

FILM REVIEW

Biyi Bandele and Kenneth Gyang, directors. *Blood Sisters*. 2022. 206 minutes. Nigeria. English, Pidgin, Igbo. EbonyLife Films. No price reported.

In Nollywood's current era of big-budget films with higher production values and somewhat diverse stories, EbonyLife and Netflix's original limited series, *Blood Sisters*, is one that has surpassed everyone's expectations of modern Nollywood television. While some naysayers on social media try to poke holes in the plotline, nitpick production errors, and criticize cast performances, the rest of Nollywood's audience is left in awe of the production's success. The four-episode series tells the story of two friends who are bound together by a heinous crime. Over the four episodes, the directors are able to present friendship, family dysfunction, and physical and emotional abuse in a way that resonates deeply with their audience.

Seasoned filmmakers Biyi Bandele and Kenneth Gyang are both directors who have laudable films in their portfolios. Although neither of them is considered an auteur, their artistic approach to directing *Blood Sisters* is quite distinctive and easy to differentiate. Bandele, who is known for his work as a playwright and novelist, is also a filmmaker with critically acclaimed films such as *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Fifty* to his name. Gyang, in a different light, is recognized solely for his career as a filmmaker. His craft as a director goes beyond his multi-award-winning 2013 debut film, *Confusion Na Wa*, and his directing credits can be traced back to the BBC World Service Trust's Television series *Wetin Dey*.

There are many contributing factors to *Blood Sisters*' overwhelmingly positive reception by its audience. Some of these can be attributed to the effectiveness of the sub-departments of the film's production team. For instance, the wardrobe department, headed by Yolanda Okereke, was able to accurately set the tone of scenes and characters to scrupulously frame them for audience perception. Inasmuch as individual departments were able to perform their duties as effectively as possible, the directors were responsible for artistically piecing together each department's contribution to the overall storytelling. While both directors come together to collectively interpret a single story, their experiences in film and backgrounds in the arts influenced their artistic approaches to interpreting the script. The difference can be felt

in the two halves of the limited series. The first two episodes, *It's a Bloody Affair* and *Run Sisters Run*, directed by Biyi Bandele, undeniably have a more disconcerting approach. On the other hand, the last two episodes, *The Hunt* and *The Catch*, directed by Kenneth Gyang, have a riveting, fast-paced approach.

Bandele's perturbing approach to the pilot episodes of *Blood Sisters* was largely characterized by his use of simplistic shots, coupled with character-motivated suspense. His reason for using this approach can be attributed to his desire to ease the viewers to the edge of their seats as slowly as possible. As the initiatory director, the responsibility for creatively ushering the audience into the story lay solely on him; this is a duty one would say was effectively carried out, as the final scene of the first episode left viewers eager to find out what would happen next. As mentioned previously, Bandele's approach was characterized by two major elements: his simplistic yet intentional shots, and his maximization of characters to drive suspense and elevate the story. At an initial viewing of the first two episodes, it's difficult to recognize the influence of his artistic style on the film. However, what many fail to realize is how the camera angles and movements—regardless of how artistically insignificant—are used to essentially manipulate the audience's emotions. Bandele's choice of framing, camera angles, and movement was effective in subliminally contributing to the overall experience of anxiety and thrill through which the story journeys.

After Bandele subtly set the tone for the audience in the opening first two installments, Gyang took over with an overt, fast-paced approach to the final segments. The reason for Gyang's approach to the creative and technical direction can be credited to a desire to build on the suspense that Bandele began peaking toward in the first two episodes. His primary responsibility in the concluding episodes is to ensure the story climaxes in the most enthralling way possible. As a dexterous filmmaker, Gyang's approach was characterized by technical shots and gory visuals that can be justified by a need for balance in the film. While Bandele focused on elevating the storyline to its midpoint by maximizing the characters' actions, Gyang focused on maximizing the characters' personalities to achieve a perfect climax. Thus, he employed technical shots to further amplify the personalities of the characters.

Bandele and Gyang's collaboration on *Blood Sisters* is a perfect embodiment of one of the three forms of creativity discussed by Margaret Boden in a 2007 article titled *Creativity in a Nutshell* (*Think* 5 [15]: 83–96). Boden asserts that creativity comes in three forms, one involving making unfamiliar combinations of familiar ideas. This describes the outcome of Bandele and Gyang's work in *Blood Sisters*, where both directors combined familiar approaches in an unfamiliar way to curate a seamless, deeply resonating experience for their audience.

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