

CULTURAL HYBRIDITY IN SELECTED IGBO ROYALTY FILMS

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Abstract

This study has investigated cultural hybridity in selected Igbo royalty films. More precisely, it has analyzed Igbo royalty-based films with a view to revealing certain aesthetic and thematic patterns that characterize the hybridization. Situated within the framework of postcolonial theory, the study employed the textual analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology for a critical reading of the three selected films; Royal Favour, Royal Tears and King of Kings. Findings reveal that hybridization in the three films occurred in all key aspects of representation of Igbo royalty – costumes, props, speeches/dialogues and movements/ gestures. In other words, the costumes, props, dialogues and gestures associated with the royals and their supporting characters are realized through blending of Indigenous and Western cultures. Further, the study found that hybridization served in advancing the narrative of beauty, class and royalty in the three films. In so doing, the films appeared to privilege Western ideas of beauty and class over what these might mean in a purely indigenous setting, hence their portrayal of royal class is realized by imposing elements of Western culture on the traditional royal setting. Lastly, there appears to be some ideological ambivalence in the manner hybridization is deployed in the three films; though relying on Western cultural elements to validate class and royalty, the films still embody narratives that tend to negate these as mere cosmetics that are neither superior to indigenous culture nor to be placed above genuine human values of love and humility. It is therefore concluded that cultural hybridization in Igbo royalty films is both an aesthetic and ideological fact, wherein hybridization is deployed for constructing ideas of royalty and for advancing certain ideological perspectives, which tend to both affirm and deny the superiority of Western culture over the indigenous culture. The study, among others, recommends the institution of high profile awards to encourage production of local films that faithfully promote indigenous cultures.

INTRODUCTION

The institution of monarchy is a common phenomenon with states, empires, countries and other similar entities, which makes the institution a universal concept, with a long history. Olaoba writes that over the years, the continent of Africa has operated monarchy institutions before colonial rule (89). Today, there is simply no escaping the traditional monarchy; there are signs and traces of them everywhere and that is why Ottenberg states that monarchies are still relevant and useful in the twenty-first century because monarchies unite diverse and often hostile ethnic groups and make it difficult to totally or radically alter a community's politics (122). In Nigeria, a traditional ruler is identified as the most paramount sovereign in any community. Generally, he is recognized by his subjects as the chief custodian of the people's culture and tradition (Oladesu 18).

Like most other pre-modern human societies, the traditional societies in the territories later to be amalgamated as Nigeria were largely administered by monarchies (Mua'azu 15). For the Igbo ethnic group, however, the situation was quite different as the 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 (Afigbo 51; Onwumechili 200). 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 Onitsha and Aro communities; the latter being a powerful and territorially ambitious empire (Afigbo 18). 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 100).

Admittedly, today, the monarchy 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. Eke opines that the Igbo king is the product of mere mortals, ordinary human beings. “He was not made by the gods or by spirits, and hence, does not wield absolute powers” (2). Notwithstanding, the differing assertions concerning the inception and administration of the monarchy institution in Igboland, just like in other Nigerian societies, it 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 20). Hence, the monarchy institution acts as the traditional governing body, agent of development and custodian of values and norms (Okachie 21). In view of this crucial position of the monarchy system in the contemporary Igbo society, the media’s role in representing it becomes vital given that media representation is a powerful element that shapes social experience (Hall 11; McQuail 217). Given the glamour and sensation that are usually associated with monarchy, it has become an attractive subject for media producers in generating their discursive dynamics (Baldin 20).

Brooks and Hebert opine that in our modern, mediated society, much of what comes to pass as important is based often on the stories produced and disseminated by media institutions. Much of what audiences know and care about is based on the images, symbols, and narratives in radio, television, film, music, and other media (216). Media, in short, are central to what ultimately come to represent our social realities. Every time one is exposed to media content, one extends one’s experience of life. However, because the producers of the media text have selected the information we receive, our experiences are restricted. By viewing media representations our prejudices can be reinforced or shattered (Hall 11; McQuail 261).

In today's Nigeria, the local film industry Nollywood, has arguably emerged as an important agency of representation being that it has become a popular media channel amongst the indigenous audience (Onuzulike 176; Omijie 15). Consequently, its representation of any aspect of the people's experience is to be taken seriously (Omijie 8). Monarchy as an aspect of the people's cultural experience also comes under this consideration. The emergence of Nollywood 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 golden opportunity for Nigeria (and indeed Africa) to tell her own story, protect and preserve her culture via locally made video films (Mba 16; Akpabio and Mustapha-Lambe 13). This is against the alleged cultural imperialism imposed by the earlier dominance of the local cinema scene by Western films (Okoye 18). Nevertheless, while Nollywood films have been "local" in terms of production hands and actors, they are many a time a hybrid of foreign and local images by way of language, costume, theme and so on, raising the question as to the actual cultural integrity of the films. Royalty has become a recurring theme in Nollywood in recent times with some of the royalty films set in the past and some in the present (Osondu 11). With the tendency of the films to represent the indigenous culture in hybridized terms, concern may arise as to the accuracy and implications of such cultural representations including as they relate to indigenous monarchy.

Considering the above highlighted issues, the study is precisely geared towards the following objectives:

- i. To find out the aspects of Igbo royalty that are hybridized in Nollywood films;
- ii. To establish the aesthetic patterns that characterize hybridization of Igbo royalty in Nollywood films; and
- iii. To establish the thematic patterns that are embodied by hybridization of Igbo royalty in Nollywood films.

AN OVERVIEW OF IGBO MONARCHY

Okodili describes kingship in Igbo land as a sacred and highly revered institution. Its awe-inspiring mysteries, myths, glamour and royalty have been major preoccupations among historians and experts in the mores of the land. It is essentially a unifying factor and custodian of the people's norms, beliefs and cultural heritage. Being a highly respected institution, a king's life, in principle and practice, is significantly free from any form of blame (2). It is generally believed in scholarship that Igbo kingship institutions originated from three sources. The first source is indigenous and ancient priesthood, which traditionally combined clerical and political duties in the village-based republics. The second source is the colonial imposition on Igbo communities by the neighboring Benin Empire. There is, however, an opposite view that the Eze of Nri imposed or influenced the constitution of the Benin Oba's status. The third source of origin of Igbo kingship is the 19th and 20th century colonial impositions by the British Empire. Under an indirect rule policy, Warrant Chiefs (men who served as tax collectors and wielded some form of powers as mediators between the colonial masters and the natives) were created by the colonial administration. Though native to the communities, the Warrant Chiefs were usually selected from among those who cooperated more with the foreign rulers (Eke 9).

The king in Igbo land embodies all virtues and the people see him as a symbol of purity. Eke 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 (4). Apart from being a secular ruler, the king is also imbued with spiritual powers and authority. He is the High Priest, and therefore at the head of all traditional religious functions in the community (Afigbo 99). In

most communities, the kingship stool is rotational among royal families who take turns to produce the kings. But the age-long practice has often led to prolonged litigations that had torn most communities apart. In the past, potential contenders to any throne were brought before the Chief Priest who consults the gods to know the best person to be crowned king and the outcome is accepted by all without complaint for fear of the anger of the gods (Ekek 5).

In keeping with the tradition of secrecy that surrounds the affairs of the king, his illness and eventual death is kept secret from the public for a long time to allow the performance of all traditional rituals that precede his burial. The news of the king's death is broken to his subjects in a metaphor-laden linguistic expression such as *igwe jiri* or *igwe ejiele*, meaning the steel or iron is broken. The Igwe's second-in-command, the *Onowu* or Traditional Prime Minister, immediately assumes the office of the late king as a regent until a new king is appointed (Afigbo 99). Nonetheless, with the advent of westernization, the concept of kingship in Igbo land has changed significantly such that the institution has lost much of its traditional content, power and prestige (Okodili 3).

IGBO ROYALTY FILMS

Royalty has become a constant subject in Nollywood productions. While some films of this genre were released in the early years of the industry, they seem to have gained more impetus in recent years (Osondu 11). While the motive behind the ubiquity of such films these days may not have been exactly determined, Ekwenchi observes that economic logic, which she says is a strong force shaping thematic and aesthetic judgments in Nollywood, is likely to be a major factor here (13). Royalty films in Nollywood focus on royal personalities and royal affairs. Akaigwe explains this genre as:

Films which stories revolve around the traditional royal family that includes the king, queen, prince,

princess, chief priest, royal guards and maids. They feature colourful traditional costumes, the supreme position of royalty and the relevance of cultural beliefs and tradition. Examples of these movies include *Iyore*, *Royal love*, *Blind king*, *Oba Ana*, etc (122).

When royalty films are set in Igbo land, they can be termed Igbo royalty films irrespective of whether the language of the films is Igbo or English. In terms of the personalities and subjects featured, such films are basically the same with others set in other ethnic environments. The distinguishing factors is the Igbo environment (Akaigwe 124).

Igbo royalty, like other elements of indigenous culture, has been observed as suffering misrepresentation in Nollywood. Ekwenchi, for instance, observes that at times Igbo royals are clothed in "borrowed" costumes suggesting that the filmmakers have failed to carry out the research well. The reference here, however, is to costumes of Bini, Yoruba and other indigenous tribes which the writer claims are made part of regalia of Igbo royals (14). Such observation is equally made by Aluu who describes this as "unnecessary caricature" (109). Nonetheless, one imagines that such hybridization of indigenous royalty is likely to go beyond the local borders to include elements from Western cultures. This is given the observed ubiquitous presence of such Western cultures in Nollywood films generally (Oduah 201).

CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION, POST-COLONIALISM AND NOLLYWOOD

Hybridization, according to Acheraiou, is "a cross between two separate races, plants or cultures. Acheraiou notes that a hybrid is something that is mixed, and hybridity is simply mixture... It has been a feature of all civilizations since time immemorial" (190).

Hybridization 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 (Kraidy 316, Idogho 13). However, cultural hybridity presents its difficulties and contestations as scholars have taken differing views as to its nature and implications (Omoniyi 109, Okeoma 12).

Cultural hybridity is an important subject in the post-colonial discourse given that hybridisation of culture is a key experience of colonised peoples. Their colonial experience ensures that their culture is now a hybrid of indigenous and Western elements (Oduah, 2013). Such hybrid means that a new form of cultural experience is generated for the people (Kraidy 316, Idogho 13). In Nollywood films, hybridity has become an important perspective as scholars engage with how culture is expressed in Nigerian films, particularly within the context of the western-local culture dialectics. More precisely, attention has been paid to how these films blend elements of local and foreign cultures; how the films come out as hybrids of indigenous and western cultural contents (Idogho 13, Onuzulike 176). As a post-colonial experience, Nollywood perhaps is bound to accommodate such cultural blending as films turn out a hybrid of indigenous and foreign cultures (Oduah, 110). Dominant debates about cultural hybridisation tend to reflect the position of the post-colonial perspective. While some scholars see cultural hybridization as a natural consequence of interaction between local and foreign cultures; an inevitable and indeed desirable result of the dynamism which is a necessary characteristic of culture (Omoniyi 109, Okeoma 12), others see it as a dysfunctional phenomenon which consequently is nothing but the domination and erosion of indigenous cultures by foreign cultures (Asogwa *et al.* 97, Fafiolu 22). The two opposing arguments tend to be accommodated in the post-colonialism discourse where colonised peoples are seen as both resisters and accepters of alien cultures.

Generally, the reality of hybridization in Nollywood films has been widely admitted in discourse (Agba 265, Idogho 2, Omijie 13). This phenomenon reflects in virtually all elements that make up a film work including language, costume, music and props among others. Thus, in Nollywood films, one, more often than not, finds the blending of elements of indigenous and foreign cultures. Thus, when cultural hybridization is viewed as a culture-eroding force in an industry like Nollywood, the industry becomes cast in the mould of a colonial legacy which ought to be resisted (Osondu 181). On the other hand, when Nollywood is viewed as a natural product of an inevitable cultural dynamism attendant on the unavoidable encounter between cultures, then the industry does not become a purveyor of an alien culture but a legitimate cultural experience which the people should own. This reasoning sees hybridization in film as normal if not desirable (Idogho 1).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To place this paper in proper theoretical framework, post-colonialism theory was adopted. As a theory, postcolonialism is an approach that critically focuses on the colonial experience and its impact on the worldview of the colonized people. It is related to postmodernism in that just as postmodernism stands in opposition to modernism, postcolonialism stands in opposition to colonialism (Dershowitz 342). Writing on postcolonialism, Ilo observes:

As a literary theory or critical approach, post-colonialism examines the literature by or about colonized people. On the one hand, it studies how the colonizer's literature justifies colonialism through images of the colonized as inferior people, society, and culture. On the other hand, it examines how colonized people articulate and celebrate their cultural identity by writing back in

the colonizer's language to redress negative labels (6).

Nollywood, in some sense, has been viewed as a postcolonial experience; a sort of statement of intent on the part of a previously colonized people; a bold attempt to retell their story and recapture their cultural destiny (Onuzulike 176, Osondu 181, Uche 54, Taiwo 220, Zaidi 87). Post-colonialism, in other words, is a negation of cultural imperialism. However, as earlier noted, postcolonial theory is also interested in how the colonized people contribute in strengthening the colonial ideology (Ilo 6). Stated differently, it also tries to explain how the colonial experience has succeeded in perpetuating cultural dependence of the colonized people on their erstwhile colonial masters. Therefore, postcolonial theory arguably becomes useful for viewing cultural hybridization in Nollywood in terms of how such hybridization advances cultural imperialism or cultural liberation. More specifically, the theory would be employed in this study for interrogating the patterns of hybridization in Igbo royalty-related films with a view to appreciating how such cultural blending advances cultural imperialism or actually promotes indigenous cultural identity.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed textual analysis (a form of qualitative content analysis) for a critical reading of the selected films under study in order to observe hybridization patterns in line with the study objectives. Three films were purposively selected: *Royal Favour*, *Royal Tears* and *Kings of Kings*. The selection was based on two considerations. First is that the plots and themes of the films were woven around royalty in Igbo land. Second is that the three films were set in the contemporary (post-westernization) African society; a period when African indigenous cultures have come in contact with Western cultures, hence opening the door to hybridization.

As a qualitative study, data analysis was thematic. The researcher critically watched the three selected films, looking out for relevant patterns in line with the objectives of the study.

SYNOPSIS OF THE FILMS UNDER STUDY

Brief synopses of the three films under study are presented below:

Royal Favour

Royal Favour focuses on the matrimonial intrigues that ultimately destroys a prince and leaves his family devastated. Produced by Precious Okafor and directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu, the 2015 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 had resided from 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 had 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 fails.

The visit to the palace by Chief Ilodibe, the most influential man in 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 his 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 had 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.

Royal Tears

Royal Tears tells the story of how a royal family meet their tragedy as a result of the king's insistence on forcing his daughter to marry a man she does not wish to. 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 Iyogbu 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 saw him fall on his way back. This role played by Kasie in saving Olaedo's life brings the two close, an affinity that eventually metamorphosis to a love affair, which the king is not comfortable with for the reason that Olaedo had 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 none of a commoner in the person of Kasie jeopardizing the marriage. As the wedding approaches, Princess Olaedo persuades Kasie to attend, a request he hesitatingly 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 surfaces. 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 and the king flatly refuses to help when approached by the couple. 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. However, trouble comes again as 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 and only to die of stroke shortly after.

King of Kings

King of Kings is a film whose story is woven around the struggle for the kingship stool of Okofia village. Produced by Kenneth Ogbuikwe and directed by Iyke Odife, the film presents a kingdom with a vacant throne and ambitious claimants to the throne, setting the stage for a fierce contest filled with arm twisting and intrigues. The death of King Okofia I (the monarch of Okofia) has seen his eldest son become Okofia II. However, the new king is killed by his younger brother, Afoka, who then assumes his position and exiles the deceased's pregnant wife from the village. Upon the death of Afoka, his son, Prince Okadigbo, who has just returned from abroad, is persuaded by his mother, the queen, to work his way to the throne even though the throne rightly belongs to Joshua, his father's brother. Okadigbo accepts this counsel and is poised to give any opponent including Ichie Oguguo, the Onowu of Okofia, a good fight.

Meanwhile, a delegation of chiefs has gone to the city to persuade Joshua who is a teacher and the rightful successor to the throne to return to become the king. Upon his return, Okadigbo feels threatened and does not hide his antagonism towards the "impostor". Soon, he uses the palace guards to throw Joshua out of the palace to ensure he is not so close to the seat of power. However, a certain man whose identity is not exactly known apart

from the fact that he is “an illustrious son of the land” has been gaining fame and influence in the land due to his philanthropy. Okadigbo is so uncomfortable at this situation as that might threaten his position in the village. Eventually, this powerful man reveals himself as Nwabueze Aguiyi Udoka, the son of King Okofia II whose brother (Okadigbo’s father) killed to take over the throne. He goes by the nickname “King of Kings” and carries himself with extraordinary pomp and circumstance. Nwabueze, who is also interested in the throne, thus becomes a bitter rival of Okadigbo who is out to get the throne at all costs. Okadigbo schemes a series of kidnappings which sees his adversaries; Ichie Nwokolo, Joshua and the Onowu disappear one after the other. The way the abductions are set up makes them appear as if it is Nwabueze that is behind them.

Faced with the stigma of being seen as a kidnapper, Nwabueze involves the police. Eventually, the police is able to rescue the kidnapped victims exposing Okadigbo’s complicity and consequently arresting him. The rescued Joshua is willing to relinquish the throne to his nephew Nwabueze, but the latter has given up his ambition. Consequently, he turns down Joshua’s offer, preferring to rather support him in becoming the next monarch. The climax comes with Joshua being crowned King Okofia III in an elaborate ceremony.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Textual analysis of the above three films in terms of how hybridization plays out in them is made under the following subheads:

- Costumes, Set and Props
- Speeches and Dialogues
- Movements and Gestures

Costumes, Set and Props

In the three films under study, there is hybridization in costuming of the royals, and this serves in emphasizing their class and distinguishing them from commoners. In *Royal Tears*, Princess Olaedo invariably wears artificial hair (wig or weavon) but with traditional beads (red in colour) worn over and around the hair. This contrasts with the hair design of the palace maidens who only wear the traditional beads around their traditionally woven natural hair. So, the artificial hair – a Western fashion – becomes the distinguishing element between the royal (Princess Olaedo) and her non-royal maidens. In other words, in this hybridization born of the juxtaposition of traditionally woven hair and foreign artificial hair, the latter becomes a symbol of class difference between royals and non-royals. In *King of Kings*, the queen and Prince Okadigbo's wife also wear elaborate artificial hair to emphasise their status and differentiate themselves from their maids. In *Royal Favour*, this traditional hair style versus Western artificial hair dialectic is also visible. Nosike's mother, while she is a non-royal, wears traditionally woven hair and uses head scarf; but as soon as royalty comes to their family, all that changes, as she henceforth dons artificial hair that is elaborate in style. But unlike in *Royal Tears*, the palace maidens equally wear artificial hair, though theirs comes with much less sophistication than that of the queen as seen in its shortness and less elaborate style. Jane's hair is conspicuously artificial with much flamboyance in length and styling, as well as her elaborate Western make-up and dressing – qualities that underline her class and royal merit. "Chief Ilodibe "came with her *exquisitely beautiful* daughter", said the visibly impressed queen to Nosike as she aims to connect the two towards an ultimate matrimonial union. Such "exquisite beauty" does not apply to her rival in the imminent royal marriage, Chinenyenwa, whose traditional hair style and less sophisticated dressing (in the Western sense) contrasts with Jane's classy and royalty-befitting style. In *Royal Tears* also, the style of Princess Olaedo's blouses, skirts and gowns as well as elaborate make-up strike the chord of Western concept of beauty which is

differentiated from those of her most immediate supporting characters – the maidens. In *King of Kings*, such elaborate Western touch is also found in the costuming of Prince Okadigbo's wife which contrasts with that of Dorathy who *de facto* has been stripped of royalty due to exiling of his father by his elder brother the king.

Of significance in bringing out this class-distinguishing function of costume hybridization is Chinenyenwa's decision, as prompted by her friend Afoma, to go for a fitting gown, high-heeled shoes, artificial hair and make-up so as to make herself acceptable to the queen. As she dons these Western costumes, Afoma says in approval of her new look:

Now the queen will know that you are more *befitting* to her son... It is called *packaging*... Nosike loves you, but his status has changed now. He is now exposed to a lot of *classy* women, and you need to be *classy* in order not to be edged out (emphasis supplied).

As observable from the above statement, the attributions "packaging" and "classy" are used in the sense of being Western in one's dressing style. Chinenyenwa is now viewed as assuming a new class befitting of royalty, purely by virtue of beautifying herself in the Western sense. Interestingly, scholars have noted the bias for long hair in the Western idea of beauty, such that images of beauty as portrayed in entertainment media and advertising tend to associate beauty with long hair; an idea that has gained root globally and has tremendously served the profit interest of firms producing and exporting artificial hair particularly to Africa (Hall 11). Beauty generally is viewed as socially constructed with the media playing an important role in popularizing stereotyped ideas of beauty – slimness, lightness of skin, blueness of eye and relaxed and long hair – all Western ideas of feminine beauty (Adorno 17).

Similarly, in *Royal Tears*, Cassidy Nwabueze – the young man depicted as befitting of royal marriage – is costumed in a typical Western fashion involving shirt and suit, fez cap, eye glasses, elaborate necklaces and ear rings. All these are deployed to underline his class, his royalty-compliant class, as against Kasie’s costuming that does not embody such Western sophistication. In *Royal Favour*, the costume of the royal guards is a hybrid of Western and Igbo dress idioms – a black long-sleeves shirt upon a wrapper tied round the waist. Apparently, the black shirt is intended as a complement that will add some class which a complete Igbo costume may lack in the Western sense.

In *Royal Tears*, even in the domestic setting, the bedroom costume donned by the queen while going to bed is Western nightgown. Also, the artificial hair remains visible in this setting just as the palace maidens in contrast don traditional costumes. Hybridization is also quite obvious in the props and sets around which royalty is portrayed in the three films. In *Royal Tears*, the palace is distinguished by the elaborate Western furniture and decorations. The king’s throne by no means bears any semblance of local taste as it embodies all imprints of Western wood art and decorations. The palace building itself embodies all complements of Western modern architecture. The same pattern is seen in *Royal Favour* where the palace hall (*Obi eze*), for all intents and purposes, can pass for the Western styled sitting room. Save for the throne that stands at one extreme of the four walls, sofas line both sides with two tables at the centre. Arguably, therefore, the royalty of the household – a supposed traditional royalty – relies on Western props for its realization.

In *King of Kings*, Western touch is very emphatically inscribed in the props around the royal family. The glory of the palace is woven around Western-styled architecture – a magnificent building. The property and decorations are visibly Western-inspired. The palace

hall has Western pieces of furniture and other foreign fittings. Also, other Western props like cars are visibly deployed to emphasise royalty. Prince Okadigbo goes about in a convoy of two exquisite cars while his rival and cousin, Prince Nwabueze rides a convoy of three very expensive looking cars. These compliment their royal status, distinguishing them from other persons. Instructively, it is only these two royal characters and their respective companies that ride in cars in the film. Other characters walk on foot.

Similarly, in *Royal Tears*, the royals are surrounded by exquisite cars, television and expensive smart phones – all symbols of affluence and class in the Western sense. Implicit in this hybridization of traditional Igbo royalty and Western idea of class is perhaps the idea that the traditional royalty is deficient in class until complemented by Western elements of class. This sort of idea, as argued by Ugwueze (119), is both a function of colonialism and the continuous propagation of images that suggest Western cultural superiority by the mass media. Also, in *Royal Tears*, westernization is emphatic in meals and other edibles served in the palace. Meals are served in foreign glass and stainless plates and complemented with foreign drinks. Hence, introduction of Western dietary in a traditional royal home becomes a tool for validating royal class. Upon the visit of Cassidy to Olaedo, he is served a Western wine. The next scene contrasts sharply with this as Kasie's mother serves him a simple dish and water without the complements of exquisite plates, dining table and wines.

In *King of Kings*, Prince Okadigbo and wife's meals are always served in Western fashion through use of glass and stainless plates accompanied by a full set of cutleries. There are also wines and juices to complement. Also, the prince is seen from time to time sipping Western wines outside meal times. All this serves in distinguishing the royals from the non-royals as far as meal culture is concerned.

Speeches and Dialogues

Speeches and dialogues in the films embody hybridization at some points. This is particularly true of *Royal Favour* where Igbo expressions are more often introduced. This hybridization serves the purpose of giving emphasis to the locality of the setting. For instance, during the meeting of the chiefs, a purely traditional setting, the traditional greeting of “Urukpeleke kwenu” (“Greetings people of Urukpeleke”) is copiously invoked as the meeting deliberates on the proposal to adopt rotational kingship. Equally, the phrase “Ndi Oji Ani” (leaders of the land) is repeatedly invoked by speaker after speaker to refer to the gathering. Such language hybridization serves to inscribe in the setting the local feel proper to that particular solemn traditional occasion. In *King of Kings*, such use of native language in native settings are prominent, particularly during meetings of chiefs and elders. For instance, a chief lamented “*Aloo emee*” (“A tragedy has occurred”) when the chiefs meet to discuss King Okofia’s death. Also, native greetings like “Okofia kwenu” (“Greetings people of Okofia”) are commonly rendered in Igbo language at such gatherings. Furthermore, language hybridization also serves in validating status. Cassidy, the senator’s son who returned from the United States of America, invariably uses the English language as one of the components of his class – a class befitting of a royal bridegroom. Unlike Kasie, his rival in the quest for marriage to Princess Olaedo, all his speeches are delivered in the English language even as he tries to speak in American accent employing expressions like “God damn”, “men”, “What the hell” etc. In *King of Kings*, Prince Okadigbo who returns from overseas speaks almost exclusively in English as against non-royals like Ichie Oguguo and Ichie Nkiruka who are in constant conversations with him. The Prince’s accent, instructively, tends towards mimicking of Western accent.

Strikingly, the same pattern is replicated in *Royal Favour* where Jane, as contrasted with Chinenyenwa, speaks unflinchingly in the

English language. Chinenyenwa's free use of Igbo language is easily observable. In a scene shortly after Nosike became a prince, she compliments him thus; "*Imachaala mma*" ("You now look very handsome"). This hybridization helps to put in sharp relief the class difference between the two rivals. Chukwujekwu (11) observes that the use of foreign language has become among Africans a symbol of status as their colonial experience has induced an attitude of near disdain for their native languages. Chukwujekwu further notes that this language alienation extends its effect to the preference of names by Igbo people as some prefer to be known and addressed in foreign names, seeing native names as inferior to these (12). Interestingly, both *Royal Favour* and *Royal Tears* make a strikingly similar juxtaposition of a foreign and a native name – Chinenyenwa versus Jane and Kasie versus Cassidy. As seen in the films, the two bearers of the native names are characterized as commoners who fall short of the elegance befitting of royalty. Contrarily, the two bearers of foreign names are characterized in the opposite mould. Thus, all perceived elements of class – wealth, elegant fashion, "good" speech and "good" mannerism – are made to converge in the characters bearing foreign names, while they diverge from their counterparts bearing native names. Thus, language hybridization by way of naming of characters becomes a tool for affirming and denying royalty.

Movement and Gestures

There is this visible use of hybridization to draw a line between the idea of royal class and the idea of common class in the three films. Contrasting conducts and mannerisms are placed side by side in order to achieve this distinction. In *Royal Tears*, Cassidy is portrayed as speaking and acting in a way that contrasts with the conduct and mannerism of Kasie; the former is characterized by elegance and confidence, while the latter is represented as crude and timid. In *King of Kings*, Prince Okadigbo's wife is portrayed as a person of fine mannerism, so also Prince Nwabueze as contrasted

with characters like Dorathy and Amaka, daughters of Joshua and Onowu respectively (Joshua is *de facto* stripped of royalty until he regains this at the end).

Similarly, in *Royal Favour*, Jane's conduct and mannerism as a "cultured" breed speaking with "refined" accent and walking with an elegant gait typical of pageantry contestants is contrasted with Chinenyenwa's native accent and largely unsophisticated conduct and mannerism. For instance, seeing his son, Nosike, sitting and eating on the floor with Chinenyenwa, the king emotionally exclaims; "You shouldn't be doing that, you are now royalty". Arguably, sitting on the floor to eat is more a local Igbo practice than the use of dining table, an adopted Western practice. However, this practice is here portrayed as incompatible with royalty. More so, its condemnation by no other person but Nosike's father – portrayed as more liberal and less inclined to class-based discrimination than his wife – may be quite instructive. Noteworthy is that the king is neither hostile to Chinenyenwa nor opposed to her marrying the prince.

The queen's reaction in one of the occasions when she finds Nosike and Chinenyenwa together underscores this juxtaposition of conduct. In reference to Chinenyenwa's conduct, she addresses Nosike sternly:

You dare not allow her bring you down to her level... This *thing* beside you ... This *thing* does not respect royalty. Do not allow her to bring you down to her level.

The pronoun "thing" is employed by the queen to refer to Chinenye to emphasize her nonentity status in the presence of royalties. This status is acquired by virtue of her conduct and mannerism which the queen finds objectionable in that particular scene. In *Royal Tears*, Cassidy is seen referring to Kasie as suitable to be "an ordinary hospital cleaner" and so should not dream of marriage

with a royalty like Olaedo. Olaedo's father, the king, equally refers to Kasie's "unrefined manners" as "incompatible with the glory of this family's royalty".

In a scene, in *Royal Favour*, even Prince Nosike, who is being portrayed as lacking any royalty-inspired pomposity and disdain for Chinenyenwa and has unwaveringly loved and respected her, has to join in censuring her "unrefined" lifestyle. "Get a job. This is too dirty for Prince Nosike's fiancée," he tells Chinenyenwa, referring to her small fish farming when he finds her feeding the fish. Evidently, he prefers to have his fiancée, a graduate, find a white collar job rather than doing such "dirty" job not befitting of a would-be royalty. In the Nigerian society, white collar job is identified with Western culture given that it was the colonialists that first introduced it in the country by way of civil service; thus creating an elite class that disdained their fellow citizens who were not privileged to get the white man's job – *olu oyibo* (Igbokwe III). Chinenyenwa, at a point in the film, apparently succumbs to the status classification being made on her – "I am dirty. I am uncultured. I am classless," She says while speaking to Afoma, her friend and confidant. With the help of Afoma, she is beginning to work towards belonging to the classy breed.

Summary of Findings

The analysis made so far indicates that hybridization was found in the three films under study. This hybridization occurred in all key aspects of representation of Igbo royalty – costume, props, speeches/dialogues and movement/gestures. Thus, these fundamental elements of film presentation are laced with cultural hybridization. The costumes, props, dialogues and conducts associated with the royals and their supporting characters are realized through blending of indigenous and Western cultures.

Secondly, hybridization served in advancing the narrative of beauty, class and royalty in the three films. In so doing, the films appear to privilege Western ideas of beauty and class as against what these might mean in a purely indigenous setting. In other words, the films' portrayal of royal class is hinged on imposing elements of Western culture on the traditional royal setting.

Thirdly, there appears to be some ideological ambivalence in the manner hybridization is deployed in the three films. The three films, though relying on Western cultural elements to validate class and royalty, still embody a narrative that tends to negate these as mere cosmetics that should not be placed above genuine human values. Kasie (in *Royal Tears*) and Chinenyenwa (in *Royal Favour*) embody true love and genuine human values that are under threat by too much glamourisation of class (conceptualized in the Western sense). Similarly, in *King of Kings*, Prince Okadigbo and Prince Nwabueze's vulgar display of class and power is contrasted with Joshua's humble and cool-headed disposition which eventually triumphs, leading to his regaining of his royalty and crowning as the king. Hence, the three films, in their thematic configurations, apparently reflect the characteristic dilemma of the contemporary African torn between attachment to his indigenous culture and seeming irresistible attraction for the Western culture.

CONCLUSION

Cultural hybridization in Igbo royalty films is both an aesthetic and ideological fact. Hybridization is deployed in such films for constructing ideas of royalty and for advancing certain ideological perspectives. Ultimately, the theory of post-colonialism becomes germane for explaining how this hybridization unfolds as both an affirmation and a denial of the superiority of Western culture over the indigenous culture.

The paper concludes that Igbo royalty films ultimately portray royal class (in the Western sense) as mere cosmetics inferior to real

human values of love and humility and not superior to the indigenous culture, yet, at the same time, the narrative still reveals an idealization of these Western ideas of royal class.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings and conclusion, the study hereby makes some recommendations. Filmmakers in the country should do more towards promoting indigenous ideas of royalty in their productions. Efforts should be made to avoid the observed ambivalence wherein the films embody narratives that both tend to promote and undermine the people's indigenous values. There is need to encourage production of films that faithfully promote indigenous culture by way of instituting high profile awards to reward filmmakers that have distinguished themselves in this respect. Such awards would potentially enhance growth in the quantity and quality of such films produced in the country. There should be an audience-focused study on representation of Igbo royalty in hybridized Nollywood films. This time, the objective would be to investigate how the audience view such hybridization and how much it influences their reception and appreciation of the message of the films.

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