seduction to lure her husband's friend and brother to sleep with her. The outcome of her action points

to the fact that seduction is not a healthy weapon to be used in sexual activity. This turns her into a sex maniac, an immoral personality and an outcast as she is thrown out of the family thereafter. The city girl should learn a good lesson from Mabel and not to cover up the men's inadequacies sexually. Rather, the fact must be made known to the man's family as well as seeking medical attention to rectify the anomaly. African men hardly cover up their barren women but unfortunately African women are always ready to support their impotent men. In any relationship where men are sexually deficient as in *Lofelofe*, a child(ren) could be adopted for the family, if the lady desires to continue in the relationship with the sterile man. This will save her from undue embarrassment.

Tolani's illegitimate affair with Jaye in London produces the baby named Mayowa in *Mayowa* film. Her illegal sexual activity is made possible as a result of distance. She is brought to great shame when her infidelity could not be hidden from her husband. The bottom line of the film is to bring to bear the importance of people who are engaged to stay together. Much as people can control or hold their passions for sex, it may not be for eternity. Sex and sexuality is an unavoidable act which human beings, ones engaged in, may not be brought to an abrupt end suddenly. The city lady should be weary of staying too far away from her partner under the pretext of seeking for economic reward. Couples in the contemporary society should also be careful with embarking on long journeys that will keep them away from their spouse. It is an unhealthy situation which must be addressed. Stories abound on how several homes have broken up as a result of this. Some people raise another home in foreign lands to secure their papers and stay permit. Some don't even return home again. This film is an eye opener to the evil of seeking economic reward in foreign countries without taking the spouse along. It breeds

unhealthy sexual relationship that turns out to hurt couples.

## **Conclusion**

The Yoruba video films as audio-visual literature treat sex and sexuality as it relates to the contemporary society. The sexual life of the city girl or lady has been the focus of this paper. We are able to see that most of our city girls today are educationally and economically empowered. They also display the gains of empowerment as great benefactors of their lovers in the films. While Yoruba film producers present the good side of the city girl's sexual life as loving, dedicated, supportive and enduring, they yet paint the bad and ugly sides of her sexual life. The city girl in some of the films is made to embrace prostitution, smokes cigarette, drinks alcohol, wears body exposing dresses, attends parties and is an accomplice of men of questionable characters. She is prone to danger, and she is equally harmful to her clients. However, the city girl or lady does not come to a good end. Some Yoruba video films also attach violence, brigandry and other vices to the city girls' sexual life which portrays her in bad light.

This picture of the city girl in Yoruba video films is a major flaw in the presentation and representation of the girls in the city. The film producers want us to believe that all girls in the cities are prostitutes. This is far from the truth. There are many young girls in the cities who may look sophisticated but are not commercial sex workers, harmful or violent. Yoruba film producers should rather take a serious look at this and present always the positive sides of the city girl rather than the negative because they talk to people in their homes through the films they produce. Hence, the society should be appropriately educated on the sexual life of the city girl. It is also the responsibility of governments and the Nigerian film Censors Board to be critical in their assessment of the content analysis and representation of individuals in the society as it touches the sexual

life of the city girl in films. Government agencies that are responsible for image making of the nation should show concern on how the sexual life of the woman in Nigerian films is painted. The Ministry of Culture, Youth Development and Tourism at all levels of government in the nation should put policies in place on sexuality in films in Nigeria in order to let the entire world know the true picture of the Nigerian city girl.

There should also be policies to regulate the presentation of the sexes, male and female in Nigerian films. It is heart warming to know that Nigerian films are a delight in most African countries and foreign nations too. Therefore, the image of the individuals in each film speaks volume about the Nigerian citizens and nation; hence it should be properly addressed.

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