



Nigerian Home Videos as Panacea for National Development

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Nigerian home videos as panacea for national development. It investigates the capacity of video films in nation building. Using historical and content analysis methods, the study reveals that the video-filmic medium has the capacity to contribute meaningfully to the development of Nigeria; archive and document history and culture; preserve morality and engineer economic growth among others. But the government and the people of most developing countries especially in Africa haven't benefitted to full capacity from this medium due to many reasons. The study therefore recommends among others, the need for government to pay more attention to video films and professional empowerment initiatives for practitioners in this art in order to bring about acceleration of socio-economic and political growth of the county. This chapter also recommends the creation of more film festivals in order to encourage both amateurs and professionals in this field in order to showcase their productions; connect and network for partnership should be established. Funding initiatives to encourage both emerging and emerged veterans in this field is recommended so that more revenue can be generated for the nation and the productions from Nollywood can stand shoulder high with her counterparts from the rest of the world.

Introduction

Film in national development has been a subject of discourse in film studies. In fact, film scholars such as Ayakoroma (2008), Ekwuazi, (2011), Haynes (1997) and Okome (1997)

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attest that the medium is one that is committed to societal development. Hence, Tekpetey (2010, p.2) also notes that cinema could “serve as an effective means of awakening consciousness, and be used as a formidable weapon in the struggle against underdevelopment as well as post-colonial oppression and injustice”. This is exemplified in the role it played in decolonising the mind of the colonized worlds. At the attainment of independence, postcolonial African societies saw cinema as a potent medium in rewriting the histories of Africa-their own annals that had been subjectively misappropriated by the colonial masters. Hence, the Senegalese, Sembene Ousmane, who had been “justifiably nicknamed, ‘pope of African cinema’ (Tekpetey, 2010, p.3), produced films that were critical of colonialism and the colonialists. These films include *Black Girl*, *Ceddo*, *Xala* and others. Furthermore, with this medium of film, Sembene Ousmanewas able to portray the rich tradition of his people-the culture of the Wolof, and Africa at large. The justification for the success of film in this commitment is because of its accessibility to the urban and rural populace. Film is a medium of communication that breaks all cultural barriers because its visual appeal-Its language is universal.

Film in Nigeria, is a colonial heritage. At the attainment of independence, one of the goals of the Federal Film Unit, of the Nigerian government, was to “explore the nation’s resources and enhance national growth” (Okome, 1997, p.34). Though, films such as *Kongi’s Harvest* (1970) were produced, this objective was not fully-or never achieved. However, with the birth of the Nigerian video film culture-otherwise known as Nollywood, this study argues that home videos could be panacea for national development. It also investigates video films in nation building in Nigeria.

A Historical Survey of Film in Nigeria

Indeed, Film is a capital intensive project. We are hoping that the same red carpet treatment given to sports, by all philanthropists should be extended to film. Film is a real business: put millions, the billions start rolling in (Shehu, 1992, p.84).

Film was introduced into Nigeria in 1903 by Herbert Macaulay in collaboration with Balboa film Exhibition Company in Spain. This film was exhibited at the Captain John Glover memorial hall, Lagos. The “Captain Glover memorial hall became the epicenter of film show in Nigeria” (Daramola, 2006, p.202). The success of this collaboration, spurred the colonial master’s foray into the film venture. He saw it as a medium for propaganda. In fact, the British colonial masters produced films to promote the Eurocentric ideas, as Okome (1997, p.29) articulates that “these films include *Sanders of the River*, and the *Tarzan Series*”.

At the attainment of independence, the Federal Film Unit (FFU) was formed by the Nigerian government. The purpose was to indigenize the content of film and produce Nigerian culture oriented films. Mgbejume (1989, p.44) states, that “the Federal Film Unit did not make any appreciable effort at creating an indigenous cinema. Instead, it began the exhibition of the same colonial documentaries”. Nevertheless, in 1962 and 1963, two documentaries, titled *Bound for Lagos* and *Culture in transition* were produced. It was not until 1970 that the first feature film was produced and it was an adaptation of Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest*. Eddie Ugboma, Ola Balogun, AdamuHalilu, and SanyaDosunmu among others led the campaign for an indigenous cinema tradition. In addition to the above filmmakers, the Yoruba travelling theatre practitioners such as Hubert Ogunde and Moses OlaiyaAdejumo, also produced films which the populace easily understood because of their utility of the indigenous language, setting and other cultural aesthetics.

Barclays Ayakoroma observes that the period of 1970s and the early 1980s was the golden era of the film tradition in Nigeria. Nevertheless, factors such as the Structural Adjustment Program of the late 1980, the influx of criminal act in the society, the conversion of cinema houses to Pentecostal churches, and so on, led to the death of celluloid filmmaking and the cinema tradition in Nigeria. Thus, some of the filmmakers decided to experiment with the video medium as Haynes (1997, p.42) avers that “Kenneth Nnebue’s Igbo language video-film, *Living in Bondage* (1992) gave birth to the revolutionized filmmaking in Nigeria”. Apart from being a box office success, this film, shot in the video format was done in the Igbo language, sub-titled in English, as well as explores the prevalent issues of ritual practices and the craze for material wealth in contemporary Nigerian society. An influx of cineastes especially those that have been in the Television serial sector, towed the same line as Kenneth Nnebue, hence, the production of video films such as, “*Circle of Doom* (Ogunjiofor, 1993), *Jezebel* (Agu, 1994), *Nneka: The Pretty Serpent* (Ejiro and Dawodu, 1994), *The Battle of Musanga* (Dawodu, 1996), *Ikuku* (Ani, 1996), *King Jaja*(Agina, 1999)” (Ayakoroma, 2008, p.6).

Apart from being the third biggest film industry in the world, Nollywood (as the Nigerian video-film industry is called), has facilitated the employment of thousands of people. If there was no Nigerian video-film, perhaps there would be no television channels such as ‘Hi Nollywood’, ‘African Magic’, ‘Orisuntv’, ‘Irokotv’, ‘Iroko play’, among others.

Nigerian Home Videos in National development and Nation Building

Shehu (1992, p.78) defines development as “a process through which the material conditions of members of a given society progressively improve”. In furtherance of the above

definition, Ogude (2004, p.59) posits that development is “growth plus change”. This implies that development is a comprehensive approach or process of change that is primarily concerned with people’s freedom, sociopolitical, economic and environmental relationships. Furthermore, Iorapuu (2009, p.10) asserts that:

Development is a planned activity aimed at directing the process of change primarily from the perspective of people, whether large-scale or small-scale, no matter how slowly, *and the people who are involved are those whose lives will be changed and those who will be enabled by changes in knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve the quality of their situation.*

Nigerian home videos are a panacea for growth and advancement, development, improvement and progress. This development could come in various facets such culture, economy, social, political and moral among others. Understanding the concept of development from the perspective of building people’s capacity, involving citizenry in the democratic process and engaging them in solving problems that pertain to the state is cardinal to the thematic thrust in video-films. The place of knowledge, acquisition of necessary skills for life and purpose and culturing the right attitude and mentality are essential to build the right environment. In fact, such are development catalyst because pattern of life to a great extent is determined by pattern of thought, mind-set, orientation and mentality. Hence, functionalities of video-film medium centre on pedagogy, education, entertainment which gear towards teaching and informing for right life pattern which will help build the right citizens for a purpose driven and development focused society.

Development and transformation in Africa cannot proceed without the full contribution of its people. In Hullen’s (1990, p.21) words, “it is manifestly unacceptable that the people and their organizations be excluded from the decision-making process. It is manifestly unacceptable that popular participation be seen as anything less than the centre piece on the struggle to achieve economic and social justice for all”. For a remedy to be put in place, it is assumed that there was a problem on ground. There was a drawback, setback, difficulty or hindrance on ground. Therefore, there cannot be a solution, when there is no setback in place. Therefore, panacea is a drug and video-film medium becomes a remedy or drug to employ for national development and even project people’s voice into the development process. National development is therefore examined under these indicators: Culture, Politics, Morality and Economy.

Nigerian Home Videos as a Medium for Archiving, Documenting and Developing Culture

Home videos are the portrayal of the culture of a people. They are a representation of the race, the geographical orbit and the cultural motif of a people. Home videos are the reflection of the culture of a people. It garners the mode of dressing, the language, and attitude to life, the mores, traditions and the whole gamut of the totality of a people. This is what makes it a popular art. The Nigerian video film industry has been able to project Nigerian cultures. For instance, *Living in Bondage* (1992), a film was made in Igbo language, though titled in the English language and set in an urban and sub urban area, duly utilized the Ibo language. Furthermore, videofilms such as *Festival of Fire*, *Amadioha*, *Battle of Musanga*, *King Jaja*, *Vuga*, *Igodo*, *Omo- Oduduwa*, *Enaiso*, *Okparigu Kingdom* and *Egg of Life* among others have succinctly projected the various cultures in Nigeria. Due to specific languages used in video-film in Nigeria, there account for video-films in Yoruba, Igbo, Bini, Isoko, Igala, Tiv, Urhobo and Hausa languages among others. Through this, culture is being preserved; cultural identity is ensured and video-film documents, propagates and develops culture.

Furthermore, home video helps in documenting history for future generation. Films such as JetaAmata's *Amazing Grace* archive history behind the song amazing grace as the film maker weaved the story around slavery as experienced during the colonial period. *Blood and Oil*, set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, depicts the course for which the Niger Delta militants are fighting for. Though this video film does not support the act of kidnapping, it shows the dirty business the government involves itself in. Lancelot OduwaImasuen in *Issakaba*, is critical of not only ritual killing, but also thievery and the aftermath of such acts. It is in the light of the above, that Ukala (2007, p.3) posits that "the creative artist has the attributes of a healer. He concocts. And if his concoction is efficacious, it heals the diseases of the society".

Nigerian Home Videos as a Medium for Political Development

Home videos also help in documenting political development in the country. This is because it keeps history and records characters of the ruler of the day, it helps in forecasting the political undertone of the day, rescues the future leaders from committing the blunders that their predecessors committed and imbibe the right attitudes and character needed for true leadership. In *Igodo* (1998) for instance, this historical epic video-film is a metaphor for the necessity of heroism and patriotism in every nation. The plot is rendered briefly: Seven men are sent to the land of the living dead to retrieve a knife that would put an end to the pestilences in the land. These men happily undertake the journey despite the hazards involved and only one of them, Igodo, returns alive. The act of heroism and patriotism is revealed

which has a great statement on the historical and cultural background of Nigeria. Many benefits being enjoyed today in Nigeria were as a result of the heroic and patriotic deeds of our forefathers. For a nation to develop, the art and act of patriotism can't be undermined.

The parlance that '*politics is a dirty game*' has its root in the belief that politicians are not safe wherever they go and for this, adequate measures especially security have to be put in place to facilitate the safety of their lives, that of their family members and properties. In *Escape from Congo*, the president's daughter is kidnapped with her friends during their party at the beach. The kidnappers ask the father to resign as president. All attempt to rescue the hostage proved futile. It was later revealed that the kidnap was an attempted coup by the president's ally. At last serenity is restored as the hostage escapes, the kidnappers are killed and the coup plotter is arrested. Though politics is a dirty game, there is also the necessity to play by the rules. An attempt to contravene the rules could culminate into one's political upheaval, crisis and conflicts that may lead to the death of people and wanton destruction. A society involved in crisis would be devoid of development, progressive change and positive transformation.

Nigerian Home Videos as Agent for Preserving Morals and Building Right Characters

From the inception of Nollywood, various themes have been explored. For instance, films such as *Living in Bondage*, *Billionaire Club* and *Rituals*, express the futility of money ritual and ill-gotten wealth. In *Living in Bondage*, Andy, uses his wife, Merit, for money ritual. He becomes rich but unfortunately, the law of retributive justice catches up with him as the ghost of his wife, Merit, haunts him. He confesses his evil doings and this restores his sanity. The filmmaker as an artist, uses his work of art to preach good morals. Therefore, *Living in Bondage* acts as a panacea for moral resuscitation of a nation whose moral values are fast dying, a society which is in its lowest ebb. In *Billionaire Club*, the billionaires (who are at the same time cultists) use their bodies and close relatives for money ritual. The end product is destruction. The video-film presents law of Karma on individuals and the society at large.

In 1999, there was the case of Clifford Orji in Lagos, the case of human skulls being discovered in Okija shrine, human parts being discovered at Ibadan in 2014, the remains of humans and clothes discovered under a bridge in Otokutu, Urhobo, of Delta state, Nigeria, and a lot of others. This has led to the underdevelopment of some of these areas, or in some cases led to slow development due to the fact that the populace felt insecure. With the home videos projecting themes of rituals and ritual killings with a destructive critique of this act,

this could lead to the purification of this trait in the lives of the perpetrators of such act. As cited by Boal (1974, p.105), this is what Aristotle referred to as ‘*catharsis*’:

A system of wills that represent concretely, individually, the justifiable ethical values, and which come into conflict because one of the characters possess a tragic flaw, or commits a tragic error. After the catastrophe, when the flaw is purged, serenity returns necessarily; equilibrium is re-established. The two philosophers seem to say that the world returns to its perennial stability, its infinite equilibrium, its eternal repose.

Development of every nation begins from the individual. His mentality, attitude and behavioural traits must be positive. Nigerian home videos attempt to change the changers of the society. One of Teco Benson’s celebrated video-films, *Formidable Force* depicts the negative implications of do or die politics, and IfeanyiOnyeabor’s *Who Owns the City* (2010) mirrors the dark side of drug trafficking. In fact, Nana Kojo, Jack Kente and Tony Magabush in *IfeanyiOnyeabor’s film* are drug barons. The society abhors hard drugs such as cocaine, marijuana, heroin and other nuisances in the society especially among the youths. They do this business under the nose of the police force since the latter are being bribed with money, in order to have police protection. The climax portrays numerous deaths which include that of a police woman and the three drug barons. The film maker does not valorize the act of drug trafficking, but points out its harmful repercussion. The film maker also points out that the police force is corrupt and as such, it should be reviewed by the government. In essence, if the Nigeria Police Force is to effectively execute her duties, then, there is need to desist from all corrupt practices.

Summarily, positive values and norms could be preached using the video-film medium. In *Festival of Fire*, a barbaric culture is mirrored. It deliberates on the issue of the killing of twins especially in some African tribes and particularly in Calabar. It is a destructive appraisal of the killing of twins. Therefore the video-film preaches morality, sound character and humanity.

Nigerian Home Videos in Economic Development

In the spectrum of economic development, giant strides could be made in various facets. The American film industry popularly called Hollywood has created employment for thousands of people. These personnel are in the craft of scriptwriting, directing, costuming, producing, stunting, choreography, editing, cinematography, acting, law, agency, acting tutors, special effect technicians, set designing, property personnel, location managing, casting directing, marketing outfits and others. Perhaps the studio system as espoused by

Hollywood contributed immensely to this development. Hence, the American government generates revenue worth millions of dollars annually. A proper co-ordination of the various art of the video-film art could facilitate growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the Nigerian economy, as well as facilitating employment for the millions of unemployed youths roaming the street.

Despite the fact that Nollywood was birthed more than twenty years ago, a lot still have to be done to utilize the medium to its full capacity. In the inception of the film tradition, cinema houses thrived as people purchased tickets to watch films being exhibited. To this end, Ayakoroma (2008, p.4) states that “most of the cinema houses were dilapidated, to the extent that they were used as warehouses that did not house wares or were at best places of worship for new generation Pentecostal churches.” The cinema tradition which thrived in the golden era of the film medium, went into extinction for insecurity reasons but a resuscitation of this tradition will not only boost an increase of the employment rate, but it will also facilitate social development.

Presently in Nigeria, what could be classed standard cinema houses in Nigeria is the Silver bird Cinema, Kwararafa Cinema (Jos); and The Film House Cinema, Surulere among others located in different urban cities in the country. This situation contrasts what can be found in the first world nations where the cinema tradition is at its peak. In countries such as the United States of America, Britain and Canada, there are hundreds of cinema houses and this has facilitated the success in the premiere of their films such as *Titanic*, *Passion of Christ*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Spider Man*, *Avatar*, *Troy*, and *Pirate of the Caribbean*, and other successful blockbuster films. In fact, films are premiered and exhibited in cinema houses before being released to be sold to individuals either through the internet, VCDs or DVDs.

BayoAkinfemi, a Nigerian born Hollywood actor and filmmaker during a cinematography workshop in University of Ilorin stated that “though piracy is a recurrent affair in the film industry, its effect is very low in Hollywood”. The implication of the above assertion is that piracy is curbed in Hollywood in contrast to the Nigerian situation where before a producer barely begins to market his film, it had been churned into the film market by pirates. KunleAfolayan, a reputable Nigerian film producer cum director lamented on the high rate of piracy in Nigeria which he experienced on his film *October 1*. According to him, *the total budget of the film was ‘two hundred million naira’* but he is yet to recoup the cost of production. The piracy phenomenon has deterred filmmakers from making quality and high budget films. If the piracy menace is well tackled the home video medium could facilitate

national growth as private investors would be willing to invest their resources into the venture.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We have explored the impact of home videos as a panacea for national development and nation building, using different examples from various video-films. This assertion has been examined from the perspective of culture, morality, politics, and economy. Home videos are both a weapon of mass destruction and construction because the technological devices and network available in this present global age has uplifted the eminence of video-film medium in archiving and developing culture; creating and tailoring discourse that pertains to politics, policies and politics; and empowering various age cadre and expertise in entrepreneurship and economic development among others.

In addition, the developing countries of the world especially Nigeria need to capitalize on the reputation, population and vast experience that her Nollywood has gained already in order to foster national development. Globally accepted initiatives should be adopted; professional development and empowerment is essential to improve the quality, exposure and experience of our video-film makers; collaboration and networking should be encouraged and contrary attitudes should be frowned at.

Furthermore, creation of more film festivals in order to encourage both amateurs and professionals in this field in order to showcase their productions; connect and network for partnership should be established. Funding initiatives to encourage both emerging and emerged veterans in this field is recommended so that more revenue can be generated for the nation and the productions from Nollywood can stand shoulder high with her counterparts from the rest of the world.

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