

Thematic Reconstruction and Gender Involvement: The Case of *Rere Run* on the Visuals

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Abstract

The function of a literary artist is consequent upon the society he finds himself. The function of a literary artist is consequent upon the society he finds himself. His texts, apart from being read, come handy for auteurs¹, as sources for visual dramatic purposes, which among several other things (of which entertainment is basic), is a re-enactment, by giving life to the propaganda or protest of an author concerning a (burning) issue earlier raised, but to which meaningful attention is yet to be accorded. *Rere Run* (*Havoc is wrecked*), a written Yoruba protest play, has been adapted severally by dramatists, for stage and screen. The continuous negative portraits of the female in an extra-script intended for contemporaneous embellishments, which transpose *Rere Run* to ***The Lion of Imogun***; its serialized adaptation is the concern of this paper. The paper concludes that despite the fact the Lamson Yesuf the auteur of the soup opera under study tried to give the adaptation a contemporaneous tone, he did not portray the females in the related lights of present times, though he made them more relevant numerically, if compared with what obtains in the text. Suggestions are made to the effect that (male) literary textual and film artists must essentially do away with cultural patrifocal views in their pursuits, and portray the female in positive and relative lights.

Key Words: *Text Fertility, Adaptation, Auteurs, Fidelity, Women, Nigeria.*

1. Introduction

The female gender in virtually all the societies of the world is related to by the opposite gender as 'the other', 'the weaker vessel', 'the less physically active', 'the less intelligent', and as such the 'less needed contributor to the society's development'. (Adagbada 2000; 2005; Akintan 2002; Ola-Aluko 2002; Kolawole 1997). The female is however to be subdued, tamed, controlled, directed and 'guided' under the guise of 'protection' by the 'superior' male, because her sexuality determines not only procreation in her nurturing of the young ones, but she also determines kingship rights (especially in Africa) and above all, gives satisfaction to the male's sexual demands and his general welfare. All these symbolize her as an object of servitude, thus making her susceptible to being marginalized, denigrated, oppressed, and gagged.

Little wonder then she is not recognized for herself, no matter her achievement, but rather as a man's daughter or wife. The socio-acculturation available for younger generations concerning the space and role of genders, allow this biased patrifocal view to go untrammelled for generations. This has resulted in the girl-child seeing and accepting her 'negative' and sub-servient self-image as ordained and put in place by the creator. This is not to say however that females have never challenged their supposed 'second fiddles' positions.

Adagbada (2005) has rightly pointed to the fact that in Africa for instance, there had been few brave women who, not minding their respective circumstances of confinement, struggle for and won liberation for their people from the forces of extinction, relegation, and oppression. These exceptional women dared to challenge patriarchal ethos. Some of these women were Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ilé-Ifè, Emotan of Benin, Mme Kathilili of Kenya, Yaa Asantewa of Ghana, and Madam Tinubu of Lagos. The patriarchal nature of most African societies is evident in the contents of their oral literary genres like proverbs (Adagbada 2006), their myths (Kolawole 1997:53-55), songs, and other folklores.

These are to large extent paradigms that explain the reasons for the status quo and explicate the origin of certain actions, values and social patterns and they above all, provide the rationale behind male domination of power structure.

The textual literary creativity, which historically has been a male preserve, as the female textual creativity has a history that does not date far (Evvierhoma 2002:3), continues to portray the female as docile and placid characters, in negative tones, in many instances. The year 1995 was declared by the United Nations as the International Women's Year. Since then, "there has been an upswing in the global ferment of female activism, which transverses all fields of human Endeavour..." (Evviehoma 2002:vi). This period also mark a time in (African) history when men began to shift grounds more than before, in the recognition accorded the self-worth of the female gender. The Beijing Conference of 1995 too, wherein it was opined that at least 30% affirmative positions be accorded women in all spheres of government, has gone a long way in putting right the negativity of Patriarchy and its hegemony.

The female and her different roles have been seen to change with the times; heroines and other female's characters should therefore portray present realities in literary creativity. This however appears to be yet achieved as many male textual and visual playwrights are still unrepentant champions of patriarchal hegemony. The main thrust of this paper is to critically examine the portrait of the female in Lamson Yesuf's extra-script to Oladejo Òkédiji's *Réré Rún* which transforms it to *The Lion of Imògún*, a serialized soap opera on the Nigeria Television Authority Network Program, in the light of the global contemporary and conscientious pursuits of recognizing the female's dignity and allowing her the due space for social responsibility and contribution. The theoretical framework on which this study hinges, are the Sociology of Literature as opined by Karlsruhe (1993), to the effect that the works of art is to provide an image of reconciliation rather than a mirror-image of the society, and Womanism as opined by Kolawole (1997); Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) and Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), that the male's oppression be refused by the woman asserting her dignity and rejecting marginalization and subjugation in line and tune with her Afrocentric cultural identity.

2. Synopsis of the Original Text

The labor union in *Imògún* is protesting against meager remuneration, high tax rates, unavailability of medical care, non-representation in the town's governing council and their leader, Láwúwo, being in police custody. The workers abandoned their work at various sites in the community, despite of all the attempts made by some of the town's chiefs to make them go back to work. The Union members resolved to raise fund, which will enable them to employ the services of a seasoned lawyer, who can fight their noble cause and affect the release of their leader-Lawuwo. While the fund raiser is going on, Lawuwo is released from custody, but charged to court. He refuses the workers' offer of employing a lawyer from their meager wages. He intends pleading for himself in the court. Idowu, one of the workers, is bought over by king Onímògún and his cabinet members (except Chief Balógun, who shows empathy towards the struggle of the workers) When the attempt to offer bribe to Láwúwo appears not to be yielding the fast desired results, Onímògún and his chiefs set Ìdòwú against Láwúwo's psychological balance. Ìdòwú sends money launderers to dupe Moréniké, Láwúwo's wife, of the supposed fund for the employment of a lawyer (which Láwúwo intends to return). Out of the fear of what is likely to be the reaction of her devoted labor activist-husband, and the union's money is not realizable, Moréniké commits suicide by taking an overdose of analgesic. Seeing Moréniké's corpse throws Láwúwo off balance and he goes insane, as such becomes incapacitated to continue the struggle against Onímògún's oppression of the laborers.

3. The Fertility and Adaptations of *Réré Rún*

The fertility of a literary piece is demonstrated by the issues (in form of texts, plays or films) it generates. Oládèjo Òkédiji's *Réré Rún* is overtly political. The sociological tone of oppression by the ruling class and revolution - the antithesis that follows (Oyewo 2003:153), are issues prevalent in most societies of the world, especially in developing countries of Africa and Asia. These issues, for a long time will continue to generate controversies, discussions, and rebellions; as such they become the focus of literary artists, forming the source of their creative works. These works become avenue for visual artistes' derivative creation in forms of adaptation. Adaptation is the most common relationship between the text and filmic activities. The process is transposition of a written play, novel or poem and other literary materials, to visual forms (Adagbada 2008, Corrigan 1999).

When examining the literary practice of adaptation, one important issue that always crop up as rightly observed by Adagbada (2008) and Dudley (1999), is the notion that seeks how faithful or otherwise an adapted piece is to its source-the original text. This is known in filmic parlance as *Fidelity* — a matter involving the generation and regeneration from one work to another, by way of borrowing, intersecting and transforming (Corrigan 1999:20-21). Another important aspect of adaptation study is how the work adapted and the audience's implied awareness of the source (the original text), shapes the understanding of an adaptation.

4. Evident Viability of the Text

Considering the sociology and aesthetics of adaptation, the choice of a mode of adaptation and of other prototypes, suggest a lot about the visual artists role and aspirations from decade to decade. Apart from this, the stylistic devices adopted to achieve the proportional equivalences necessary to construct matching stories, are not only symptomatic of an era's style, but may considerably alter that style (Bamidele 2000:26-39; Andrew 1999). Presently, *Réré Rún* appears to be the most well-known and adapted Yoruba published protest play. It has a wide appeal for its revolutionary contents for almost all lettered (Yoruba) literates, especially the academics. Bode Osanyin has made it more popular by translating it to English language as *The Shattered Bridge*. While still in manuscript form, the play was acted live in August, 1973, by the Orí Olókun Performers at the Orí Olókun Cultural Centre, Arubidi, Ilé-Ifè in Osun State, Nigeria. The well attended show was directed by Olá Rótímí, a foremost playwright, drama teacher, and stage director. Ola Rotimi adopted the popular Stanislavski's psychotechnique system of acting in the "as if it were true" manner (Oyewo 2003). This stage drama maintained the exact storyline of the text without any infidelity, because it was a test-run; to ascertain the reality, viability, and acceptability of a proposed text.

Late Ìsòlá Ògúnsolá's travelling theatre group also staged *Réré Rún* in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria in the late seventies. Like Olá Rótímí's version, Ogunsola adhered strictly to the text, albeit with audience participation. It was however not very successful because the group lacked human and material resources for production, as casting was restricted to only the members of the group, making it very scanty (Oyewo 2003). Norman Podhoretz as cited by Bamidele (2000:40) is right in his opinion that the television, cinema and other new forms of entertainment and communication, have become visual literature that aspires to replace the novel and traditional verse, as the bell tolls for their future dearth. This can be observed in the present global preference of buying video and compact discs for viewing at home, watching soap opera on the television and going to cinema halls, to purchasing literary and other texts from bookstores or borrowing them for reading from libraries, as means of relaxation. Another production which proves the wide potentiality and varied appeal of Okediji's *Rere Run* is a video film, which bears the same title with the text like other earlier adaptations, produced by Why PJ Video Production in 2001. This version does not bear total fidelity to the original text, unlike the adaptations before it. Taking the advantage of the present political dispensation of democracy in Nigeria, the producer makes the indictment of the government very obvious by making Lawuwo the labor leader victorious at the end of the film, despite his insanity. The most current of the different adaptations of *Réré Rún* and the most appealing; by being the most relative contemporaneously, is the one under study- ***The Lion of Imògún***, as a serialized soap opera on the Nigeria Television Authority Network Programme by Wale Adenuga Productions Limited, on the house-hold programme; Super Story.

5. The Extra-Script

The extra-script in form of embellishment, which transforms *Réré Rún* to ***The Lion of Imogun***, was written by Lamson Yesuf for Wale Adenuga Productions Limited. The script is necessitated by three basic reasons in our own opinion. Serials for soap opera on television are known to span a minimum of thirteen episodes and the adaptation of 100-paged *Réré Rún*, if adapted with total fidelity, will be inadequate for serialization. Apart from this, the extra-script is intended to give reality and more especially contemporaneously, to the theme in the source. This is to enable the adaption blend with the present scheme of things in the present social and political dispensations of Nigeria. Thirdly, it is needed in order not to bear too close fidelity to the original as done in earlier adaptations of *Réré Rún*. With the basic picture of the labor being oppressed by the employers left intact against the background of the sociology of Nigeria between the late sixties and the mid-seventies, Yesuf projects into present times by reconstructing the major and sub-themes of the text, in a way that pursuits, actions, reactions, effects and results from the interrelationship of the characters in the televised drama, becomes similar and relative to what occurs to-date. He does this in English language—the *lingua franca* in Nigeria, to make it appealing to most Nigerians, compared to the original text's limitation of being written in Yoruba language³.

The social margin between the workers and the government, in the text, is widened by Yesuf with the choice of costumes, affluence depicted by residences, cars, standard of living and general outlook. This is in contrast to the workers' scanty wardrobes, living in slums and the inability to have the basic needs for normal living⁴. The labour leader whose life as a youth is not mentioned in the text, is called '*Omo Édádùn-únsìn* (child of he who enjoys serving others) in the soap opera. His courtship of Moréniké, the death of Gòkè their toddler son, who dies by being mistakenly hit with a charmed ring⁵ worn by Láwúwo, are included in this script.

The idea that even the self-employed citizens in Imògún land are not spared of Onímògún's oppression is reflected with market scenes in ***The Lion of Imògún*** wherein policemen are demanding for trade permits and monthly tax receipts, even before the end of the month and carting away traders' wares. The lack in the provision of basic social amenities by the government is also highlighted by using the Imògún iron ore factory site as the location where members of the labor union down tools in protest against their conditions of service. This is a pointer to the moribund Nigerian steel industries, which would have spurred Nigeria to great technological heights. The hospital scene wherein Junior's mother rushes him to, when the boy has convulsion and had to be revived with a herbal concoction by a sympathetic neighbor, as there is no doctor on duty and the pharmacy is virtually empty, is another embellishment in the extra-text which highlights the poor health facilities provided in Nigerian hospitals. Reference to the civil strives in the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria is another strand which gives relativity and contemporaneously to ***The Lion of Imogun***. In the nineteenth episode, aired on the thirteenth of April, 2006, Lawuwo and his comrades travel to a riverine town on canoe, to attend a christening ceremony. The town is a ghetto, with people residing in shanties and living in obvious abject poverty. One of the visitors laments:

This is part of Imogun land, yet the Kabiyesi and his chiefs leave them to suffer in poverty....

One of their hosts, a woman, implores Láwúwo to remember to discuss their plight with Onímògún, the *Kabiyesi* (King).

Another aspect in Yesuf's script, which is basic to this paper, is the role and position given to female characters. The on-going global call for gender balance must have prompted Yesuf to include more female characters in the script. In the original text Moréniké; Láwúwo's wife, Wúràolá; his aunt, Sariyu; Moréniké's relation and Mopélolá the typist, are the few female characters against fourteen males. Some of the newly incorporated female characters are Ìyábò and Wùnmí who are chief Arèsà's wives, Mámá Akin; Balógun's wife, the two wives of Olúgbón and Jayéoba, Adérewà, Kúnbi and Kémi who are members of Onimogun's harem. Some others are Kémi's mother, Ádùnní, whose child convulses the nurses, Foláké; Idowu's girlfriend and the female dancers and choreographers at the king's wedding feast. The increase in the involvement of females in this adaptation is no doubt a positive development in depicting the increasing attempt at gender balance by the present Nigerian government. This is particularly relative to the democratic regime of President Olúségun Árèmú Obásanjó, during which the soap was aired serially. It was a regime wherein women were given functional political, social and economic positions in the various governing cabinets at the Local, State and Federal levels. The present regime toes this line.

6. Gendering the Roles and Positions of Characters in the Extra Script

We do not have the intention of lamenting the lot of the (African) woman in this paper. This has been done in many quarters (D'Almeida 1994; Ogundipe Leslie 1994) years ago and it is still going on in several other quarters. It is a relief to know that the outcry is yielding results. However, that traditional belief of women being weaker physically and as such mentally, also less virtuous and more vain; continue to rear its ugly head in the literary creativity of some men. Such men are unwilling to do away with the negative image of women, a view they have socio-culturally imbibed. This is our point of contention with Lamson Yesuf's extra-script in ***The Lion of Imògún***. Psychologically covering up for men's inadequacies, Yesuf consciously or otherwise, makes it appear as if satisfying women's financial need, is the major reason why men misappropriate public funds. Ìdòwú, a wretch like his fellow laborers, becomes suddenly rich from Onímògún's largess and the first thing that comes to his mind is to drop a huge amount from it into Lábáké-his girlfriend's laps. This is tax payers' money of which King Onímògún boasts:

I have money in more than twenty banks... In fact I have more money than the whole of Imogun land...

being spent lavishly on Kémi too, the intended wife number six, on a shopping spree and boat cruising in Lagos. When *Olorì* (King's wife) Jayé and her co-wives show their disapproval concerning the acquisition of a new wife, Onímògún there and then simply increases their allowances. He says:

Hmm, Olorì Jayé! You sure know how to exaggerate, but ...do not let finances be your worry at all... In fact from this moment your allowances are doubled.

It is as if money can replace the affection which a man is supposed to have for his wife. The women are happy and they even chant Onimogun's *oriki* (panegyrics):

...The only lion that shakes the forest to its foundation... The one whose wealth is like the sand on the sea shore...

Not only this, Jaye shocks the audience by accepting and praying for Kemi, her rival, that:

...And you, the new Olorì in the making, let your time ushers in great tidings.

Kémi, who knows that such display of affection between co-wives are unusual, for the Yoruba say '*Órìsà jé ní pe méjì obìnrin kò dénú*' ('Gods, let me have a co-wife' is not a sincere desire of any woman), is surprised, but feigns relief. When it appears that all other means by which (fellow male), Onímògún, and his chiefs can clamp Láwúwo's wings and render him useless for the course of the labor union fails, Moréniké's (his wife) death, becomes the alibi for Láwúwo's failure. The soap's writer also blames the accidental death of Gòkè, Láwúwo's son, on Wúràolá his aunt. This is because she is the one who forcefully (out of concern), takes Láwúwo to the herbalist, in order to seek protection against enemies' attacks. Onímògún contracts out the construction of a mill to his chiefs, who does a sub-standard job. Onímògún does not go to commission it himself, but sends Olorì Jayé to experience the resultant shame and embarrassment. Olorì Jayé is however eager to go. How else could she have displayed her new wardrobe before the poor masses of the town? This is the main reason behind her edging out the other wives from the commissioning. The women urge Onímògún to put in place more projects, so that they too, can display their wardrobes at such public occasions. Yesuf also portray women not only in the light of accomplices to men's criminal and wicked behaviors, but more essentially the brain or silent movers behind them. For instance, when the police chief comes to inform Onímògún that the workers are revolting and Olorì Jayé has to halt her going out for the commissioning, her statement that:

At moments like these, I begin to wonder and ponder about who actually rules Mogunland. Is it you or Lawuwo? infuriates Onímògún, who vows to "finish" with Láwúwo "this time".

It is not a progressive stand for anyone to continue to re-echo or portray the supposed "inadequacies" of women. The African woman cannot but be what the society makes her. In the spirit of the positive contribution of our foremothers like Efunsetan Aniwura, Madam Tinubu, Queen Amina of Zaria and Olúfúnmiláyò Ransome-Kúti (all of history) and contemporary Nigerian active women like Dora Akunyili, Farida Waziri, Okonjo-Iweala, Obiageli Ezekuezeli, Cecilia Ibru, Ndidi Okereke-Onyekwe and a host of others (Adagbada 2006) like them, why does Yesuf continue to portray women in negative lights? In the pursuits for self-identification and self-determination against male oppression, the African woman's stand is dialogic (Hudson-Weems 1993; Kolawole 1997). She seeks co-operation and recognition from her male counterpart; to contribute her quota to the progress and development of her society (and be recognized for it). If Ìdòwú's position as Láwúwo's assistant were occupied by a woman, the plight of the workers would have fared better. Mopélólá or Wúràolá for instance, are not likely to double-deal the workers, neither would either of them spend the union's money on a 'male-friend', like Ìdòwú does on Lábáké. Considering the fact that Yesuf's adaptation is not out to remove the basic concept of the workers losing out in their attempt to reject government's oppression in his reconstruction, the story could have ended the way it does, even if women were portrayed as active and functional comrades, working alongside men for the progress of all.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have highlighted the close relationship between the text and visual drama as both are narrative in nature. We have also examined various ways by which an auteur may adapt an author's work. The main crux however is a critique of Lamson Yesuf's portrayal of women in *The Lion of Imogun* and the cliché roles he gives to them. To us, Yesuf has done a beautiful job, if not for any other reason, at least for increasing the number of the female characters as against what obtains in the adapted text. This is to hint on the increase in the contribution of the female gender to socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. However, the roles he gives to his female characters show that he is one of the men who are yet to (totally) do away with the traditional view point of the female as the 'other'; 'the second fiddle'. We call on men like him to accept the (African) woman's right hand of fellowship, the *Umoja* (Swahili concept of togetherness, unity or coalition) - a quest which is Afrocentric, rather than a parroting of the Eurocentric mode of the female's self-inscription, self-retrieval and self-healing.

Notes:

1. While authors are owners of written literary pieces, *auteurs* are the re-creative artist who adapts existing texts, especially for their already established popularity, for filmic purposes. (See Adagbada 2008).
2. Visual drama here means dramatic shows that can be watched live on stages or in special places designed for such. It also include shows recorded by electrical means, in a way that they can be watched by an audience or spectators, collectively in cinema halls, or personally in the confinement of individual's home.
3. Yoruba is the (standard) general language (with variations as dialects among sub-ethnic groups), spoken by all the members of Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria. The other two major ethnic groups are the Hausa and the Igbo.
4. The group of laborers is actually regarded as a 'tortoise' before their employers who are seen as elephants. This is evident in the working title- '*The Lion and the Tortoise*' at the film shooting locations as evident in the scripts given to characters. It was later changed to ***The Lion of Imògún***.
5. The ring is given to Láwúwo by a native doctor for protection against attack by Onímògún and his chiefs. Whoever he hits with his fist while the ring is worn, will die immediately

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