

FILM REVIEW

Chuko Esiri and Arie Esiri, directors. *Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)*. 2020. 114 minutes. Nigeria. English, Nigerian Pidgin, Yoruba. GDN Studios, Kimiera, Ominira Studios. No price reported.

The success of Chuko and Arie Esiri's debut film *Eyimofe (This Is My Desire)* rang silent bells in the Nigerian film industry. It was not surprising that the multi-award-winning film was not heartily received by most of its local audience. The nearly two-hour-long film embodies characteristics which are contrary to locally popular Nigerian films. It abandons flashy montages for somber-paced scenes and ditches cacophonous scores for soulful tunes. Through these elements, the Esiri brothers created a film that forces its audience to be present.

This drama tells the tale of a dream common to many Nigerians: a dream of escape. Through the lead characters Mofe and Rosa, each of whom plans to relocate to Europe, the audience comes face to face with the compounding frustrations of the average Nigerian. Mofe is an engineer at a printing press by day and a security guard by night. A man in his late fifties, he has his migration plan thwarted by a series of crushing events. A similar fate befalls Rosa, a hairdresser and bartender whose plan to relocate with her younger sister Grace remains beyond her reach. Though Mofe and Rosa's paths never cross in the film, the paths of their mutual friends and other supporting characters from their lives cross frequently.

The storyline speaks to Nigeria's socioeconomic realities. It captures the country's social landscape through the disparities in Rosa's life and the perceptions of her life by the country's upper class. It succinctly captures the nuances of Nigerians' attitudes toward health and the general welfare of others. The predatory nature of the slightly privileged is revealed through characters such as Mr. Vincent and Mama Esther. While some of Rosa's challenges in the film—such as the ritualistic demands she must satisfy to fulfill her desire to relocate to Italy and the misogyny she faces as a young, working-class woman—can be linked to redundant tropes about women, the plights of both Rosa and Mofe allow for newer layers of character complexities.

Throughout the film, Mofe's character evolves with each new personal conflict. The introduction of his relationship with his father, prompted by the death of his sister and nephews, turns Mofe's character from an ordinary frustrated electrician to a man with compounding familial issues. This pair of events presents a new facet of Mofe's identity; we see him as a person with nothing to live for in Nigeria and an increased will to hasten his migration plans. The termination of his employment, prompted by an outburst of emotions which was aroused by the denial of his sister's inheritance, also reveals another layer of Mofe's character. He is deflated but not completely defeated. Though the film does not detail how his character resolves after this climax, he does not allow himself to dwell on his anguish.

However, what makes *Eyimofe* a standout film is not its story alone, but the way the Esiri brothers use shot composition, sound, and visual rhythm to create a lasting impression of the characters on the audience. Through conscious and precise editing, the Esiris aptly capture the complexity of the human condition. Their use of documentary-style shots throughout the film forces the viewer to take in the mundane interactions that are peculiar to Nigerians.

The use of celluloid allows for a layer of depth and character in the film. By tapping into both the nostalgia for Nigeria's golden days and the harsh realities of modern-day Nigerian life, Chuko and Arie allow for a juxtaposition of the country's glitz and austerity.

The directors' reliance on scenic sounds plays a critical role in keeping the viewer situated in the environment of the characters. The subtle clanks, honks, bangs, and thumps emanating from the characters and their environment are used to draw the audience in. In this manner, the directors allow the viewers to take on the camera's gaze, and rather than being mere viewers, they become real-time characters within the cinematic world.

In comparison to new Nollywood films centered on Lagos which over-emphasize the chaos of the city and its inhabitants through sensory-heavy visuals and sounds, Chuko and Arie's pairing of textured visuals and scenic sounds enables them to further home in on the ordinariness of Lagos behind the glossy cameras.

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