

FILM REVIEW

Ema Edosio, dir. *Otiti*. 2022. 120 minutes. Nigerian Pidgin, with English subtitles. Available on Amazon Prime. No Price Reported.


Ema Edosio solidified her reputation as a major force in Nollywood after debuting with the television series *The Governor* (2016) and a first film, *Kasala* (2018). As a young, talented female filmmaker, Edosio's international reputation has earned her numerous awards, including Best Editor at the Motion Picture Film Festival, Best Director at the Zuma International Film Festival, and the Audience Choice Award at the African International Film Festival. Edosio is well known for addressing local issues that have universal appeal across cultures, and her work has been discussed at film festivals and university institutions.

In the film *Otiti*, a talented seamstress named Otiti (Gina Castel) navigates a complex web of relationships and family dynamics. She struggles to balance her romance with her committed lover Odion (Charles Etubiebi) while caring for her ailing father, who abandoned her as a child. However, her half-brothers, Dafe, Tega, and Ejiro, have other plans, scheming to take control of their father's property. Otiti's life takes a dramatic turn when she meets Onome (Yinka Davies), a client who reveals her true identity as the daughter of the man who deserted her and her mother. With Onome's help, Otiti reunites with her bedridden father, despite her half-siblings' hostility. As Otiti takes responsibility for her father's care, a fierce family feud erupts. Her half-brothers, led by the ruthless Omonigbo (Toyin Oshinaike), will stop at nothing to claim their father's wealth, even if it means his death. Caught in the midst of this conflict, Otiti must fight to protect her father from his greedy relatives.

The film *Otiti* illuminates the sociocultural challenges faced by female children in Nigeria, particularly in the country's patriarchal society where gender prejudices persist. A poignant conversation between Otiti and her father reveals that his desire for male heirs to carry on his name and legacy contributed to her parents' separation, highlighting the deep-seated gender bias. During a talk-back session at the 2023 Regina Film Festival and Awards in Regina, Canada, facilitator Babatunde Onikoyi, who curated the film at the "Screening the Global South" session, noted that the diverse female audience strongly identified with Otiti's struggles. He emphasized that "this resonates with many women across cultures worldwide, who see Edosio's film as not only a reflection of their complex experiences but also a powerful critique of patriarchy. The film redefines the representation of women as achievers, rather than passive and unambitious appendages to men, aligning with a new wave of 21st-century cinematic works that challenge gender stereotypes."

The camera masterfully captures Otití's character and struggles, which resonate with the experiences of many African women. As an ambitious woman, she works twice as hard as men to establish herself, owning a modest shop and employing two workers whom she pays salaries. The camera skillfully frames Otití in contrast to the rigid and unambitious men, lacking drive and moral direction. A poignant medium shot of Otití facing her half-brothers highlights their tense confrontation, while the presence of their father's coffin below them symbolizes his passing and sets the stage for the characters' gathering. This powerful image marks a turning point in the film, representing a full circle. Rather than being the climax, the father's death serves as a catalyst for the unfolding of events and truths. Through this frame, the audience witnesses the impact of the father's death on the characters, forcing them to confront their conflicting emotions, relationships, and past experiences. This moment foregrounds the film's central theme, showcasing the transformative power of a significant event and its effect on the characters' dynamics.

Otití's story is a powerful inspiration for women worldwide who dare to defy societal expectations and pursue their aspirations with unwavering determination and resilience. While the film transcends gender issues, it thoughtfully addresses the persistent relevance of these issues in Nigeria. Through characters like Otití, her father, and half-brothers, the film reenacts these concerns and imagines potential solutions to combat female marginalization in Nigeria, emphasizing the crucial significance of gender equality in empowering women and promoting their rights. Ema Edosio masterfully captures the audience's attention, inspiring viewers to take action towards creating a more equitable society—a sentiment shared by many African filmmakers in an era marked by socio-psychological abuses. *Otití* serves as a catalyst for change, encouraging individuals to strive for a future where every woman has equal opportunities to succeed.

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