

## FILM REVIEW

Pascal Atuma, dir. *Clash*, 2021. 87 minutes. Nigeria and Canada. English, French and Igbo. American Movie Netflix. No price reported.

Pascal Atuma is a Canadian-Nigerian actor, screenwriter, film producer, director, and CEO/Chairman of TABIC Record Label. He was born in Ikwuano Umuahia, Abia State, Nigeria, and received education from institutions in Nigeria and the United States. Atuma's extensive filmography includes *Sweet Revenge* (2018), *Bloodlines* (2014), *LAPD African Cops* (2016), *The Other Side of Love* (2012), *My American Nurse 2* (2010), *Secret Past* (2011), and *Clash*, among others. He is the host of *The Pascal Atuma Show* and the YouTube talk show *The House of Commons*.

His film *Clash*, a transnational narrative film that advocates multiculturalism, was released in 2021. It features a diverse cast from Nigeria and Canada, including Warren Beaty, Ola George, Omoni Oboli, Brian Hooks, Merlisa Langellier, Stephanie Linus, Vivian Williams, and Pascal Atuma.

*Clash* is an example of the potential of using film to reshape perceptions, promote cultural authenticity, and foster a more nuanced understanding of a people's cultural identity. In the film, Atuma makes strident effort at decolonizing representations, amplifying marginalized voices, presenting alternative perspectives, and promoting cultural revitalization. *Clash* is a thought-provoking film that skillfully navigates the complexities of cultural identity, tradition, and generational differences. Its narrative resonates with audiences, inviting reflections on the intricacies of the hitherto overlooked and undervalued non-Western traditional norms and values.

The story follows a traditional Nigerian Igbo man who visits his wife in Canada and is troubled by the Western lifestyle affecting his children's adherence to Igbo culture. He discovers his son is pursuing a PhD, not medicine as he assumed. The son discovers that he is not his biological father and becomes violent but is made to realize the nature of Igbo tradition on progeny and heredity which assures that even though he is an uncle, tradition has converted him to his true father. His insistence on knowing his son's girlfriend's lineage leads to the uncovering of her father's identity, bringing about her father's reconciliation with her mother. He guides his daughter away from an irresponsible relationship towards a stable one. Finally the daughter becomes formally engaged to her new fiancé in a proper Igbo traditional engagement ceremony (*Iku aka n'uzo*) and the son gets married in a typical Igbo marriage ceremony.

Atuma exploits the intrigues of the patriarchal protagonist Chief Okeke (played by Atuma himself), who showcases the dexterity of a confident Igbo man's skill at winning everyone around him over to the beauty and superiority of his Igbo tradition and culture even in a foreign land. His assertiveness, resolute

stances and unapologetic insistence on pushing for the acceptance of his traditions and values are represented as infectious.

The man's overwhelming sense of cultural superiority and confidence comes to a peak where he refers to his son's white girlfriend with the slide term "Ewu Bekee" (white goat)—a racist slur that challenges the conventional reverence for the West among sub-Saharan Africans—adding a somewhat intriguing layer of social commentary, which serves as a refreshing departure from the conventional veneration of Western people by indigenous Africans that is often depicted in cinema.

Central to the storyline is John's discovery of the truth of his parentage, which uncovers the Igbo tradition where a brother marries the deceased brother's wife to sustain the family bloodline. John's uncle's (Jordan's) question, "Did they not tell you?", hints at the tradition of informing the child, which his parents didn't do. The decision may reek of deception and betrayal as was perceived by the boy, which precipitated his initial violent reaction. However, his parents' motive for withholding this information was rooted in the profound affection his foster father held for him, rendering disclosure unnecessary. His foster father's offer to die in his place showcases the profound familial love forged by tradition, leaving John with a deep understanding of his cultural roots. The sacrifice and love implied by a man's willingness to die in place of a non-biological son was a testament to the enduring strength of familial ties within African culture that are not predicated on direct biological progeny. John could not help but believe in the sincerity and power of the love that informed the reason for their decision.

Through moments of reconciliation and acceptance, *Clash* portrays the gradual embrace of cultural values. The dynamics between the man's insistence on avoiding cultural taboo and the complexities of love as espoused by the wife precipitates the reconciliation of John's white girlfriend's (Charlene's) estranged



"I only have one request. You see that place that I buried my brother? When I die, bury me close to him" (56:36)



“My beautiful daughter, please take this wine and give it to the man you have chosen to be your husband.”  
(1:24:18)

parents, fostering better understanding and appreciation of the man’s culture and tradition.

Atuma’s use of sound in the libation scene added layers to the exploration of cultural rituals and their significance. He was able to capture the whole Igbo marriage rites from the “Door Knocking” (*Iku aka nu uzo*) or the daughter’s engagement, to the son’s final marriage ceremony (*Igba Nkwu*). These ceremonies offered ample opportunities to display the rich African fashion and cultural heritage.

*Clash* offers a compelling exploration of cultural identity, familial dynamics, and the enduring influence of tradition. Through its thought-provoking narrative and the forceful unapologetic persistence of the traditional African protagonist (Chief Okeke), the film leaves a wistful urge on the viewers for a better understanding and admiration of African culture and tradition. As a transnational narrative genre, it opens a great window for cineastes of African extraction to change the African narrative and present African cultures in their complex diversity.

Chiemela A. Ogbonna   
Pan-Atlantic University,  
Ibeju-Lekki, Lagos, Nigeria  
cogbonna@pau.edu.ng

doi:10.1017/asr.2024.103