

The African as Compared to European and American Film Adaptation: Some African Techniques of Film Adaptation from Novels

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Abstract: Adaptation study is a sub-branch of comparative literature that makes the bond between literature and cinema. Both literature and cinema are two different media and each has its own language to convey meaning. This article studies the African techniques of film adaptation from novels such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to Biyi Bandele's film in 2013 with the same title. With the advancement of technology, people are gradually shifting from the culture of reading novels to that of watching adapted films, which becomes a problem, as it tends to affect their knowledge of that particular text. Thus, how does the African filmmaker, as compared to other European and American filmmakers, leave from the novel to the film? The hypothesis to this question is that there is a number of pure African techniques that the filmmaker uses in the adaptation of the novel such as editing, sound, modified scenes, excluded scenes and invented scenes. The elements of this study are analysed using the Film Adaptation Theory based on Linda Hutcheon approach and the Film Analysis Method, which is a pure qualitative method. The findings of this study show that, the visual and aural techniques used by the filmmaker are all involved to create a film with a new vision having specific effects on the audience. There is therefore a difference between a novel and a film so; depending solely on the film adaptation to get the meaning embedded in the novel is erroneous.

Keywords: Novel, Film, Camera View, Techniques of Film Adaptation, Culture, Africa, Europe, America, Nollywood

1. Introduction

People nowadays are becoming increasingly attuned to the moving images and less patient with mere words on a page. It has been observed that with the advancement of technology, many novels have been adapted to film [13] and people in general with students in particular tend to shift from the culture of reading novels to that of watching adapted films, which becomes a problem as it affects their knowledge of that particular text. Watching a film adapted from a particular novel without taking time to read the novel proper paints a different picture of the original storyline from that which it is [14]. Therefore, depending solely on an adapted film as most students do to have the meaning embedded in a particular novel is erroneous, as they tend to have a modified storyline, which may not represent the perspective of the original

author. Elsewhere, African film adaptation techniques seem to be quite different from those used by European (German [8], French, English...) and American (Hollywoods, Brazilian and Canadian...) filmmakers. As African cultures are different from European [17] and parts of American and Asian cultures, there is no longer any thought that African film adaptation techniques from Novels should also be. A good number of scholars have carried out research and came up with many works on literary film adaptation of African novels. Adedipe [2] argues that in cinematic adaptations, the repression of most of the information in the source material can easily be misconstrued and quickly categorized as a result of the reductionist measures that cinematic adaptations of novels typically go through. He backs up his argument with the case of the cinematic adaptation of Chimamanda Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Emaeyak [9] explores

notions of resistance and complicity, in the film music process, and how identity is negotiated in such global co-productions. According to him, since becoming a globally recognized film industry, mainstream Nollywood has broadened its activities to include international co-productions. These co-productions present instances of cross-cultural tensions and borrowings between Nollywood and its foreign cinema counterparts. Adopting a cultural studies approach with an ethnographic/analytical approach based on his communication with the soundtrack practitioners of two case study films, namely, *Baby Oku in America* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, his findings show that identity in this context is a passionately contested issue driven mainly by the film music tradition that both dominates and influences much of the creative process. Shaheed [23] presents a *Conceptual Isomerism in Half of a Yellow Sun*. He examined film narrative and argues that knowledge sharing through film narrative provides an antidote to complex social problems and promotes social wellbeing, peace and unity within a multicultural setting like Nigeria. He uses both the Edmund Husserl's phenomenon and the philosophical lens of the Yoruba Orumila theory of representation and or/ (re-)interpretation, which precedes but connects with Husserl's concept of perception and representation. One of his main arguments was that light and dark, and good and bad is intertwined and therefore inseparable. This was important regarding his perception of the representation of Igbo people as "good" and therefore everyone else as "bad" in Adichie's novel. This paper revolves around the following question: How does the filmmaker leave from textual to aural/visual techniques? Africans have their own realities and so, African novels may hope to have different adaptation techniques compared to European adaptation techniques. This article is guided by The Film Adaptation Theory¹, with emphasis on Linda Hutcheon Approach [12].

2. Aural and Visual Techniques of Film Adaptation

This section deals with the textual and aural/visual techniques, which enables the filmmaker to leave from the

¹ Film adaptation theory is a link between integrated literature, linguistics and media. Gordon E. Slethaug [24] in his book *Adaptation Theory and Criticism: Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA* notes that adaptation theory has "incorporated tropes of linguistic and semiotic analysis, post structural and postmodern enquiry, textual reproduction, and cultural criticism to indicate that adaptations have value, validity and integrity not dependent upon the originals and able to say interesting and unique things about language and culture". This research is a comparative analysis of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* [6] and its adapted version by describing their similarities and differences. It provides insights into the techniques of film adaptation by Biyi Bandele from the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* to his film. Hutcheon asks six questions in her attempt to theorize adaptations. Her approach is to study an adaptation by answering the comprehensive questions. The six questions are: What gets adapted? Who is the adapter? Why do they choose certain works of art? How do they adapt? Where and when does the adaptation take place? Each of these questions will be thoroughly investigated in the following paragraph and applied to the novel under study.

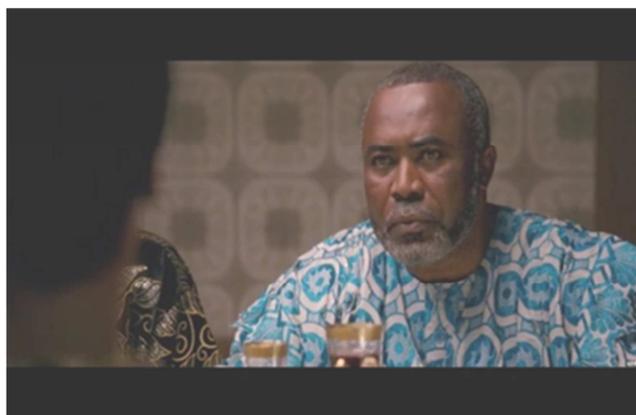
novel to the film *Half of a Yellow Sun* [4]. According to Merriam- Webster dictionary of Georges M. and Charles M. [11], aural elements are those relating to the ear or to the sense of hearing visual and aural sensations while visual elements relate to sight. Some of these elements are soundtrack, specific camera angles, fidelity (extensions and compressions) and infidelity (inventions and exclusions). What is important is to focus on how all the elements are used together by the filmmaker in making the film in order to bring out meaning.

2.1. Soundtrack in the Film

Naughty Little Flea – Miriam Makeba, BereBote – Cardinal Rex Lawson, A Night in Tunisia – The Tony Kofi Quintet, Corcovado – The Tony Kofi Quintet, My Little Suede Shoes – The Tony Kofi Quintet, Un Poquito De Tu Amore – Tony Kofi Quintet, Funeral Ceremony, Go Lil Liza – The Tony Kofi Quintet, Dramatic Event, Arrival of the Queen of Sheba – Sinfonia Varsovia/ Varsovia/ Albrecht Mayer/ Monika Razynska/ Arkadiusz Kropa, Santa Baby – Eartha Kitt, Hail Biafra – Cardinal Rex Lawson, Simini Yaya – Collins Oke Elaiho & His Odologie Nobles Dance Band, Finlandia Half of a Yellow Sun Film Information: Genre: Drama | Romance.

The electric soundtrack including, Miriam Makeba's "Naughty Flea", Eartha Kitt's "Santa Baby," and the patriotic-cum-religious "Finlandia," popular in Biafra aptly captures the tapestry of cultures and subjectivities of the era. Vibrant war songs drawing from indigenous musical traditions articulate a political and moral consciousness that is emblematic of the spirit of resistance. Highlife music like Rex Lawson's "Hail Biafra," exuding resplendent patriotic consciousness and a highpoint at Olanna and Odenigbo's wartime wedding is interrupted by an air raid. Overall, according to African Studies Association [5], the soundtrack, resounding with emotions, narrative layers, and subtle spectatorial positioning, generates meanings that stretch across a broad range of intertextual social, cultural and political discourses.

2.2. Specific Camera Angles



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:04:39]

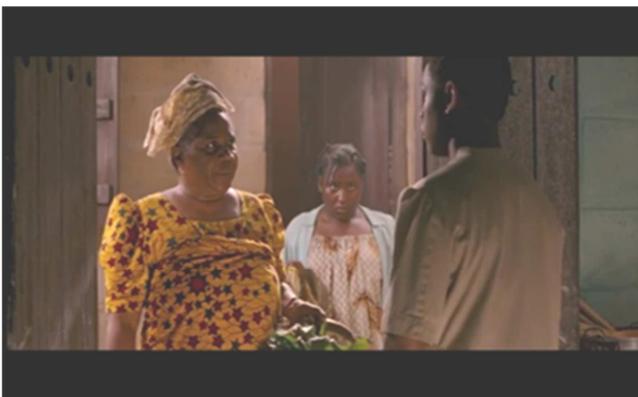
Figure 1. [Eye level shot 1].



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:05:21]

Figure 2. [Eye level shot 2].

The eye level shots above connect the audience to the emotions of the character on screen, so whichever emotions they are feeling, hopefully so will the audience feel. In the first image, one reads disappointment on Chief Okonji’s face as Olanna announces to her family that she will be moving to Kano. This disappointment stems from the fact that Chief Okonji wishes that Olanna visits him one of these days. In the second image Kainene’s stern look emphasises her disagreement to what her father is planning for her, which is why she immediately says she will equally be moving to Port Harcourt to manage her father’s businesses there.



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:17:21]

Figure 3. [Shoulder Level Camera Angles 1].



Source: Half Of A Yellow Sun [00:18:15]

Figure 4. [Shoulder Level Camera Angles 2].

The shoulder level camera angles use perspective to show where characters are in relation to one another and are great for offering the viewer a new point of view to make the scene more dynamic as it is the case in Figure 3 or provide another character’s perspective on a scene as in Figure 4.



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:21:21]

Figure 5. [Aerial Shot 1].



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:16:59]

Figure 6. [Aerial Shot 2].

An aerial shot, whether taken from a helicopter or a drone, is captured from way up high. It establishes a large expanse of scenery. According to S. C. Lannom [16], aerial shots help directors to define the world that the characters inhabit which is a powerful storytelling technique. In the Figure 5, a beautiful building can be seen. However, a sharp contrast can be seen with the second image and the rest of the images. In the Figure 6, it can be noticed that the roof of houses is old and some of those roofs are burst. This contrasting images brought about by the filmmaker is to establish the differences between the world of the poor and that of the rich as it is the case in many African communities.

Low angle shots are often used to convey power, and depending on the subject. It depicts both the good and the bad type of power. The Figure 7 depicts the good kind of power which has to do with the friendly relationship between the master and the servant. Though Odenigbo is the master and has power over his servant Ugwu, he doesn’t treat him like garbage. However low angle shots don’t always convey

good power as it is the case with the Figure 8 where Olanna influences Richard with alcohol to go to bed with her.



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:15:04]

Figure 7. [Low Angle Shot 1].



Source: Half of a Yellow Sun [00:44:16]

Figure 8. [Low Angle Shot 2].

3. The Fidelity Technique (Compressions and Extensions)

This part deals with the techniques that reveal the filmmaker's degree of fidelity in his adaptation of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* [4] to his film. The notion of fidelity with regards to film adaptation is a long, much discussed subject. The importance of staying faithful to the original text in which the film is based, divides theorists and critics. According to Paget [21], while some, usually those from a literary background believe that straying away from the text is a great betrayal of the work, especially dealing with a novel that considers a classic novel. The fidelity technique will be discussed with regards to modified scenes subdivided into extensions and compressions.

3.1. Compressions

Filmmakers play a vital role in compressing the scene.

Scenes are sometimes compressed, due to reasons such as the length of the scene and the attention given to it according to its significance to the course of events. The compressed scenes in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are illustrated according to some of the novel's scenes and sequences of the film as seen below.

Ugwu is excited about an upcoming trip to his village with Richard, who wants to attend the local *ori-okpa* festival because he wants to see Nnesinachi before she departs for Kano. Unexpectedly Ugwu's aunty comes and summons him home, saying his mother is very sick. Ugwu suspects his mother has died. Odenigbo drives Ugwu immediately. On the drive Odenigbo comments the government should focus on feeding its own people with farming and overcome this colonial dependence on imports. They bring Ugwu's very sick mother back to the house in Nsukka. (p. 89-90).

In the film, nothing is said about Ugwu's mother's health condition. The only thing seen in the film is when Ugwu returns from the village and Odenigbo's mother welcomes him and asks him to rest. Equally, in the film, nothing is said about the *ori-okpa* festival. Ugwu's aunty is not seen in the film and Ugwu goes alone to his village [00:28:10] the filmmaker still uses the compression technique at this level.

Odenigbo's mother arrives with a young house girl, Amala, and displaces Ugwu from the kitchen. She is rude to Olanna when she greets her warmly, accusing her of being a witch and saying, "I hear you did not suck your mother's breasts." She tells Ugwu she plans to consult a *dibia*, a traditional healer, to help drive Olanna away from Odenigbo. Olanna leaves and goes to her flat. When Ugwu tells Odenigbo, he is dismissive. (p. 99).

In the film, this scene is presented as it is in the novel aside the fact that Odenigbo's mother doesn't mention anything about consulting a traditional healer to help drive Olanna away from her son Odenigbo. [00:20:49] The technique used here is compression which renders the scene shorter in the film.

3.2. Extensions

In film adaptation, extension goes beyond the original version by developing the backstory of a secondary character. Adapters need to add more action to the movie and not just recite details of the novel. In the case of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, all the extended scenes are for the sake of adding dramatic scenes to make the film more interesting.

At Odenigbo's there is talk of secession and a new country, which would be named after the bay, the Bight of Biafra. A British diplomat, David Hunt, has arrived in Nigeria in an attempt to quell the conflict. Odenigbo champions the cause of secession while Miss Adebayo advocates making peace before things explode. (p. 154-156).

In the film, Odenigbo and Miss Adebayo argue over secession. Miss Adebayo feels insulted by Odenigbo because according to her she is Yoruba and not Igbo and so can't understand their plight. [00:59:47] In this sequence of the film, aside from the talk on secession at Odenigbo's as said in the novel, Miss Adebayo feels insulted as Odenigbo says

she can't understand their plight because she is Yoruba. The filmmaker makes use of extension at this level.

Kainene visits Olanna briefly, telling her, she was an army contractor, and she had a license to import stock fish. She invites Olanna to visit her at the refugee camp the following week. (p. 322).

In the film, Kainene visits Olanna and brings gifts for Baby. Olanna says she will visit her on Wednesday. [01:28:52] The filmmaker modifies the scene but remains faithful as he represents Kainene's visit to Olanna. The filmmaker uses the extension technique at this level as he extends the dialogue between Olanna and Kainene.

4. The Infidelity Techniques

This technique is subdivided into two: exclusions and inventions. The filmmaker through the use of the narrative device ² ellipsis excludes some scenes in the novel on the one hand and invents other scenes while narrating his film *Half of a Yellow Sun* [6].

4.1. Excluded Scenes: The Filmmaker's Use of Ellipsis

There are many excluded scenes from the novel. The filmmaker makes use of the narrative device ellipsis to exclude some scenes and details. There are some excluded characters and details and several compressed scenes. Below are some excluded scenes from the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*. These excluded scenes will be analysed according to some selected scenes in the novel.

Richard meets Kainene's parents at a dinner at their house, and they are unimpressed with Richard's interest in tribal culture and that he is a writer. Olanna, however, treats Richard warmly, attempting to include him in the political conversation. (p. 70).

Tortured by guilt over his infidelity, Richard breaks up with Susan and moves out. He resolves to use African herbs to cure his impotence. Kainene says Olanna will introduce Richard to Odenigbo, "her revolutionary lecturer lover," and asserts Odenigbo's radical socialism is incorrect because the Igbo have always been capitalists. (p. 71-74).

The filmmaker makes use of the narrative device ellipsis to cut-off the scenes above. The information in these scenes however is not vital in the development of the filmmakers' plot since his focus is on the love life of the twin sisters Olanna and Kainene. Nevertheless, the scene where Richard meets Kainene's is important since he plays an important role in her life and in the development of the plot.

The narrative jumps in time from the early sixties to 1966. Visiting his village, Ugwu finds the food unpalatable and could not wait to get back to Nsukka and finally eat a real meal. His sister Anulika is pregnant and engaged to be married to Onyeka, a village man. She says she wants to have

a baby boy. Ugwu doesn't like Onyeka and says "he smells like rotten oil beans." Anulika disapproves of the changes in Ugwu, saying, "You have forgotten where you come from... you have become so foolish you think you are a Big Man". Leaving, he runs into Nnesinachi, who seems to return his attraction. (p. 119-120).

Unlike in the novel where Ugwu is the major character and there are a lot of details about his family and friends, the film is not centered on Ugwu so details of him are not mentioned by the filmmaker. Consequently, characters like his sister Anulika, her husband Onyeka and Nnesinachi are not present in the film.

4.2. Invented Scenes: The Filmmaker's Use of Added Scenes

The filmmaker makes use of invented scenes in the film *Half of a Yellow Sun* such as the recurrent use of archival footage or black-and-white newsreels and catch-up voice over throughout the film to help dramatize the Biafran War. The film is interspersed with archival stock footage of television news broadcasts of political events in Nigeria.

The first newsreel used is at the beginning of the film. This scene reveals Queen Elisabeth, the Queen of England as she arrives at the airport in Lagos and there are a lot of people who welcome her including the Nigerian army. [00:00:39]

In the second archival footage, it is said that, in May, Major General Oronzi abolishes the regions by decree and it is the last strike of the north. However, there are riots and his regime falls barely after six months. The riots leave thousands of Igbos dead and a troop is equally killed at Ibadan. [00:53:10]

In the third newsreel, it is said that the military governor of the eastern region, General Ojukwu is questioned about the extent of the killings. He cites the number of people who have died in the different towns. [00:58:06]

The fourth archival footage reveals General Ojukwu's speech after the celebration of the Biafran Independence. He says a civil war is imminent and his people have been prepared for this eventuality and he is confident of their readiness. He continues as he says that when the war thus comes, the people on the other side will be surprised after what they will get. [1:03:07]

In the fifth archival footage, there is a journalist who reports that every day at precisely half past one, there are explosions. In this scene, people are running in all directions, children are trained in the army as the war gets serious. Out of options, General Ojukwu encourages young boys in the army to fight and defend their country "heroes of our fatherland, pursue the enemy, destroy the invader, and march on brave boys..." [1:30:34].

In the last newsreel, General Ojukwu who led the Biafran secession in Nigeria is on his way to seek political asylum in Ivory Coast. He is said to have with him 3000 pounds of luggage. At the end of this footage, Major General Ifeum makes a series of declarations among which is the eradication of the Republic of Biafra. [1:42:56]

The effectiveness of this archival footage in the film is that

² an ellipsis is a narrative device of omitting a portion of the sequence of events, allowing the reader to fill in the narrative gaps. Applied to filmmaking, ellipsis is the omission of action whose importance to the narrative can infer from action, including dialogue, preceding and following the omitted action.

it does not only help in dramatizing the Biafran War but equally goes a long way to show the audience how people had to suffer during this war to the extent that little boys had to get involved as soldiers to fight during the war. This newsreel used by the filmmaker is to bring back the painful memories of the Biafran civil war so that people can learn from it.

5. Conclusion

This article was based on the analysis of film adaptation techniques from Chimamanda Ngozi's award winning novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* [6] to Biyi Bandele's film bearing the same name. How then does Biyi Bandele leave from the novel in his film? This was the researcher's major preoccupation. This study adopted or made use of a theory and a method which enabled the analysis of the techniques of film adaptation from the novel to the film that were the corpus of this research. Given the fact that the realities in Africa are different from those in Europe or the rest of the world, the filmmaker was therefore criticized at some point for misrepresentation of the realities of the Biafra war. The film has been criticized and condemned by critics. These critics based their criticisms of Biyi Bandele's film on three aspects; misrepresentation, political repression and injustice to the source materia. Chike Ofili, Derica Shield and others based on the fact that it fails to depict the agony of the war, as it directly affects the Igbo. In fact, Ofili [20] gives a total condemnation of the film in terms of filmic adaptation like "misplaced representation" of pictures, "wrong casting" for some characters like Ugwu, wrong pronunciation of some Igbo words and "unclear storyline" (p. 2). All of these have been described as a "filmic failure" on the part of the director and the editor (p. 2). Ofili further comments on the reaction of the audience and laments that "the audience left the theatre almost untouched, without tears and sighs and their heads still held on high rather than succumb to their chest and grief" (p. 1) However, Ofili misses the point here: that the film is Bandele's narrative and not Chimamanda's novel. This is because, according to Adeoti [3], an adaptation does not really have to be "sheepishly" faithful to the original work, since each of the works is an original in its own right (p. 18). That the film version of the novel may have altered the narrative in the novel, thus not being a truthful representation of the original text does not remove its own originality. As Ademakinwa [1] points out, the person adapting is a creative hand in "the process of recreating a story and in another form as a dramaturge, he repairs and reconstructs an already written work to suit the present condition or the targeted issue pertinent or in vogue" (p. 133) Adedipe [2] argues that in the cinematic adaptation of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, the absence of more than a hundred minority peoples, the absence of the mutilation of women and children during the war, and the absence of cannibalism point to the repression of history within the film. He insists on the fact that the total absence of these elements and the removal of the scene of the Kano massacre on the insistence of the government show there is a "deliberate political repression of history in the

movie" (p. 5). He analyses evidence that shows that the cinematic version of Chimamanda Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* was censored for political reasons. He explores discourses that show that there can be a political motive in the reductionist process of adapting a literary work into a movie. He argues in his paper that suppression is ultimately political. He explores the suppression in the cinematographic version of the novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which is due to the rigors of the cinematic adaptation of novels, censorship, and politics. Suppression in his essay means the deliberate exclusion of certain events and an attempt to obliterate the Biafra story. This suppression to Adedipe is an attempt to euphemize the gory story of the Nigerian Civil War.

The film *Half of a Yellow Sun* [6] by Biyi Bandele received mixed reception from critics. It currently has a 51% aggregate rating on *Rotten Tomatoes* based on 53 reviews, with a 5.53 out of 10 average score. The site's consensus states, "While it doesn't quite do justice to the source material, *Half of a Yellow Sun* adapts Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel with committed performances and narrative nuance". Leslie Felperin of *The Hollywood Reporter* writes that it "is the kind of ambitious literary adaptation that wants it all kinds of ways, not all of them compatible" and "the script is studded with great leaden lumps of expository dialogue" [10]. One can retain that, even though the film does not create the same emotions as the book does, one can point out that it creates its own kind of emotions, which come from watching, amazing sets, actors, supporting actors and music. Peter Bradshaw of *The Guardian* gave 2 out of 5 stars and commented "there is a heartfelt quality" but "unfortunately, the film is often stately and sluggish with some very daytime-soapy moments of emotional revelation. At other times, it looks more like a filmed theatrical piece" [7]. These criticisms have their place given that the film is found lacking in many areas; nevertheless, the film stands as an example and clearly differentiates itself from the novel.

One can firmly state that, African film adaptation techniques are very different from those used by German, French, English, Hollywoods, Brazilian and Canadian filmmakers, because filmmaking and adaptation are pure cultural oriented phenomena and all those countries and continents are different from one to another. Furthermore, filmmaking and film adaptation are merely results of cultural and intercultural competence in the intercultural dialog perspective [19], in artistic inter-medial communication [18], in translation [15] and in understanding the social context [22] in which the novels is being adapted into Film.

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