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RESEARCH ARTICLE

FILMS AS META-NARRATIVES IN SELECTED NIGERIAN (NOLLYWOOD) MOVIES

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Abstract

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The study examines the role of films (Movie Production) as meta-narratives. The research analyses the plots of some selected Hausa movies with a view to examine the significance of movie production in storytelling. It aims to discover whether films are considered as special narratives by the various film producers/directors or not. The research is mostly carried out through field work (interview). Oral interviews with the producers of the selected movies are conducted so as to find out whether they consider films as meta-narratives or otherwise. A textual analysis of the selected movies is also carried out for validation. The study discovers that movie production is a special form of narrative with artifice meant to justify an existing story (narrative) for emotional commitment and satisfaction. At the end, the study recommends that films should continue to be held and regarded with high esteem despite some of its criticisms.

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Introduction

The Nigerian Movie Productions started over fifty years ago with the likes of Latola Films (1962) and Calpeny Nigeria Ltd. anchoring *The Escapade* (Wikipedia, online source). Historically, Latola films was one of the first and earlier film production companies in Nigeria. It started movie production as far back as 1962. Equally, the Yoruba Travelling Theatre Group, for instance, Ola Balogun, Late Hubert Ogunde, Adeyemi Afolayan a.k.a. Ade Love, Adebayo Salami, Afolabi Adesanya and others pioneered the earliest movie in Nigeria. Kenneth Nnebue was the first to spearhead the production of movie in Nigeria when films were shot with VHS cameras and edited in television studios using a couple of VCR machines. These early men made movies like *Kongi's Harvest* in 1971, *Bull Frog in the Sun* in 1974, *Bisi*, *Daughter of the River* in 1977, *Cry Freedom* in 1982 and so on. The early nineties brought *Circle of Doom*, *Glamour Girls* and *Living in Bondage* which actually gave life to movie production in Nigeria.

The Africans incorporated the everyday rhythms of life into his expression. African traditions of communalism, respect for elders, rituals of life and death, child rearing practices and storytelling were to later appear in the western hemisphere, having been brought by the enslaved Africans. According to A.M. Mungadi & Y.A. Gulumba (2002:85), quoting Abraham 'folklore is nothing but a fiction'. They go further to say that the author of *Zaman Hausawa* posits that folktale is a story narrated usually at night for moral and entertainment purposes. By this definition, folktale is a narration targeted at children for moral rejuvenation as well as entertainment. This is usually after supper and before they go to bed. It is also seen in Hausa as "wanilabari ne wanda Magabata (musammantsoffinmata) sukeshiryawa a cikin hikima da nunakwarewa da nakaltarharshedayakunshiwatashiryawa da nuni Zuwa g a sakanishadi da rahagarayuwa da kumacinye dare" meaning "it is a story narrated by elders (especially women) usually formulated with wisdom, expertise and proficiency in language and points to good

habits, educates and entertains” (BidiyonKasuwar Kano). Although all these definitions seem to be saying the same thing. The second definition appears clearer and straight to the point.

From the foregoing, folktale could be regarded as a fictitious story narrated at night by elders to children to guide them towards cherished habits and to also entertain. Folktale in Hausa is as old as the language itself. It is one of the major aspects of oral tradition in Hausa language and society. It is an oral tradition that evolves with the society. Folktales are stories influenced by people’s traditions and customs which is why they are universal especially among the Hausa people in spite of their advancement and the level of socialization, Folktales in Hausa consist mainly of true and false stories. Folktales in Hausa are of two (2) types namely those before the advent of Islam and those after. Folktale also known as tale telling is used by oral artists to provide relaxation and teaching moral lessons. The telling of stories is used by narrators to instruct the young and teach them to respect the dictates of their customs. As a result, a large body of moral instruction, of societal values and norms are preserved for posterity. This aspect of oral literary form is portrayed in almost all the movies used for the study.

The first major publication on Nollywood was edited by Jonathan Haynes, here in Nigeria and published by the Nigerian Film Corporation. It was republished in 2000 by Ohio University. Before then, Françoise Balogun had written on Cinema in Nigeria. Other works include those of Brian Larkin and FolukeOgunleye. Nollywood refers to the Nigerian National Film Industry. The name has an uncertain origin but was derived from acronyms such as Hollywood and Bollywood. Haynes highlights that it apparently appeared for the first time in print in an article by Matt Steinglass in New York Times in 2002 (Haynes, 2005).

The Nigeria artistic world offers many possibilities for entertainment and relaxation. Even if the Nigerian film industry is an emerging industry, it has accomplished to become the 2nd largest movie industry at worldwide level in terms of the quantity of movies produced on a yearly basis. In this way, the Nigerian film industry represents an attractive opportunity for prospective film investments. Whether we are thinking of comedy, drama, soap operas, romance or action films - Nigeria's film industry can raise to expectations.

Film is a powerful tool for the transmission of cultural values. In an analysis of how film could further the course of cultural identity, Arulogun (1979: 26-29) identified four main areas. As a propaganda tool, film remains a vehicle employed by governments and others interested in the art of subtle diplomacy. Because of its popularity as an entertainment medium, it easily becomes a means of relaying and reinforcing information meant to promote a certain reality. Film also plays the role of stereotype, helping to shape perspectives on a people's culture. The impressions which viewers develop about a people and their cultural values are greatly influenced by film portrayals. As an educational medium, film covers issues in the school curricula or things about their country of origin which tell viewers about different countries and peoples. Film also plays a role in promoting commerce. The storylines of popular videos are indicators of a trend which affects films by Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba producers alike, or use either language with or without English sub-titles. Popular themes which recur are sex, infidelity, fraud, violence, intrigue, conflict and other such subjects which are designed to entertain, excite, provide escapism and appeal to the emotions.

Hausa people or Hausas are a group of people who interact and speak the same language known as Hausa language. They are mostly found in the Northern part of the country(Nigeria), particularly Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Zaria,Zamfara,Daura among others. They are also found in settlements known as ‘Zango’ in other parts of the country such as Lagos, Okigwe in Imo State and many other areas in the Southern part of Nigeria.They are also spread over vast areas of Francophone and Anglophone countries of Africa such as Chad, Mali, Cote D’Ivoire, Niger and Ghana (Smith, 1959:9).

The origin of Hausa movie (drama) began from Hausa oral performance which strictly depicts Hausa culture and traditions. Drama, which could be in oral or written form, is as old as mankind (HarunaDanjuma 2000:1), Hausa drama could be oral in form of traditional performance, and written in form of plays. With the setting up of western schools in the Northern region, “a drama text titled Six Hausa plays (Wasanin Hausa Shidda) written by Dr. R.M. EAST appears to be the first documented written Hausa play written in 1930.” Mugadi&Gulumba (2002:5). The next was WasanMarafa written in 1949 by AbubakarTunauMafara, Zamanin Nan Namu written by ShuaibuMakarfi in 1959 and later in 1964, the same author wrote Jatau Na Kyallu. These and some other plays marked the beginning of prolific writing in Hausa particularly.

Western (White) historians have not accepted the African oral tradition as a legitimate and effective system of documenting history. African history that was preserved orally as opposed to being written down is therefore viewed as inferior and invalid. Surely, written records are useful, but to deny a people's history because its preservation was done orally instead of written, suggests that there are other dynamics defining the legitimacy of the oral tradition, namely Western attitudes toward literacy and the presumed superiority of the written over the spoken word.

Material and Methods

Five selected movies are used for the research viz: *Daskin Da Ridi* (*Name of a Prince*), a production of Sarauniya Film, Kano. *Samu* (*Wealth possession*), a film produced by UNA Enterprises, Kano. *Sangaya* (*pure love*), is produced by Sarauniya Film Production, Kano. *Sai Na Dawo* (*I Shall Return*), is produced by SaniDanja, directed by Yakubu Mohammed and marketed by 2 Effects Empire films Kaduna. *Karshen Makirci* (*End of the mischievousness*), it is produced by Mansur Abba Sheriffs Company, Ibrahimawa Film Production, Kano. The research design involves the use of Oral Interviews. This was conducted with the producers of the selected movies adopted for the study. The research analyses the plots of these selected Hausa movies with a view to determine the essence of the application of these oral forms.

Method of Data Analysis

Plots of the selected movies are analysed and the aspects of narratives are identified in order to validate their significance.

Results

It is evident from the research that folktale which is largely to pass moral traits is done through the **media** to the new generation. The preservation and transmission of cultural traits is normally achieved through many methods that include; writing books, storytelling, tales, folkways, songs, drama and plays. The study identifies **entertainment** as another method of cultural and historical retrospect. Consequently, it is discovered in the movies that folktale is not only a material resource but also influences the quality of these movies.

Folktale (Tale/Story-Telling)

Folktale could be regarded as a fictitious story narrated at night by elders to children to guide them towards cherished habits and to also entertain. Folktale in Hausa is as old as the language itself. It is one of the major aspects of oral tradition in Hausa language and society. It is an oral tradition that evolves with the society. Folktales are stories influenced by people's traditions and customs which is why they are universal especially among the Hausa people. Folktales in Hausa consist mainly of true and false stories. The study discovers that folktale has been resourceful in the movie production. The movie titled '*Daskin Da Ridi*' is a movie based on a story (folktale) about an Emir who traveled on a tour leaving behind the affairs of the Emirate to a Senior Counselor, Wambai. Before he travels he urges his son "Yerima" to select a wife-to-be before he comes back. It is a moral story that stresses the fact that, it is better to be humble and the meek inherits the earth. This story is a folktale told for the purpose of knowledge transfer and personality development. The movie *Sangaya* is another movie based on folktale as produced by Sarauniya Film Production, Kano. It is about love affair between a Prince, Maina and a housemaid, Zubaina. It is a folktale on morality that proves that destiny has no obstacles. The movie *Karshen Makirci* is another folktale on morality. It is produced by Mansur Abba Sheriffs Company, Ibrahimawa Film Production, Kano. The movie is about a girl, Sadiya who happens to be neglected by her father, Alh. Usman following her mother's divorce. In the absence of her mother, Hajia Zainab, Sadiya finds herself in a difficult situation because her stepmother, Hajia Asama'u maltreats her like a slave but later gets married in good hands. It also emphasizes on the moral fact that the evil that men follows or lives after them. The movie *Sai Na Dawo* is a Hausa folktale about a honest man with contentment and humility. He discovers that he is not the legitimate heir to the kingship throne and steps aside in humility for the rightful heir to the throne. It is a moral lesson to all political aspirants, leaders and appointees who force their way to leadership by any means, hook or crook, rigging election, violence or crisis to embrace peace and honesty when vying for political positions. This sensitizes the need for a change in our attitude. Let the people's votes, views and rights be respected. The movie *Samu* is another folktale about the reality of life. From what transpires between Musbahu (the spirit) and Khalifa (the prince), preaches the fact that we should be good to the people we meet up the ladder because we might meet them on our way down. This by implication is telling us to be good to everyone.

Although, the study discovers the influence of Hausa film industry on folktales or stories as master narrative that provides a comprehensive explanation to the knowledge of the existing stories. It is confirmed that folktale has been instrumental in interpreting and conveniently conveying movies messages to the audience and also a medium of information, instruction and communication and also as medium of advancing the media.

It is discovered that folktale and other elements of oral tradition such as songs, proverbs are **emotional, inspirational and passionate** ways that appeal to the reasoning of the people thereby having the ability to induce positive behavioural changes in the society. Oral tradition is didactic, therefore it brings to our consciousness through the media our cultural values in order to achieve morals.

The research establishes the fact that there is a link between stories as narratives and movie productions as a bigger narratives or tools that order facts or events into general ideas and allow us to form emotional associations with them.

The research also discovers that while some of the producers are aware of the techniques they employ in producing the movies, some are not aware, but produce these movies unwittingly. They use them unwittingly in trying to convey the message they imply in these stories. These movies sustain the interest of the society thereby making them to appreciate these stories

Discussion

Story telling is one of the elements of Oral tradition which is the basis of African culture. It consists of other elements such as **history, religious practices, cosmology, rituals, proverbs, riddles, games, songs, dance, magic, epic tales, myths and narratives**. The Hausas incorporated the everyday rhythms of life into this expression. Hausa traditions of communalism, respect for elders, rituals of life and death, child rearing practices and storytelling appear in the Hausa movie productions. The importance of folktale is evident in the significant roles it plays in the film industry viz: it boosts the quality of the messages in the movies by being inspirational, instrumental, motivational in portraying and teaching the customs, traditions, and history of the people. So, these stories develop as the community looks for a recreation of memory in her life. Therefore, the movie industry, is seen as the vehicles in which stories develops and vice versa

The qualitative impute of film making in developing these stories is obvious. The media as a system of communication is a constituent feature directly linked to the processes of globalisation of culture due to its role in mediating a range of aspects of popular culture like film, dance, music and other aesthetic expressions. The frequent use of stories by the Hausa people as their films has proved that the movies are inevitable tools for developing these stories. One important genre of Hausa oral tradition is the narrative/folktale, a form of popular entertainment which the Hausa people call tatsuniya (story telling). Since the advent of Hausa movie industry, it has served as one of the significant source materials for the popular Hausa video movie. The traditional Tatsuniya (story telling) reflects the social and cultural life of the Hausa people, at the same time drawing attention to the salient aspects of Hausa culture and how to live it according to a set down societal norms and values. *Folktales or stories in Hausa movies has discovered the use of films as meta-narrative in exploring the cultural and religious identity of not only Nigerians but also Africans*. Most of film making in Nigeria, especially those with cultural or moral backgrounds are collages of the lives of different people from different backgrounds. It mirrors intrigues, desperation, greed, misfortune, betrayal, and leaves lessons which challenge the imagination of viewers. It portrays culture in its richness, leaving out the kind of abusive and rotten language used in some other films ostensibly to raise their popular appeal.

However, producers are not about to champion the cause of cultural purity since the elements of local cultures are daily refined by influences which dictate the mainstreaming of values to fit global prescriptions. Packaging of films for export is also influencing the drive to satisfy criteria rooted in Western commercial standards in the scripting, characterisation and production of films. Local cultures in their original form, therefore, become secondary considerations in film content. The middle ground between the commercial consideration which is primary and other secondary considerations, including culture, yield products which neither please local people nor are strong enough to break significant grounds with overseas audiences. Local cultures are, of course, in transition all over the world. Globalisation is setting the pace in the interaction of cultures with the consequence that local cultures are overwhelmed.

It is evident from the study that folktale which is a very concrete method of preserving a society's culture is as old as humanity. Available evidence from this study shows that all societies, particularly the Hausa society, make efforts to preserve the elements of their culture over time. It is therefore pertinent to note that oral tradition which is characterised by **folktales**, myth, legend, fables, etc is basically meant to keep the past alive; introduce young people to history, beliefs, and religions of their society, teach moral lessons such as; hospitality, honesty, kindness, courage etc, and to warn against negative qualities; greed, wickedness, foolishness, mischief etc. This is largely to pass these cultural traits to the new generation. This research which is concentrated on Hausa movies so that the Hausa people's oral tradition is captured, analyzed and further documented as applied in the movies considered. The study

made efforts to identify the use of oral tradition in film making as a new innovations in Hausa movies, as well as the reasons and implications of the innovation. Oral tradition has added verisimilitude and plausibility to film production, hence, experiences of Nigerians are the ones being depicted in the film production. It also authenticates the Nigerianisation and Africanisation of the content of the films depicted and it promotes Nigerian histories, cultures and experiences. The research established a link between Hausa people's traditional practices, and the content of Hausa movie.

Considering stories as narratives of movie messages, some of the producers are aware of the techniques they employ in producing the movies, some are not aware, but used those aspects of oral literature unwittingly. They use them unwittingly in trying to explain the message they imply in the movies. The lasting contribution of video films to Nigerian society will depend on how the industry responds to the challenge to stay profitable without compromising the rich cultural heritage with which the country has for centuries been associated.

Having considered the textual analysis of the selected Hausa movies, it is concluded that oral tradition has been, and may continue to be a reliable means of conserving, and transmitting the Hausa culture. Also, stories disseminated in movies assist in informing, educating and entertaining the people. It is also a good means of guidance and counseling. The research has realised the quest for social revolution in the Hausa society which is antithetical to Hausa culture where social stratification is prominent. However, many Hausa movies like the one titled; *Sai Na Dawo* is making meaningful contributions in Nigeria's democratic process by promoting good governance, transparency and accountability and the implications of the absence of these values. Hausa movies have cautioned against political violence, election rigging and preach on the other hand proper conflict resolution mechanisms as seen in the movies especially the movie *Sai Na Dawo*. Furthermore, there is the need to caution by way of guidance or scrutinizing these movies because Hausa movies are likely to be agents for the adulteration of the our culture. This is because nearly all the producers in the film industry model themselves after foreign industries.

Conclusion

In view of the above, because of our recent dependence on written records, modern society often fails to respect oral traditions. We know how a verbal message can get changed in the telling, and find it hard to believe that oral histories can be accurate. We tend to place a great deal of trust in the idea that once a fact has been written down, it will never change. In this belief, we somehow manage to overlook the masses of conflicting information that have been written down over the years. One need look no further than any Internet search engine for thousands of examples of contradictory data being presented as absolute fact. These changes mean that much important traditional knowledge is being lost. The knowledge that is being lost can provide people with a sense of identity. Knowing who you are can give you pride in your culture. Elders have knowledge that is needed for survival. They know a lot about the land they live in. They know where to find animals to hunt or trap because they know of places where animals will go to find food. They know how to find their way around the land because they know the landmarks. Traditional knowledge still has many uses in our world today.

Recommendations

- Movie production should continue to be held and regarded with high esteem despite the emphasis on some of its criticism. It should use edifice that would portray the reality of events.
- The stakeholders in the Hausa movie industry should continue to be original and avoid unnecessary foreign influences because unoriginality tampers its uniqueness.
- While it is acceptable and normal for the producers/directors in the movie industry to make money, they should not over-commercialize their endeavours or compromise their dignity. They need to see their job as service to the community and humanity in general.
- Individuals should partner with private organization to boost the quality of the business.
- Film also plays the role of stereotype, helping to shape perspectives of these stories. The impressions which viewers develop about a people and their cultural values are greatly influenced by film portrayals.
- The preservation and transmission of cultural traits could also normally be achieved through other methods which include; Movie productions, writing books, storytelling, tales, folkways, songs, drama and plays.

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