

CINEMATIC REPRESENTATION ON THE CONSERVATION OF TRADITIONAL IGBO CULINARY PRACTICES: AN ANALYSIS OF *IFEDICHE*

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This study examines the impact of cinematic representation on the preservation of traditional Igbo culinary practices, using the film Ifediche as a case study. The research explores how the film showcases Igbo cultural cuisine, particularly Okpa, and its significance in promoting cultural awareness and preservation. Through the lens of cinematic apparatus theory propounded by Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, and Jacques Lacan, this study analyzes how film can be a powerful tool for cultural revitalization, challenging negative stereotypes, and preserving endangered cultural practices; using content analysis of qualitative research method. The findings highlight the importance of film in promoting cultural heritage, empowering marginalized communities, and ensuring intergenerational transmission of cultural values. This research emphasizes the need for collaborative efforts between filmmakers, community members, and cultural experts to effectively propagate cultural heritage through film, ultimately contributing to the preservation of Igbo cultural identity.

Keywords: Nollywood, Cinematic Representation, Conservation, Traditional Igbo Culinary and Practices

Introduction

Globalization is an advancement driven integration around the globe. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that has led to the growth of cross-cultural contact, which embodies cultural diffusion and the adaptation of new technologies and practices in the world. It has a lot to do with the interdependence, integration, and connectivity of social, cultural, political, and technological spheres around the world. This implies that globalization harmonizes different cultures and beliefs and narrows ideological differences between various nations (Ugoji, 5).

Globalization, by implication, facilitates the exchange of cultural practices, ideas, and values between nations, leading to a more interconnected world. It increases connectivity and integration, which can, without a doubt, foster economic cooperation, trade, and development among nations. However, the harmonization of cultures and beliefs may lead to a loss of cultural diversity and the homogenization of indigenous local cultures. Additionally, it can exacerbate existing power imbalances between nations with dominant cultures and economic potential, influencing or dominating weaker ones in developing countries. The consequences of globalization include the facilitation of the exploitation of natural resources, which leads to environmental degradation and resource depletion. This phenomenon highlights dollarization in domestic currencies, which places the value of the domestic currency to the value of foreign currencies, and the dollarization of prices that the price of goods and services in local markets are increasingly quoted in foreign currencies. And this recurrent devaluation of the national

currency creates a vicious circle (Enuka, 8).

The idea of a global village is that the concept of globalization is infusing our society; culturally, mass-produced products like books, films, recordings, television programs, and social media can have a detrimental impact on young people's minds. These products can instill behaviors that are not aligned with Nigerian values, including substance abuse, lesbianism, homosexuality, homosexual relationships, and violent crimes (Osugwu et al 146). In the same way, global communication requires the English language, making it a predator language, thereby rendering Nigerian Indigenous languages impotent, as English becomes the most efficient language for globalization (AbdulRaheem, 5).

Globalization has permeated every aspect of our lives, leading to a significant erosion of our African cultural identity. Our traditional way of dressing has been replaced by Western attire, and our indigenous languages have been supplanted by Western languages, which have become the gateway to the global community. Moreover, our cultural values, teachings, and way of life have been overshadowed by foreign influences. Unfortunately, some of these adopted values are detrimental to our cultural heritage, but due to their global acceptance, they are now perceived as normal or desirable in our culture. In addendum: Today's societies are multicultural in themselves, which encompasses a multitude of varying ways of life and lifestyles. Most people are shaped by more than a single culture, which is brought about by globalization. Globalization which is the concept of uniformity assumes that cultures are becoming the same as the world. In Nigeria, the instability of the personality, family, community, and other activities are largely due to the rapid erosion of our absolute traditional values and not due to the advancement of information technology. Instead, technology has come to accelerate our cultural heritage (Ogohi 39)

Despite its drawbacks, globalization has its benefits and has contributed to the advancement of various cultures. It has driven technological progress, expanded knowledge, and improved other facets of life. Globalization has facilitated the positive exchange of cultures, enabling artists to transcend local boundaries, adopt new techniques, and advance their cultural heritage. Ugoji frankly states that while acknowledging that globalization is synonymous with change, an inevitable and constant aspect of life, his concern lies in the potential risk that unmanaged change can pose to humanity's overall security, particularly cultural security (51).

Nevertheless, film has become a significant aspect of this globalized world, shaping the global film industry through cross-cultural exchange, technological advancements, and economic factors. Film production has become more accessible and affordable, allowing filmmakers from diverse backgrounds to produce content for a global audience. Similarly, it has opened pathways for the exchange of cultural values and ideas, allowing audiences to experience life through diverse perspectives and develop respect for the uniqueness of other cultures.

Furthermore, modernization is a transformative process that updates traditional, social, economic, religious, political, and cultural environments to meet global standards. This is achieved through the adoption of modern technologies, methods, and materials. As a result, communities shift from traditional rural societies to more urbanized circular ones, leading to changes in values, beliefs, population, geography, and ideology. From this perspective, modernization views traditional methods as outdated and detrimental to progress, associating them with the developing world. In contrast, modern lifestyles are seen as contemporary and characteristic of Western society. Consequently, modernization creates a divide between traditional and modern societies, implying that the former is inferior to the latter (Eze-uzomaka&Oluidi, 82). Not too long ago, ChijokeEgwu recalled that in traditional cultures, elders are revered for their wisdom, guidance, and decision-making authority. However, modern society often overlooks the value of their accumulated experience and knowledge, prioritizing youth, technology, and material success. As a result, older individuals are frequently

misperceived as unproductive and dependent, largely due to their lack of accurate information about their contribution to society (166). Whenever globalization or modernization is mentioned, Western influence inevitably comes to mind, having a profound impact on a country's culture, politics, economy, social structure, and religious practices. Bearing this in mind, Falola equally suggests that Nigeria, along with much of the globalized world, has undergone significant changes.

Consequently, there is a growing demand to redefine the current form of modernity by removing its colonial legacy or creating a new, and more suitable one. This is because the dominant Western-centric model of modernity has consistently disregarded Nigeria's unique cultural and religious identity, ultimately hindering the country's development and perpetuating underdevelopment (35). Serving as an eye-opener, societies must first cultivate inwardly and strengthen their indigenous cultural heritage and traditional communal way of life rather than blindly adopting Western values and practices. The focus should be on developing the society's unique identity and customs, which will ultimately benefit the society as a whole. By doing so, the conception of modernity, previously entirely Western will be depleted, and people will begin to see themselves in the new modernization they have inculcated. In a nutshell, this research work focuses on Nollywood's growing focus on cinematic representation of indigenous culture that has sparked a renewed interest in conservation effort, particularly in preserving traditional Igbo culinary practices, which are not only an integral part of Igbo heritage but also play a vital role in promoting the diverse cultural cuisine and sustainability.

Theoretical Framework: Cinematic Apparatus Theory

Cinematic apparatus theory emerged in the 1970s primarily through the work of French film critics and theorists, including Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz, and Jacques Lacan. This theory examines how the cinematic apparatus influences spectators' perspectives and interpretations, and criticizes the ideological underpinnings of film thought in a more self-conscious and self-critical set of assumptions (Baudry & Williams 39). In essence, the cinematic apparatus refers to the entire system of cinematic production, including camera and cinematography, lighting, sound, editing, and projection, the way in which the audience is invited to view the film is hugely influenced by the cinematic apparatus, which is neither neutral nor objective, rather ideologies, belief, and values that are the views of the producers.

The cinematic apparatus theory explores the understanding, underlying structure, and psychological dynamics shaping the cinematic experience. According to this theory, the production, presentation, and consumption of films are not entirely neutral or objective but rather infused with ideological or psychological meaning that influences the viewer's experience. In simpler terms, movies and television programs are more than just entertainment; they are instruments that mold audience perceptions and worldviews. When the audience watches a film, they are not just absorbing a story; they are also being subtly influenced by the underlying ideologies, values, and beliefs embedded in the film (Buhler 230). Conley Tom elaborated that the apparatus theory considers how film impacts our imagination, consumption, and memory. He also noted that film classification is crucial in understanding its effects. From his perspective, the theory has multiple interpretations:

1. Psychoanalytic perspective: A libidinal exchange between the spectator and the screen influences the audience's perspective and emotion.
2. Sociological and historical perspective: Film plays a significant role in shaping everyday life, reflecting economic and social contexts.
3. Ordinary viewers' perspective: Film enthusiasts control, mediate, or politicize their passion for cinema (146-151).

The Igbo Culture and Globalization Worldviews

According to Asikaogu, Igbo culture and perspectives are being impacted by globalization, posing a significant challenge on how to integrate Igbo values with global trends (42). The roots of this issue can be traced back to colonization, which has had a profound and lasting effect, creating a deep cultural divide between the colonizer and the colonized. The exploitation and disruption of colonial rule led to the decline and erosion of traditional culture in colonized societies, particularly in Igbo communities. As a result, the Igbo people are suffering a significant loss of their cultural life and identity (Nweze, Nwokpore et al 58). Analyzing the statement reveals that colonization created a profound lacuna, preventing colonized societies from appreciating their values and identity. This has led to the unconscious rejection of their own culture and traditional heritage, instead blindly adapting to the colonizer's influence. Through globalization and modernization, colonized societies are further assimilated into various aspects of life, including culture, religion, politics, economy, and social structure. Ikegwu Jacinta bemoans the dearth of Igbo culture, citing that young men traditionally aspire to become renowned Di Mgba (wrestlers or warriors), earning recognition and respect from their communities. Communities took pride in their skilled wrestlers, and wrestling competitions were often held during festivals like the Iriji, and New Yam festivals. However, with the influence of globalization, this traditional practice has largely disappeared, except in a few remote villages. She states that the decline of cultural values like DiMgbahas not only eroded Igbo heritage but also missed opportunities for cultural tourism. Western culture and values have become increasingly appealing, overshadowing traditional practices (1).

As globalization continues to transform societies, there is growing uncertainty about the fate of cultural identity. The widespread adoption of Western-style restaurants and outdoor catering has led to a dominance of Western consumption patterns, with foods like burgers, salads, spaghetti, and noodles becoming increasingly popular. This trend raises concerns about the erosion of cultural identity, which is a vital source of meaning and heritage (Amadi & Akena 21). A culminating impact is that people's actions are expected to be rational efficient, and predictable in modern society. This is reflected in the fast food industry, where people are expected to fit into roles without emotional attachments. The emphasis is on speed and efficiency, leading to a culture of instant gratification (Akanle 48). Modern restaurants now prioritize showcasing Western cuisine and lifestyle, which are perceived as globally appealing.

In doing so, they relegate traditional local delicacies to the background. Ironically, mentioning traditional food in these restaurants might evoke negative stereotypes, implying that someone is unsophisticated or backward or typical of someone from a rural area. Families have lost the joy and bonding experience of sharing traditional meals at home. Instead, many eagerly adopt Western cuisine, mistakenly believing it symbolizes sophistication or high society. This misguided notion erodes traditional family values and culinary heritage, leading to the loss of cultural roots and community.

Food plays a vital role in Igbo culture, symbolizing joy, unity, friendship, acceptance, and community. Sharing meals is an integral part of Igbo life, to the extent that not eating with others can be viewed as unusual or abnormal. Similarly, in Igbo tradition, every occasion is an avenue to gather, eat, and celebrate. Traditional Celebrations like festivals, burial, naming, housewarming ceremonies, and other events are marked by the preparation and sharing of various delicacies. The richness and variety of food served are often seen as measures of the celebration's success and vibrancy.

Nigerian Video Film

Nigerian cinema has a rich history dating back to the 1960s when the country gained independence.

Early films drew inspiration from the Yoruba traveling theatre tradition, featuring stylized gestures and dramatized plots. Pioneering filmmakers, including Ola Balogun, Ade YemiAfolajon, Francis Oladele, Hubert Ogunde, and Eddie Ugboma, helped shape the industry, which gained popularity in the 1970s. However, the 1980s saw a decline due to economic challenges. By the 1990s, celluloid film production ceased. With the production of the movie 'Living in Bondage' produced by Ken Nnabuihe in the early 1990s, the dice for the emergence of what is now referred to as Nollywood was cast (Onuzulike 234). And then, nearly a decade later, it became the second-largest film industry in the world in terms of films produced annually, earning the name Nollywood. Nollywood has also gained popularity across English-speaking African countries, with productions in urban and rural areas (Onishi 1). Brown notes that since the 2000s, the Nigerian film industry has undergone significant changes to improve professionalism. This change led to a resurgence in cinema establishment and renewed interest in cinema culture. By 2013, the industry had become the third most valuable globally, generating substantial revenue and influencing cultures worldwide.

However, in Ugobude's account, an online article states that the industry is rooted in the colonial era when filmmakers produced movies for local audiences. Early films, such as 'Palava' (1926) and 'Sanders of the River' (1935), featured Nigerian actors and were screened nationwide to large audiences. In a detailed manner, he asserts that during this period, religion significantly influenced cinema culture, with Christian missionaries using filmmaking as a tool for propaganda (www.okayafrica.com). More so, before the groundbreaking film 'Living in Bondage' (Nigeria's first home movie), the country was already familiar with various soap-operas and sitcoms. Notable examples include: 'New Masquerade', 'Checkmates', 'The Village Headmaster', 'IcheokuBasi and Company', and other local productions (Oparaugo 87). Since then, the industry has experienced rapid expansion, spreading its influence across Africa, Europe, and even Asia, gaining a widespread audience.

Synopsis of the Movie *Ifediche*

Ifediche tells the story of a female character, popularly referred to as Ife, who's a Nigerian graduate in engineering. After graduation, she faces job scarcity due to the increasing state of unemployment in the country, as well as being a female graduate in engineering: an occupation dominated by men. Her determination to remain chaste and her values are tested as she upholds her principles as a disciplined young woman. Her inability to secure a favorable job, coupled with her mother's ailment, forces her to return to her hometown, Enugu, where she continues her mother's trade in selling a popular Igbo cuisine called Okpa. With the help of her younger sister, who sold her the idea of packaging traditional delicacies, Ife was able to access organizations boosting her business. Additionally, through Lotanna's assistance, she successfully marketed her local delicacies, gaining global recognition and celebrating Igbo culture. However, Ife faces unexpected challenges, blackmail from her past molestation she encountered during her job struggle; and relationship issues.

Lotanna, her new lover, is kidnapped by her former boyfriend and others, threatening to hamper her food business. Additionally, controversies arise, attempting to undermine her success. Ife overcomes these challenges by speaking truthfully about her past encounters, ordeals, and hardships, which nearly drove her to suicide. With determination and resilience, she reveals her traumatic experiences. Hence, she collaborates with Nigerian police to rescue her boyfriend, Lotanna from his captor and reconciles with him. Okpadelicacy has gained global recognition as a celebrated Igbo food.

Cinematic Representation of Traditional Igbo Culinary Practices in *Ifediche*

Film is a powerful weapon for driving positive change and promoting cultural values, ensuring lasting impact in the face of rapid scientific and technological advancements. Abunike emphasizes that the media has accelerated global transformation, imposing significant responsibilities on media professionals (104). The enduring popularity of film in the world underscores their influence, extending

beyond: encouraging critical thinking, promoting cultural values and heritage, fostering empathy and understanding, inspiring social change, and shaping public opinion. *Ifediche* has gained international recognition through various accolades received in numerous film festivals, utilizing the medium to showcase Igbo cultural cuisine, particularly Okpa. The global impact of the movie includes the introduction of Okpa to international audiences who previously were unfamiliar with the traditional delicacy. This promotes Igbo cuisine and highlights Igbo cultural heritage. Notably, it revitalizes the interest of indigenous Igbo people in their traditional cuisine, encouraging them to preserve their identity with pride: as Okpa and other local delicacies can inspire global culinary innovation globally.

Significantly, *Ifediche* serves as a cultural preservation tool, showcasing culinary consumption and its cultural significance in Igbo culture. This strengthens indigenous pride and fosters a deeper understanding. The audio-visual medium, like film, facilitates cultural preservation and educational dissemination of cultural elements, highlighting Nigeria's film industry's position in cultural export and preservation (Dairo, 21). That is to say, *Ifediche*, as a film, can be utilized as a pedagogical and documentation tool for enlightening young and future generations to promote intergenerational cultural transmission. This way, Igbo cuisines will not be lost in time, or eroded by transatlantic exchange, as it has become a proactive effort to conserve and transmit cultural practices and norms across generations (Aniukwu & Enemuoh 105).

Furthermore, they (Aniukwu & Enemuoh 107) detail that film "helps people, especially the young generation, to understand and know who they are, where they come from, and how they got there and where they are going to or could go to". The assertion reaffirms the adage: 'If you don't know who you are and where you come from, you won't know where you're going.' That is, self-awareness is crucial for understanding one's heritage, direction, and future aspirations. The film successfully provides identity to those uncertain about their traditional cuisine, elevating it from local to international recognition. Likewise, blending reality and aesthetics effectively educates and raises awareness among societies, extending beyond abstract cultural heritage to convey factual truth (Guli & Gulner 1142). Notably, *Ifediche* transcends cultural boundaries by presenting detailed facts about Okpa's nutritional content and value. This transformation showcases Okpa as a cuisine that satisfies both taste and nutritional demands.

Analysis and Findings

Watching the film *Ifediche* raises a profound question: what ignited Ifediche's unwavering confidence in her ability to succeed, despite that her mother's struggles in the Okpa business, is marked by a series of failures and accumulated debt to community members? *Ifediche* highlights the complexities of entrepreneurial resilience, familial legacy, and the human spirit's capacity to defy adversity. Firstly, Ifediche's educational background has provided her with a solid foundation in business acumen, enabling her to effectively package herself and her brand. Her knowledge of marketing principles, branding strategies, and entrepreneurial practices has equipped her with the skills to present herself and her business in a professional and appealing manner.

Ifediche: Food business is not a business one can fill in easily, especially when the most sought out is our delicacy, Okpa. Okpa can be eaten in the morning, it can be eaten in the afternoon and it can be eaten in the night. We take it as dinner. It can be eaten with 'Akamu', and also mineral. As we all know, we Igbo like eating it in the morning:

Ifediche: Okpa is very rich in taste...

Man: Yes...

Ifediche: It is also rich in nutrients. Okpa can be made into different types of meal... Okpa I affordable. The middle class, the rich, and even the poor can afford Okpa.... Yes, Okpa is native to Igbo ethnicity, but once tasted, your tongue will tell you it's



Plate 1: The Preparatory stage of Okpa



Plate 2: The finished Product-Okpa

She exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit by demonstrating a profound understanding of her target market, particularly the Igbos. She has a keen insight of their attitude towards their traditional food, recognizing the Igbos deep-seated passion and emotional connection to it.

Ifediche in an interview says:

Ifediche: Am really passionate about food, and my mum has been in the food business for a while.

Interviewer1: What food if I may ask?

Ifediche: Okpa, ma.

Interviewer2: Young lady this is laughable. We are here talking about pizza and you're telling us about something... a dirty food from the east?

Ifediche: Excuse me, sir. You know as pizza is to Italy, so is Okpa to us. Okpa is not a dirty meal eaten by the easterners. It is eaten by everybody, people from different ethnic background.



PLATE 3: Shows Ifediche with Director SME



PLATE 4. Shows Ifediche and interviewers

This understanding fuels her own passion and dedication to her business, enabling her to effectively cater for the needs and preferences of her customers. By acknowledging and resonating with the cultural significance of traditional Igbo cuisine, she successfully builds a loyal customer base and establishes a thriving business.

More so, Ifediche possesses a deep understanding of the Okpa business, garnered from her formative years of selling the local snacks for her mother.



PLATE.5 Shows Naza, Ifediche and Mama cooking



PLATE 6 Shows them Celebrating

This hands-on experience has equipped her with invaluable insight into the challenges and prospects surrounding Okpa production and sales. Her familiarity with the intricacies of the business enables her to navigate its complexities with confidence, leveraging her knowledge to drive innovation and growth. Undeniably, the presence of Lotanna in Ifediche's life played a pivotal role in her success. His enthusiasm for promoting her business and his genuine appreciation for the cuisine served as a powerful motivating factor, fueling her ambition and driving her to overcome the challenges she faced. Lotanna's love and support not only provided a sense of security but also instilled confidence in her, enabling her to stay focused on her goals and ultimately achieve success.

This research finding highlights the importance of appreciating and valuing everyday aspects of our lives, particularly those rooted in our traditional and cultural heritage. We often overlook the significance of common things, such as traditional cuisine, which play a vital role in shaping our identity and cultural narrative. These traditional practices and customs are an integral part of who we are, and they coexist with us, influencing our lives and vice versa. By embracing and celebrating our cultural heritage, we can gain a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place within the world. This study, through the movies the need to reevaluate our perspective on ordinary things, recognizing their inherent value and the role they play in defining our cultural identity.

Ifediche had long harbored a dream of building a business empire, but she was uncertain about where to begin. She lacked clarity on the initial steps, necessary capital, and overall direction. That was until her younger sister Naza opened her eyes to the sales of Okpa, a family recipe passed down through generations from her grandmother to her mother and eventually to her:

Naza: Ke empire ozokariri empire anyinekpaMakaya? Empire odi one.Okpa empire na. Ha nine so naihe a neme. Ihe nine bukwa packaging, Ife.Otu Isi weh fun ihe kogaesiabatalugi. Ego juluna Okpa ofuma ofuma.

Translation: What empire could be bigger than the empire we are talking about? How many empires are they? Okpa empire na. They are all empire. It's all about packaging, yes packaging. The way you view something will determine how it works. There is money to be made in selling Okpa.

Ifediche: And I thought about it and it gave birth to Okpa ndimmuozu. Seizing the opportunity she had previously overlooked, Ifediche rebranded, packaged, and transformed Okpa into a global cuisine. This strategic move led to

widespread exposure and lucrative partnerships with Ntache Osa food network, propelling her towards the realization of her entrepreneurial aspirations and the establishment of a thriving business empire.

Therefore, we should never underestimate the value of everyday things especially those of our traditions and culture or downplay opportunities that seem common or insignificant. As Ifediche's story carefully illustrates, the very things we tend to underrate or take for granted might eventually prove to be the catalysts that propel us to greater heights.

Conclusion

Cinematic apparatus theory indeed plays a significant role in shaping cultural norms and values. Filmmakers can harness this power to propagate cultural revitalization by: preserving endangered cultural practices and challenging negative stereotypes and misconceptions. Without a doubt, strategies for effective cultural propagation can be ensured by collaborating with community members and cultural experts, incorporating authentic cultural elements and symbolism, and leveraging social media and digital platforms. The benefits of this Cultural Propagation through Film will increase cultural awareness and appreciation, empowerment of marginalized communities, preservation of cultural heritage for future generations, and the enhancements of national identity and pride.

However, the preservation of cultural heritage through film has proven essential in safeguarding traditional practices, promoting cultural awareness, and ensuring intergenerational transmission, which the case study underscores. This responsibility does not lie only on the shoulders of filmmakers. The audience, as well as the indigenous Igbo people, has a role to play in preserving their cultural cuisine. They should, in all ramifications of their modern life, propagate everything cultural and traditional typical of core Igbo values, beliefs, and customs to preserve what Igbo stands for, for posterity's sake. Typically, other breathtaking delicacies like Ukwa, Akidi, Fiorfior, Abacha, Ji-mmirioku, Ugba, and others should be preserved in this medium. This should include the process of preparation, challenges they pose during preparation, and how to overcome those challenges. This research acknowledges the efforts of social media users, who through live streaming, are promoting and preserving Igbo culinary culture. Their initiatives showcase the richness and diversity of Igbo cuisine, contributing to its preservation.

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