

IGALA ORAL POETRY AND CINEMATIC TRANSPOSITION: INTERROGATING TWO IGALA FOLK FILMS

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between oral poetry and film. Folk films especially in Africa derive their visual inspiration from the oral folk poetry and or narratives which are in most cases derived from the oral traditions and narrative images of the people. The paper suggests that African films can accomplish stronger relevance and artistic/thematic originality by adapting or transposing the oral poetry and narratives of traditional African society to the cinematic medium. In Africa, adaptations have been part of the artistic realities of African daily experience. They are reflected in the re-enactments and renditions of the oral traditions and narrative folklore, and in the interpretations of the various art forms as in ritual, festival and other artistic activities of the popular African society. Most traditional African dramatic plays and renditions are adaptations of traditional narratives, like in folklore and mythology. The paper analyzes two Igala folk films OTIDI and AMOBONI which were derived from the oral poetry of the Igala people.

Key words: Oral poetry, cinematic and folk film

Introduction

According to Malcom Heath (1996) Aristotle in his treatise (Aristotle Poetics), believes that human beings produce among other things poems. Poets according to him must be able to project themselves into the emotion of others. Aristotle's contention then is that human beings are by nature prone to engage in the creation of likeness and to respond to likeness with pleasure. Aristotle notes that poetry is imitation in rhythmical language, with or without melodic accompaniment. He believes that poetry is better if it has a structured plot. He infers that earliest poems would have recounted the glorious deeds of some inferior character in a satirical vein, without there being any structured sequence to the events described. Aristotle also believes that poetry is better if its mode is dramatic rather than narrative. Poetry to Aristotle is imitation, it seeks to create likeness, and the likeness is greater if the words of those involved in the action are presented directly rather being mediated by a narrator.

This paper examines the imitation or dramatization of Igala cultural reality or poetry into film. Fidelis Egbunu (2001), records that there are probably three schools of thought of Igala history. He refers to them as the Yoruba, the Benin and the Jukun schools of thought. He bases his Yoruba link to the existence of the Attah kingship title in Ayede and the "Attah Oja" in Osogbo, Osun state of Nigeria, and the linguistic similarities between the two languages. But Ade Obafemi (1970), states that, the most definite statement that can be made about the Igala is that they had a common origin with the Yoruba, and that the separation took place long ago to allow for the fairly considerable linguistic differences. He further notes that the Yoruba speaking people especially in Ikiri, Ibinu, Oworo, Ijumu and Owe of east Yagba are geographically closer to Igala and also preserve living culture traits and orally transmitted traditions which vividly demonstrate closer ties, which though of imprecise antiquity are definitely more

recent. With the Benin, he states that the near exactitude and similarity of the royal costume and brass/metal accouterments of the Attah Igala and the Oba of Benin are indications of the historical and ancestral links between the two.

It should be noted that even today Igala cultural and traditional histrionics are visible in the cultures of many societies across the length and breadth of Nigeria and manifest in their cultural practices, such as kingship, funeral ceremonies, beliefs, marriages, masquerading, mode of dress, body adornments and so on. Igala histrionics are similar and indeed related to the Egwugwu or Mmanwu of Igboland, the Egwugwu of Asaba, and the Alekwu of Idoma land, the Eku of Ebirra, the Gunu and Ndaeko Gboa of the Nupe but with some slight differences. The Ogani festival performed in Idah and Ankpa, for instance are also celebrated in the southern parts of Plateau State, especially in the Umuashia and parts of Nassarawa. Tom Miachi (1980, p. 10) notes that Igala political influence and interaction with the Igbo dates back about the 8th or 9th A. He bases his arguments on the possible influence of Igala royalty on Nri and Igbo-ukwu cultures which is dated between the 8th and 9th AD.

Oral Poetic Performance as Source for Filmic - Adaptation

It is Me Obafemi (2001) who states that the three main constituents of oral performance are oral literature (poetry and folktales), music and dance. He submits that the most important point is that they are interrelated and they are all realized, basically, in performance. Poetry is actualized in performance via songs, chants, music and other recitative forms. Obafemi classifies poetry into two; the esoteric and the popular. He contends that the first contains the Ifa-oracular and, Efe divination, The popular poetry include the performed poetry found in panegyric poetry called Oriki or the praise songs, eulogistic poetry or praise poetry and so on. Sotunsa (2005), notes that poetry and especially drum poetry, is an indispensable part of Yoruba traditional music. Drum poetry according to him, "forges a stylistic/literary relationship between music and the dramatic action." He notes that in all types of drama written text, staged plays, television and video drama with Yoruba origins, drum poetry is significant. Sotunsa also notes that indeed a new and important development in the practice of Nigerian theatre is in the home video series.

Describing the nature of the oral text in performance, Isiodore Okpewho (1979) classifies them as **re-creation, limited creation and the real creation**. He notes that in rituals or religious ceremonies, the text is somewhat fixed making it a limited creation. Where a narrative or art is re-enacted in another location from its original place, it could be classified as re-creation. The real creation refers to when the artist does not really have a restricted or limited text to create from, but creates his own text as he is inspired by his imaginative thought and the audience reaction. This could be called the real creation.

Digression by the artist himself or from members of the audience through interpolations and injections are elements of the non-fixated and malleable text of oral drama. An example of textuality of the oral narrative can be seen from J.P Clark's stage adaptation of *Ozidi* from its original folkloric narrative the *Ozidi* saga. Olu Obafemi (2001), notes that *Ozidi* as an adaptation provides insights into the relationship between traditional festival theatre/folklore and Clark's dramatic idiom as evident in his stage adaptation of this traditional festival drama. He notes that in *Ozidi Saga*, Clark appropriates his indigenous theatre heritage and Ijo metaphysics to produce his own creative vision in his play.

The Oral Poetry *Amoboni*

Amoboni is an historical drama that has resided in the oral poetry and traditions of the people over time. It is derived from the history and oral narrative of the Igala people called 'Ale'. 'Alo' is the oral narrative of the Igala people. It can be a factual chronicle of a historical event or a recreation or re-enactment of a myth or mythology. Its distinct feature is that it is rhythmic and highly poetic. It is performed with songs and dances. Many historical chroniclers have made several versions of the oral text of *Amoboni*, but this researcher relies on the synopsis offered by Shakuba, a local oral artiste who has been able to chronicle the reigns of almost all the Attah Igala who have reigned in the Igala kingdom. Shakuba as a folk artiste performs his art with the people, he usually creates a circle of audience- participants round him as he narrates the story amidst songs and dances. In the Amoboni narrative he uses songs and chants to demonstrate the events that characterized the Amoboni era, his battles with the Whiteman over his practice of tradition and the consequent conflicts and tragedy that follow it.

During the performance of the narrative the people join him in chorus and at times can interject his rendition and ask questions or throw in other perspectives as is typical of traditional oral folklore.

The narrative poetry which contextualizes the drama goes like this-

Ojokadomo
Attah domo
Muffet domo
Yeni achicholo no
Icho attah wa kawa newnwa
Icho abegu kawa newn wa

English:

One day
Attah was there
Muffet was there
He said we can't practice our tradition
The tradition of our fathers
The tradition of our ancestors

The oral plot or story of Amoboni is the story of the late Attah Ameh Oboni, the monarch who ruled the Igala people until 1956. As a traditionalist, he believed strongly in the religion and existential worldview of the Igala, which had been handed to them from generation to generation, and the notions of the cosmic circle, That is, of the living, the dead and unborn. The conflict in the story arises from allegations of human sacrifice levelled against him by his opponents, and in apparent connivance or support by the British administration who considered him a heathen and a pagan. The story is told with awesome description of his exploits as a traditionalist who believed in the religion and powers of his ancestors. It is told with full images of myth and mysticism surrounding the Attah. He is said to possess so much magical powers that there was virtually nothing he could not achieve. He could make land to flow over water, get bees to sting his antagonists. He was so powerful he could walk into the camp of his enemies unnoticed and disarm a whole village. Ameh Oboni loved his people and his tradition so well that he will rather die than allow his traditions to be trampled upon. It is this firm belief that leads him to a clash with the Whiteman who wanted to stop him from practicing the will and traditions of his ancestors. In the course of the crisis between him and the Whiteman he orders bees to sting the Whiteman and all

the other Chiefs who have gathered to attend a meeting. Mr Muffet the Whiteman is enraged and planned to deal with Ameh Oboni. The Whiteman's plan is to dethrone him and send him on exile, but before the white man can get at him, he commits suicide. In the end, he dies in office and is buried in the royal cemetery like his forbears, rather than be dethroned and disgraced.

Poetic Images

In *Amoboni*, the eulogizing and praise poetry is used very well and this is evident more in the actions and lyric renditions of the praise singer, especially at the festival scenes. Each time the Attah appears on stage the praise singer is praising him.

Praise Singer – ikeleku achiya adowo chobabla agba?

The rat does not meddle with the beards of a cat, if it does is it not consumed?

Olikekele a dago ofe ugba kia cholubor?

An infant twine does not provide shade under an iroko tree

Ma pkali okuta a tegu uwo?

A man does not mount a mountain with a stone tied round his neck (p.16)

Praise Singer – Ogbagada ogba wu unedo kiya kechu awo.

It is the brave who attempts to slap the faeces of a child. The ash of a burnt forest shall remain the make-up of the baby monkey .The goat even if it runs a million miles (P4) shall never sweat.

Each time the Attah moves to take his seat there are praises and chants.

Attah ododo ola Attah nana gbe

Attah ododo ola Attah nana gbe

Attah ododo ola Attah nana gbe

Attah the beautiful flower-Attah is big

Attah the beautiful flower Attah is big

Attah the beautiful flower-Attah is big

The Attah moves in rhythmic correspondence to the sound of the drum. The Attah's costume is usually a large gown called 'Otogbo'. On his head is a long red cap fitted round with feathers called 'iwe'. The Attah also wears a necklace that rests directly on his chest called 'ejubejuailo' as he moves to face the audience, the women chorus

Igala: Ojo gwata amideju

lye gwata amideju

Onu gwata Amideju

They continue this chant repeatedly;

English: God greets Attah

The kings greet Attah

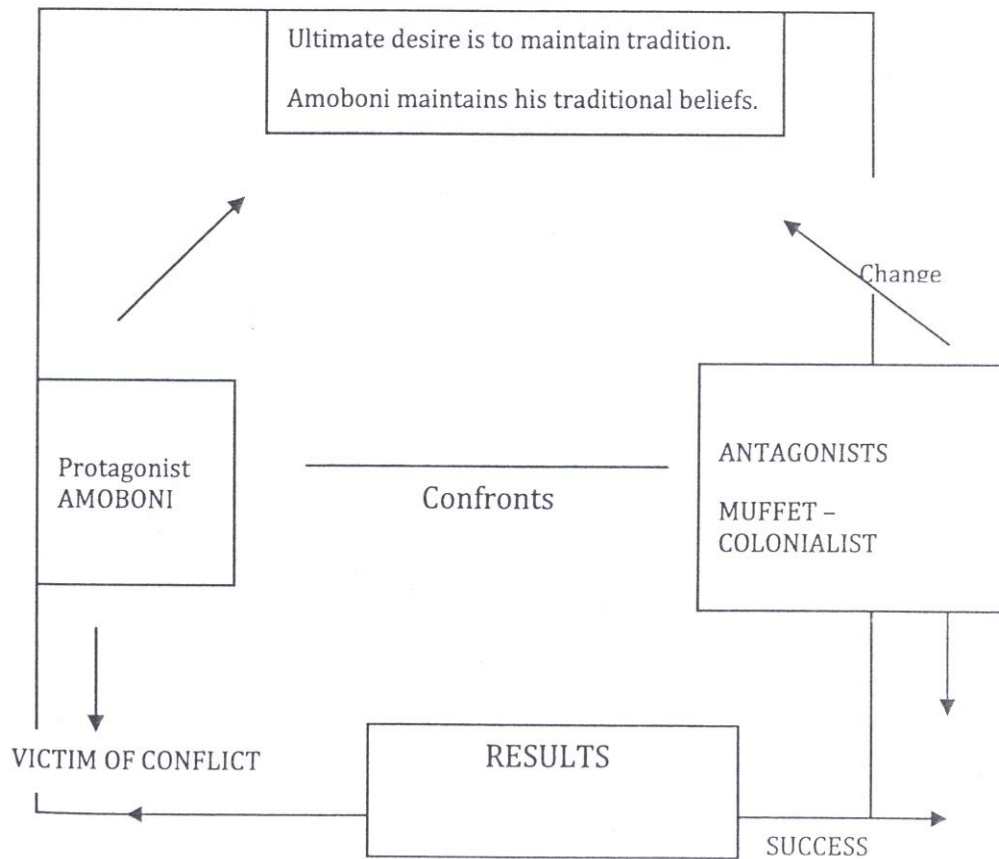
The children greet attah

The chant continues until Attah waves the people and sits on his throne, then all the women will shout 'oleleooooo'

See basic structure of AMOBONI below

Diagram of Basic structure of: **AMOBONI**

Diagram of Basic Structure of: AMOBONI



The film begins with the Attah Amoboni and his chief priest Oyoga. They are consulting the gods, the Oyoga is divining the date of the Ocho festival and its acceptability by the gods, the traditional folk song 'egba jo me' is on Attah Amoboni is introduced in a long Shot (LS), he is wearing his royal apparels a bronze face mask sits on his chest-it is called the 'ejubejuailo', he holds a horsetail. The shot is wide on Long shot so we can see that on his head, he wears feather round his red cap, there is a goat tied to a stake, on the floor are the beads for divination. In the second set, he is consulting the gods, we can see the divination beads on the floor, it is a Medium Shot (MS), the Attah is consulting the gods before he can perform the Ocho festival. The people are celebrating; there are masquerades, drums and other

traditional festival materials. In the second image set in another location, the conflict base is established. Achi and another person are spying on the festival.

The shot returns to the chief priest who is performing a ritual, the entire village is involved and it is collective and participatory. In the third image which also begins on Long Shot, the Attah is in council. He is meeting with his chiefs, he talks about the plan of the conspirators led by Achi, to thwart his administration and warns that their plans will not work, assuring them that the gods will not allow them to succeed. This image sets the confrontation occurs when Mr Muffet visits the palace to warn Amoboni of the consequences of human sacrifice and animal abuse. He threatens to deal with him if he discovers that he is in the practice. In the fourth image, Amoboni takes the conflict to the ancestors as he and the Oyoga divine the future outcome of Mr Muffet's antagonism.

The gods reveal that it is going to be a long and rough conflict. In the fifth image, Mr Muffet convenes a meeting of all the chiefs, where Amoboni on removing his hat releases a set of bees, which ends the meeting in confusion, marking the defining line and peak of the conflict. In the sixth image set, the conflict hightens as Muffet has concluded the plan to dethrone Amoboni and remove him from office. Amoboni is told of the plan of the Whiteman and he is prepared for the confrontation. In the seventh image set Amoboni's corpse is brought to the palace he has committed suicide, the entire community is distraught, there is tragedy. In the concluding image Muffet withdraws his men and declares that he has worn but the society is left in the dark of the future.

See image pattern below.

AMOBONI: Cinematic Schema

Introduction

Traditional Igala society is based on communal

Living irrespective of social hierarchy

Informing Matrixes

A festival is that event or institution that symbolizes this unity and communal philosophy

First image set

(Confrontation)

Amoboni versus Achi/Collaborators
Achi is determined to undo Amoboni and have
Him dethroned (This build up tension and suspense)

Achi informs his group of collaborators that
Amoboni indulges in human sacrifice.
Therefore he should be dethroned.

Second Image Set

(Confrontation)

Amoboni versus Achi and others (tension)

Amoboni is in his palace with his chiefs.
He has promised to deal with all those
Challenging him and the tradition of the
people

Third Image Set

(Confrontation)

Mr Muffet versus Amoboni
(tension and suspense)

Mr Muffet visits the Attah's palace and accuses
the Aitah of human sacrifice. He threatens to
Deal with him if he does not change.

Fourth Image Set

(Confrontation)

Oyoga versus the gods
Oyoga divines a conflict between
Amoboni and Mr Muffet

looking through the divination boards
Oyoga the priest predicts a serious conflict
between Muffet and Amoboni. He predicts
that the people will be the victims of the clash

Fifth Image Set

(Confrontation)

Amoboni versus Muffer and others
(Fear and Tension)

Amoboni uses his magical power to cause
bees to sting Mr Muffet and others who
have gathered for a meeting.

Sixth Image Set

(Confrontation)

Amoboni versus Muffet
(Tension and Panic)

Ochama reports that the palace is barricaded
And that the king cannot enter into his palace.

Amoboni threatens to return to the palace.

Seventh Image Set

(Confrontation)

The praise – Singer versus Muffet

(Tragedy)

Amoboni has committed suicide and his corpse is led to the palace by the praise singer.

Muffet's team is armed, they barricade the palace. But allow the corpse in when they see he is dead.

Conclusion

End of Conclusion and Conflict

Society is left in a dark future - a gulf

The Oral Narrative *Otidi*

Otidi is a story that is derived from the folklore of the Igala people. It is also in the corpus of 'Alo'. There are many versions of the Otidi oral narrative text, but the most popular and the adopted version by Joseph Abuh, a traditional poet and folklorist. As a folklore, it is told in the evenings with people sitting around the fire, with the people and the folklorist participating in the rendition. The people also participate in the performance through songs and dances.

Oral Rendition (Igala)

Egba jo me eee egba chegba -etobe

Egba jo enwini eeee

Egba chegba etube

Eneka domo ma do ko Otidi

Onu domo Onu jachi

Otidi gbere Oya onu

Enekumakpa baki ma gbo omuwu no-etube

English Interpretation

Now is the time -yes time is time.

Today is the time .yes time is time

There is a young man called Otidi

There is a king Jachi

Otidi went for Onu's wife

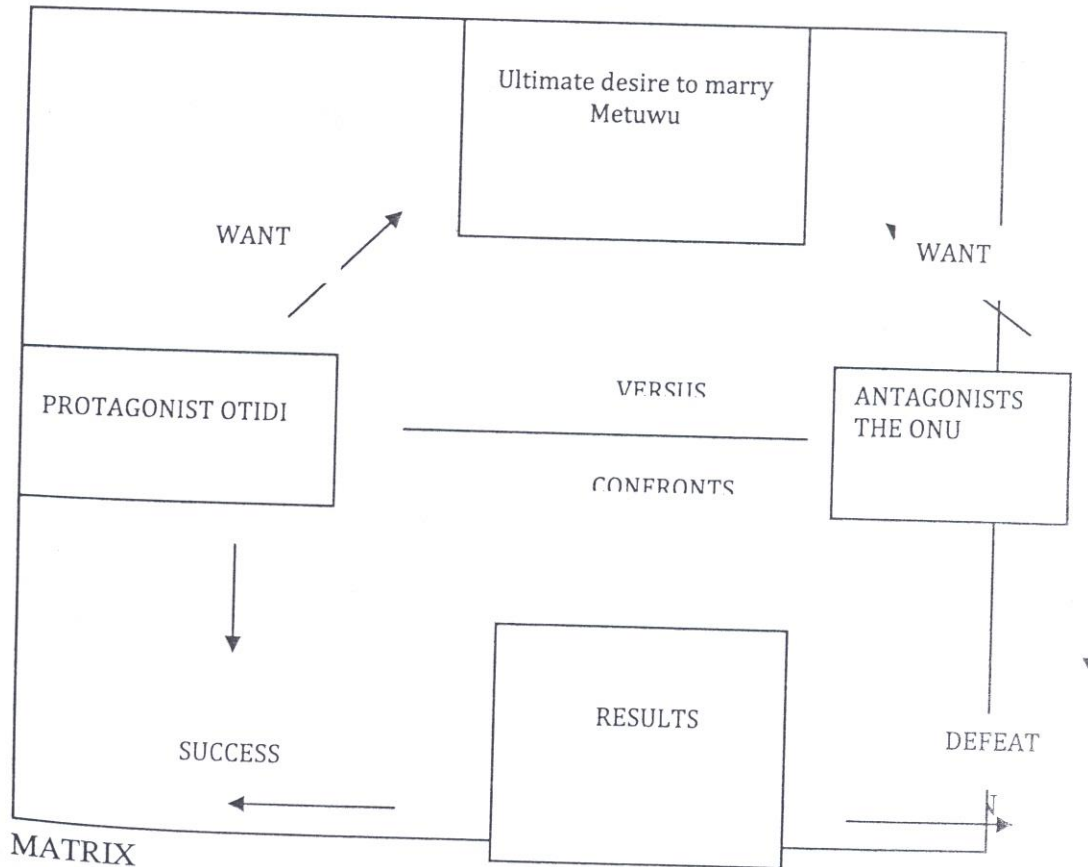
The man that is committed to death must be heard.

The above contextualizes the conflicts that arise from the dramatization and screening of the plot. The story is the story of a young man who was described as the most handsome man in the whole world. He and Metuwu have sworn on oath that they will marry, but Otidi travels out to meet the traditional obligation for initiation to manhood before he can marry. Before he returns the king marries Metuwu against her wish. Otidi returns and vows that he will take her back. At Idah he is able to see her through

one of the king's wives Amichi who also fall in love with him. Soon after Metuwu is pregnant, there is sickness in the palace. The king threatens to kill Otidi and his parents but the poet tells him to listen to an accused before judgment. The king discovers that Metuwu and Otidi were sworn to marry before he came in. He releases her to him and the people rejoices.

See basic structure for Otidi below.

Diagram of Basic Structure of Otidi



Cinematic Interpretation

The establishment shot, reveals a typical African village. The first image set, a long shot (L.S) of Igagu is at his furnace with his wife and they praise the ancestors for their child Otidi. In the second image set, a long shot Otidi and his friend Aku are on their way to the hunting forest and they are talking about their initiation to manhood in tune with the traditions.

In the third image set, a medium shot of two, we see two young ladies, Metuwu and her friend Alewo, and they are making their hair. Metuwu declares her love for Otidi and promises that she will do anything to marry him. In the fourth image set, Otidi and Metuwu are discussing their relationship and what the future holds. They swear an oath and exchange blood vows, meaning that they are secretly married to themselves. (See appendix xi) In the fifth image set the conflict is introduced as we are told that the king is also interested in marrying Metuwu. The Onu sends his emissaries to seek Metuwu's hand in marriage. In the sixth image set, Metuwu is in conflict with her parents because she has refused

to marry the Onu, she is distraught and crying. Meanwhile Otidi has gone for initiation to manhood and we see him with the priest who pours libations and makes incantations, he is also painted in the ancestral white color. It is an overhead shot. In the seventh image set, the conflict peaks as Metuwu is forcibly betrothed to the king, she is not happy in the palace, she is sobbing and crying. Otidi returns from the initiation and he cannot find his wife, he vows to retake what is his.

In the eighth image set Otidi meets two of the king's wives, on their way to the farm and they fall in love with him. In the ninth image set, the king's wives send Metuwu to Agada's house with some food for Otidi, not knowing that Otidi and Metuwu are known to each other. They are both shocked to see each other. In the tenth image set, Metuwu is pregnant in the palace, (long shot). The king is angry and the gods are offended, because the king has not slept with her yet and she is pregnant, the diviner consults the oracle and Metuwu eventually names Otidi as the man responsible for the pregnancy. In the final image set, Otidi is arrested and brought before the king but before the king orders for his execution the palace historian through his folk song cautions about hasty decisions and warns that a man should be given a fair hearing before he is executed. The diviner accuses the king of taking what does not belong to him, saying that the gods have revealed to him that Metuwu and Otidi were on Oath and had vowed to marry each other. The king subjects his desire, to the will of the gods and the people, and consequently releases Metuwu to Otidi. There is great celebration.

See Image Pattern below:

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Otidi cinematic schema

Introduction

Traditional Igala Society, a village setting at a local family house

First Image Set
(Confrontation)

Igagu Versus Otini and Otidi

Second Image Set
(Confrontation)

Otidi versus Aku
(Expectations)

Third Image Set
(Confrontation)

Metuwu with Alewo and the other girls
(Love expectation)

Fourth Image Set
(Confrontation)

Otidi versus Metuwu
(Loyalty)

Fifth Image Set
(Confrontation)

Onu versus Otidi and Metuwu
(Conflict)

Sixth Image Set
(Conflict)

Metuwu versus her parents and the Onu
(conflict)

Information Matrixes

The gold smith Igagu is at the hearth working. He is chatting with his wife

The parents Igagu and Otini discuss the travails (expectations) they have been through in their marriage and talk about their son Otidi who has attained the age of marriage

The two friends are desirous to marry yet they cannot until they are initiated to manhood. Otidi says he needs to marry Metuwu but will have to travel to his uncle to be initiated.

The girls talk about Otidi and his handsomeness. They all desire that he is their husband. Though Metuwu is the one who intends to marry him.

Otidi convinces Metuwu who was initially scared to take an oath of marriage to wait for him while he travels for his initiation. They slit their fingers and exchange vows with blood.

The Onu send's his emissaries to seek Metuwu's hand in marriage

Metuwu is reluctant to marry the king. She is crying and challenging her parents but she is forcefully married to the Onu

Seventh Image Set (Confrontation)	
Otidi versus Onu	Otidi returns to discuss that the Onu has married his wife, so he runs to the Onu's town to rescue her
Eight Image Set (Confrontation)	
Otidi versus the Onu's wives	The Onu's wives are all interested in Otidi due to his handsomeness.
Nineth Image Set (Confrontation)	
Otidi versus Metuwu	Otidi sees Metuwu in Ochayi's house. He wants to take her away she refuses; he makes love advances to her the lights fade.
Tenth Image Set	
Onu versus Metuwu	
Eleventh Image Set	
Onu versus Otidi	There is confusion in the palace. One of the king's wives is pregnant. She is Metuwu. Otidi is named as the villain.
Twelfth Image Set	
Onu versus Otidi and the People	The Onu is mad. He is offended he orders the arrest of Otidi and his family
Conclusion	
Confrontation ends the Onu releases Metuwu to Otidi	The king is about to kill Otidi and his parents until he is told the Otidi and Metuwu are married on oath. The king releases them.

Conclusion

African oral poetry has continued to be a veritable component of the art of the African society. There is an obvious need to continue to explore the multi potentiality of African oral poetry. As we seen from this article not only has it fertilized African literature it has also show amazing adaptability in its exploration and inspiration of visual imagery and cinema. Perhaps there is no stronger way to inspire, protect and project the African philosophy than through its art and poetry.

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