

NASIR TAOFIQ OLAIDE

Perception of Moral Values in Yoruba Home Video Film: An analysis of Ayitale

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the performance of some Yoruba films in propagating the teaching of Yoruba cultural norms and values through the art of film-making. Film is one of the most popular art forms in existence today. It serves several purposes including entertainment, educating (be it an individual, group or even a nation). It equally remains one of the fastest means of information dissemination. Because of its potentials and effectiveness in communicating emotions and ideas, it is often referred to as the most important of the arts. Other reason adduced also include the fact that a film can rise above the limitations of language and cultural barriers by the power of visual images, use of music and sound effects. These elements can succeed in conveying same message to audiences of a heterogeneous background.

This work is predicated upon functional humanistic theory, which preaches that the immense influences attributed to film should be geared towards human and societal development. The paper hereby submits that though the film is interesting, it falls short in correcting the societal ill it set out to remedy.

Introduction

Morality in the strictest sense is universal to human culture. Indeed, it is *essential* to all human culture. Any society without a modicum of morality must collapse. Morality is simply the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of the individual to those of others in society. This, of course, is a minimal concept of morality. A richer concept of morality even more pertinent to human flourishing will have an essential reference to that special kind of motivation called the sense of duty. Morality in this sense involves not just the *de facto* conformity to the requirements of the harmony of interests, but also that conformity to those requirements which is inspired by an imaginative and sympathetic identification with the interests of others even at the cost of a possible abridgement of one's own interests. Charity, it is said begins from home. One can then infer that the theatre of moral upbringing is the home, at parents' feet and within range of kinsmen's inputs. The mechanism is precept, example and correction. The temporal span of the process is life-long, for, although upbringing belongs to the beginning of our earthly careers, the need for correction is an unending contingency in the lives of mortals. At adulthood, of course, as opposed to the earlier stages in life, moral correction involves discourses of a higher level and may entail the imposition of compensatory obligations (of which more later). However, at all stages, verbal lessons in morality are grounded in conceptual and empirical considerations about human well-being. Here lies the bane of African culture, which places much premium on morals as a means to preserving and developing the self and community at large.

Functional Humanism

Functional humanism is predicated on the notion that given the immense influences attributed to the media, their overriding aim should be to develop humanity. In other words, the media should be explored functionally to respond to human problems desirous Change. Conscious efforts towards or what Bennis, Benne and Chin (1974) call 'planned change' are the propositions of functional humanism. Due to the malleable nature of media, which can be adapted into positive and negative uses, the process of functional humanism is carefully designed to achieve a specific goal of social integration and change. The society, in this instance, is viewed as having connecting parts with interactive influences. The collective goal, presumably, is the creation of an enabling environment that offers opportunities for individual and collective development. However, societies, as viewed by social scientists, are not predictable or so simply defined in relations to social existence. There are usually disruptive interventions of certain variables built into social structures, either through natural processes or humanly contrived. In effect, this produces disorder, generating conflicts and other social distractions that demobilise the society and render it immobile. It must be noted that these social distractions, whether natural or human, are not beyond human re-ordering and reconstruction. But that reconstruction can only be if conscious efforts have been made to re-condition the psycho-social existence of the human element in order to enhance cognitive perception and re-tune mental frameworks to an appreciation of the social condition and environment. In other words, one must have been well informed about the state of his environment, his own unsalutary condition and the desirability of adapting himself to change.

One effective medium through which this re- conditioning of the human element can be utilised is the home video film. Due to its proven relativity to the human social existence as revealed by (McCann, 1991; Rotha, 1952), the home video film is an appropriate medium that can be purposively and systematically designed to educate, inform and re-orientate the human subjects in order to induce a desire for change within them. In essence, the stress of functional humanism is on the development of human resources populating the social universe. It is these human elements that can make social change possible. The quality (or lack thereof) of the human specie will determine the process (rapid or slow) of change in any given society and condition the state of that society's development or underdevelopment.

Home Video in Nigeria

Man is insatiable in nature and is considered to be a complex being. The complexity of man is seen in his push in creativity and technological inventions. Drama – which is considered to be a mirror of life – has taken many dimensions as a result of technology from stage to cinema, film and now home video, making it more possible for people to have access to this area of the arts. As informed by Ekwuazi (1987: 17), the present position of Nigerian film culture, most of Nigerian film makers come from what one might designate as the theatre belt of the country – that is, the south west of the country, with its virile theatre tradition and professional theatre companies. Some of these film makers had made a name for themselves on stage before making the transition to film. They include the likes of Hubert Ogunde, Ola Balogun and Moses Olaiya among others.

Enahoro (2009: 4), in his inaugural lecture in Jos posits that the Nigerian celluloid film industry flourished in Nigeria between the 1970s and early 1980s with a major debut in the feature film genre. Examples of this work include: Francis Oladele's *Kongi Harvest*, *Sons of Africa*, *Bull Frog in the sun*, an adaptation of Chinua Achebe's novel, *Things Fall Apart*, Eddie Ugbomah's *The Death of the Black President*, Ola Balogun's *Amadi*, Ade-Love's (Adeyemi Afolabi) *Kadara*, *Taxi Driver I & II*, Adamu Halilu's *Shehu Umar* and many others. In order to appreciate the Nigerian home video, we must situate it within the context of the socio-cultural and politico-economic dialectics of the period in question. Television dramas like *The Village Headmaster*, *Samanja*, and *The Masquerade*, *Cockcrow at Dawn*, *Behind the Clouds* created and secured the needed audience and also helped in ushering the Nigerian home viewing experience as mainstream practice.

There is no gain saying that Nigeria has its origin in the cultural settings of the past and the vicissitudes of the present. The remarkable folklore of the past with its rites and pastimes created a climate and a veritable foundation for a variety of theatrical activities. The theatre tradition is therefore a part of the social and ritual life of the people embracing the totality of their way of life, habits, attitudes and propensities. As posited by Adedeji (1985: 35), although looked as a form of entertainment, a theatrical show is regarded as an informal way by which the quality of life of the people can be inculcated and enriched. Involvement of the Yoruba travelling theatre practitioners in motion picture production was perhaps the most auspicious single factors in the evolution of an indigenous cinema in Nigeria. This happened in the mid 1970s when, in spite of positive reviews, English language feature films by Nigerian filmmakers were not making the desired impact to stimulate constant market demand both at home and abroad. Ola Balogun's box office hit *Ajani Ogun*, which opened the flood gates, gave the much needed impetus to local film production and led to a new career for travelling theatre troupes. The economics of celluloid film production and marketing had been the bane of Nigerian film makers. However, since the commencement of commercial film production in the country and before the establishment of the Nigerian film corporation's lab and sound dubbing studio facilities, production and post-production overheads had to be paid for in either British pounds sterling or US dollars.

To sustain creative artistic works, Ayorinde and Okafor in Haynes and Okome (1997: 22) informs that Yoruba travelling theatre artists began making video films in 1988. They conceived of video simply as the cheapest possible way of producing audio-visual material for projection to an audience. This was the culmination of a process of adopting progressively cheaper media as the economy deteriorated: they had to turn from 35mm film to 16mm, then to reversal film stock or shooting on video and blowing it up to 16mm. Due to the way cinema was during the colonial era, Ekwuazi (1991: 8) posits that the films required for nationwide campaigns for influencing social behaviour and for adult education will mainly have to be produced in the territories where they will be used. The success of these films will be in direct ratio to the extent to which audiences can associate themselves with the characters in the film and the subject matter. The history of film style is a part of what is broadly taken to be the aesthetic history of cinema. This umbrella category also covers the costing of film forms (for example narrative, or non-narrative forms), including different genres (for example, westerns)

and of modes (for example, fiction films documentaries). Films scholars commonly distinguish aesthetic history from the history of movie industry, the history of film technology and the history of cinema's relations to society or culture (Bordwell, 1999: 14). All the phases the Nigerian theatre has taken so far have been for the sole purposes to preserve culture, to be a pathfinder and to educate, inform and entertain.

Nollywood

The Nigerian movie industry popularly known as Nollywood has become well known all over the world between the 1990s and 2000s to the rank of second largest film industry in the world in terms of the number of yearly films productivity. This automatically places it ahead of the United States. According to statistics, Nigerian Home Video produces about 200 films into the market every month. Enahoro (2009: 12) says the home video has a means of communication and communication is the nervous system of a contemporary society, interconnecting a myriad of interdependent units. The Nigerian home video like television and cinema emphasises the elements that are generally found in imagination, visual fluidity, time, space flexibility and make-believe.

The beginning of indigenous Yoruba films can be traced to the first generation of artists such as Ola Balogun, Duro Ladipo, Muyideen Alade Aromire, Moses Olaiya among others. Armoire is said to be the soul behind the emergence of Yoruba home video. The rise of affordable digital filming and editing technologies has stimulated the country's video film industry though Nigeria has produced films in the 1960s. The name Nollywood is derived from Hollywood. The release of the box office movie *Living in Bondage* in 1992 by NEK Video Links owned by Kenneth Nnebue in the eastern city of Onitsha set the stage for Nollywood as it is known today. The use of English rather than local languages served to expand the market and aggressive marketing using posters, trailers, and television advertisement also played a role in Nollywood's success. (Evuleocha, 2008: 409) informs that the first Nollywood films were produced with traditional analogue video, such as Betacam SP, but today almost all Nollywood movies are produced using digital video technology. Nigerian home video can be found at three major production centres that include upper Iwaka in Onitsha, in Anambra State, Idumota in Lagos State and Kano City in Kano State.

Nigerian films according to Sickle (2009:32) are currently receiving wider distribution as Nigerian producers and directors are attending more internationally acclaimed film festivals. In the USA, viewers can watch Nollywood and other West African movies on afrotainment online as streaming is gradually becoming part of the distribution system with sites like Iroko TV and all African cinema showing Nollywood video content.

Synopsis of Ayitale

Produced by Adebayo Salami and directed by Bayo Tijani, the film *Ayitale* opens with the annual water festival of the village. Propitiation was made to Olokun, the water goddess for bountiful harvest for farmers and for safe delivery for pregnant women amongst other expectations. It was thematically centred around Abeni (Joke Muyiwa) whose quest to have her only child, Aderopo (Femi Adebayo) to be wealthy led her to an herbalist, Ewenla (Ganiyu Nofiu) for a money making ritual. Her sojourn to the

herbalist was successful with a proviso that she would develop a hunch on her back. It is foretold that as the hunch decays and gives off a foul smell, so shall her son, Aderopo become wealthier. She concurred and the necessary ritual was performed. Lo and behold, Abeni suddenly develops a hunch and her son Aderopo in far away Lagos became highly successful in everything he does. Things started falling apart when Abeni decided to pay Aderopo a visit in Lagos and stay for a while with him after he had left home for so many years as a teenager. On arrival at her Aderopo's palatial and tastefully furnished house, she was very happy that at least she is not suffering for nothing even though she cannot confide in anybody. Aderopo was equally elated to see his mother but his happiness was short-lived on discovering the hunch on her back and was even more embarrassed by the foul odour emitting from it. He then called his uncle (Adebayo Salami) who brought his mother aside and told him to take her back to the village because he has an important meeting and the environment is not conducive due to the foul odour coming out from his mother's hunch. All attempts for him to tolerate his mother's odour fell on deaf ears. Unfortunately, the mother overheard their conversation and was crestfallen. There and then, she decided to leave and all entreaties to make her stay as planned were proved abortive. On getting to the village, she headed for the herbalist's house and informed him that she wanted the hunch removed from her back and does not care about the consequences. The herbalist did as she requested but warned her that as she is being cured of her hunch, that it will be inherited by her son Aderopo. Not only that, but Aderopo will also be afflicted with other diseases. She agreed as long as she is cured and relieved of the agonising pain that she was going through and was not even appreciated by her son on whose behalf she made the sacrifice. The herbalist did as she requested and Aderopo in far away Lagos fell ill as Abeni started getting better. He also started developing a hunch as Abeni's hunch started disappearing. Aderopo was taken to several hospitals without any success and his uncle and fiancé were advised to invite a traditional healer to examine Aderopo, a practice customary within an African setting. The traditional healer upon close examination informed that he could only be cured if he is taken to his mother and he would beg for her forgiveness. It was at the village that the story was eventually unveiled about the secret of Abeni's hunchback and its disappearance and Aderopo's hunch inheritance and strange ailment. Another trip was made to Ewenla's place and after much pleas and persuasion; he agreed to heal Aderopo but asked them if they remember the specie of a fly called ayitale. It is said that it is the love of its offspring that kills ayitale. The simple interpretation of this is that should Aderopo be cured, Abeni must die. Again, the herbalist was prevailed that Abeni had suffered enough and deserve to live. While Ewenla and Abeni took Aderopo inside his consultation room for treatment, Aderopo slumped and became unconscious. After many incantations, Ewenla revealed to Abeni that Aderopo's soul had left his body and only Abeni can bring him back. Therefore, she should hurry to a hill called kobomoje and intercept the soul from advancing further. He warned sternly that if the soul leaves, Aderopo would never be revived again.

In a flash, Abeni set out on the arduous journey and after much hardship, she got to the mountain and truly saw Aderopo's soul attempting to go. She held on to him and in that instant, Aderopo regained consciousness in the Ewenla's house and the hunch on his back miraculously disappeared. Having regained consciousness, Abeni couldn't hold

him any longer and from exhaustion, she fell off the mountain. The moment Aderopo regained consciousness, the entire people went in search of Abeni and was found at the bottom of the mountain where she lay unconscious. She was then revived, congratulated, and was also warned severely for attempting to alter God's plan for her son.

Analysis

In the analysis of *Ayitale*, we shall take into consideration the four meanings posited by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2004), in film evaluation and criticism. These four types of meaning are referential, implicit, explicit and symptomatic meanings.

Referential: a person who is not acquainted with the background of a film may not comprehend fully the referential meaning because the narration in such a film often refers to tangible things, persons or places already invested with significance. Most importantly, the referential meaning of a film must function within the film's overall form or else it will turn into a story hole, that is, an unwanted element.

Explicit: in most cases, the explicit meaning gives direct explanation to what is shown on the screen, the interpretation here, openly asserts what is explicitly presented on screen, hence the meaning that is offered must adequately and exhaustively summarise the essence of the film. Although one may not be able to isolate a particular significant moment and declare it to be the meaning of the whole film, the explicit meaning must just like the referential, be functional within the overall form of the film.

Implicit: this on the other hand is considered to be more abstract as it assumes some elements that go beyond what is explicitly stated in the film. Implicit meaning involves interpretation and this can lead to broader concept of the theme. It should be noted that while one is in search of an implicit meaning, one should not leave behind the particular and concrete feature of a film.

Symptomatic: this is also abstract and general as it situates the film within a trend of thought, within the characteristics of a particular society and period. The symptomatic meaning of a film comes to be when the viewer or critic could trace the explicit or the implicit meanings to a particular set of social values/ideology.

No doubt the home video film is quite interesting. While the technical aspects such as the setting, lighting, costume, make-up and props were explicit to a large extent, the same could not be said of the story and morals expected which is the main concern of this paper. Certain morals could be discerned in the film, which includes having great regard for one's parent irrespective of their condition or status. Moreover, the mother should be regarded as one's lesser god on earth. This is because of unquantifiable love a mother has towards her offspring. Apart from this, it equally preaches truthfulness, patience and tolerance and one cannot predict what God has in store for us and we should believe that human destiny cannot be altered.

Above all these, the overriding bone of contention that this paper set to bring to the fore lies in the title of the home video film, *Ayitale*. *Ayitale* is the name of a fly known to sacrifice all for its offspring and loses its life in the process. One wonders why Abeni

who chooses to be like ayitale should be spared of her life at the end of the day. While one is not insisting that she dies, logical reasoning and sound moral judgement should have prevailed that she dies because if the objective of making the home video is to correct societal ills, then, Abeni surviving the ordeal nullifies such intention as it proved that one can engage in immoralities, suffer and at the end of the day live to enjoy the crime committed – no matter how grievous.

Conclusion

This paper hereby submits that even though the film *Ayitale* is symptomatic, it fails to explicitly explore and bring to the fore the direct interpretation of the title upon which the thrust of the film lies. In this way, it equally negates the systems theory that propagates the assessment of social structure by way of initiating the process of feedback and inspiring change process within a given environment. This is unless one considers the negativity of the change witnessed in the film as accepted, which in itself goes against the functional humanistic theory whose overriding aim is predicated on human development. It is on record that most Nigerian home video films ends on a happy note even where a crime is committed as witnessed in *Ayitale*. The fact that Abeni used herself for a money-making ritual does not make her less of a criminal than those who use other people for the same intent. Also, in concordance with the practice of the fly, 'Ayitale' that dies for its offspring, the film would have served as a deterrent to other would-be money rituals that I believe should be the main aim of the film.

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Biography

Nasir, Taofiq Olaide graduated from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife before proceeding to University of Ibadan for his postgraduate studies. He is an astute scholar and practitioner who effectively combines theory with practice. His area of specialisation includes Applied drama, Criticism and Theatre Technology. He is a registered member of National Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP) and Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). He writes for both National and International

journals. He currently lectures at Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria where he teaches Theory and Criticism, Applied Drama and African Drama.