

Beyond Hollywood Formulas:

Evolving Indigenous Yoruba Film Aesthetics

PAR-DELÀ DES FORMULES HOLLYWOODIENNES:

EN ÉLABORANT L'ESTHÉTIQUE DU FILM INDIGÈNE EN YORUBA

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Abstract: Home video scholarship is an emerging aspect of theatre studies in Nigeria. While previous studies have been merely critical of Nigerian film practitioners' inability to evolve an indigenous form, they have failed in prescribing necessary strategies for achieving this. This study, therefore, fills this gap by proposing devices for evolving an indigenous meta-language for the Nigerian film industry. It concludes, amongst others, that Nigerian film industry should evolve an indigenous film language through a fusion of traditional story telling forms and conventional film codes.

Key words: Film; Indigenization; Yoruba video film; Aesthetics

Resumé La bourse du Home vidéo est un aspect émergent des études théâtrales au Nigéria. Les études précédentes ont été simplement des critiques de l'incapacité des praticiens du cinéma nigérian d'élaborer une forme indigène, et elles ont échoué dans la prescription des stratégies nécessaires pour atteindre cet objectif. Cette étude, par contre, comble cette lacune en proposant des dispositifs pour une évolution de mélange indigène pour l'industrie cinématographique nigérienne. Il conclut, entre autres, que l'industrie cinématographique nigérienne devrait trouver un langage cinématographique autochtone via une fusion entre les formes de récit d'histoire traditionnelle et des codes cinématographiques conventionnels.

Mots-clés: Film; Indigénisation; Film Vidéo En Yoruba; Esthétiques

DOI: 10.3968/j.ccc.1923670020110702.025

INTRODUCTION

The cultural environment of film as an art form has been well established, having posited elsewhere that, like every other art form, film is a veritable index of culture (Olayiwola 2010). Borrowing Horatio - Jones' (1979, p. 76) expression, we may observe here that "film is basically a propaganda and cultural tool". Mast (1977) calls it a truly American art. Ousmane Sembene also laments that: "cinema from the beginning has worked to destroy the native African culture and the myth of our heroes" (Perry, McGilligan & Sembene, 1973, p. 37 – 38) while Dosumu (1979, p. 62) enthuses that "film itself is a culture - though foreign in its physical presentation - that we must here and now recognize and use it to

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† Received February 4, 2011; accepted April 9, 2011.

propagate our indigenous cultural identity". In Adeleke (2005, p. 1)'s contention, African filmmakers should adopt viable means of deculturizing the film genre by suiting it to African culture. To achieve this lofty feat, Idegu (2003, p. 29) advises that Nigerian movie makers should be conscious of the negative impact of foreign films on our society and consciously decide to plunge into identity defense of Nigerian culture through the potency of the motion picture.

Our concern in this paper is to assert this cultural consciousness: to see film as a powerful but subtle cultural weapon through which Nigeria, and Africa as well, could protect its identity in the face of globalization. In this wise, we shall be guided by the position reached by the league of African filmmakers at the second meeting of the federation of African filmmakers (FEPACI) in Algiers in 1975 that for the development of authentic African cinema, "not only should African film represent Africa from an African point of view, but they should also reject commercial, western film codes (Murphy, 2000, p. 24). This view is in consonance with Soyinka's submission that there is need for us to consciously evolve our indigenous cultural idioms by sourcing for local images to express our film messages. This paper will therefore attempt to examine such cultural images in Yoruba films specifically and suggest their recurrent usage. It is our belief that the images or film codes that better delineate our culture are resident in a number of our indigenous films: some are consciously employed by film makers who have a knack for culture while others use them unconsciously or rather intuitively.

It should be stressed that a cultural employ of film should be construed from two ends - content and form/style. A true African film, as expected in our own case, is therefore such which interrogates African culture at the dual planes of subject matter and the style of presentation; it expresses African world view using African story - telling devices.

WOLE SOYINKA AND ANTI- ILLUSIONIST THEORY

We find it extremely expedient to review Soyinka's suggestion for achieving a strong departure from "commercial, western code" as advocated above. In a speech at a seminar on the film industry and cultural identity in Nigeria held in 1979, the 1986 Nobel prize winner, Professor Wole Soyinka recommended the anti - illusionist approach in developing a unique film idiom for Nigeria. This approach in his consideration envisages a radical break away from Hollywood commercial style with its use of opulent illusion galvanized by high technology and outrageous budget. The underlying rationale for this submission is not far from the truism that African drama or story - telling is non - realist. The introduction of a narrator, as espoused in Okpewho (1986), suggests an initial consciousness of the fictitious nature of the African folk stories. That is why in the popular story of how the tortoise broke his back, the traditional audience did not see any confusion in the different and divergent stories being told about the same event. They were, as it were, aware of the purpose of traditional story telling -education through entertainment.

Soyinka thus suggests that Nigerian film makers should not be canned in the glamorous illusion of Hollywood, which in any case they may be unable to match but should rather explore the benefits offered by the link between film and theatre. He cites the example of the Bolshoi theatre which, when it came to perform in England, used three nights to shoot its entire performance on the stage. He remarks that if the *Swan Lake* had been shot by Hollywood studios using their artificial gadgetry with a multi - million dollar budget, it might not have surpassed the aesthetic height of the original work. He therefore suggests the process of adapting the stage to the screen, though with the consciousness that the two media are not the same, howbeit complementary.

He further advocates a total decline from technology - ridden Hollywood in favour of a creative amalgamation of sequences shot on the stage and in actual environment. His view is basically that to shoot Duro Ladipo's *Oba Koso*, there is no reasonable need "to go and ask for the permission of Alaafin of Oyo to turn his family out so that they can shoot the film in the authentic setting but the production can be shot in sequence and on the stage, using the same technique as the film makers of the Bolshoi theatre did (Opubor & Nwuneli, 1979, p. 101). The import of this submission is the need to adopt film to suit the economic and artistic dynamics of our cultural environment, especially as it is difficult to raise the huge amount needed to produce Hollywood kind of film. Soyinka also warns that to achieve this, the filmmakers should mould the taste of their audience along the pathway of this new technique.

We may, however, wonder about the viability of molding the audience's taste in this age of knowledge explosion; as the internet and cable system penetrate even the creeks and hinterlands. Media technology has made Hollywood style a common, perhaps the only, denominator in every home. In content and style, Nigerian films are rated along with western films, especially by the audience, local and foreign, who see the latter as superior to the former and to whose standard the former should aspire. It is therefore not uncommon to see Nigerian video -films, especially of the English language variety, being modeled after some Hollywood block blusters. The films display outrageous glamour and exotic lifestyle. Ogunjiafor in Haynes & Okome (1997, p. 35) believes that the English language films are chiefly imitative:" we produce in English and adopt western concepts which are lost on our own people who buy the films".

Hence, while Soyinka's suggestion may not be appropriate for the present situation as African film battles with the western titans who deploy the mechanics of technology to cow it into submission, the essence of his suggestion is timeless

- there is need to depart from European models and evolve our own authentic form but the form should also be intelligible and acceptable by the rest of the world as a unique creative form.

DIALOGUE VERSUS PICTORIAL DOMINANCE

If a true Yoruba /Nigerian film form will emerge, there is obvious need to consider the proportion of dialogue viz - a - viz the image that will be permissible within the ambience of culture. The position of Ekwuazi (1991) is helpful here. He opines that if film had evolved in Africa, its emphasis would probably have not been on the visuals since Africa is a talking, preliterate society. Also, in Yoruba communities, majority of the people are still unlettered and transact their daily activities informally through oral communication. This fact explains why most Yoruba films emphasize speech to the detriment of the visual. The characters are often seen glued to their seats, except in rare occasions when movement is mandatory, and communicate exhaustively through dialogue.

However, film theorists including Kracauer (1960), Conrad and Griffith (in Ekwuazi, 1991), Musburger (1999) and Bare (1970) have contended that film is basically a pictorial medium, arguing that the importance of the spoken word is appreciated only when the image alone cannot express the message or when it only complements the image. The position of Kracauer (1960, p. 103) is worth stressing:

It is the motion picture camera, not the sound camera, which accounts for the most specific contributions of the cinema; neither noise nor dialogue are exclusively peculiar to film.

After all, sound was a later addition to the cinema. The early cine-artists held their audiences spell bound without the use of speech. In the light of this, the over - utilization of the speech medium could be described as an aberration or sheer desecration of the basic essence of film. However, when one considers again Ekwuazi's view above, one is confronted by the need for balance if speech is truly golden to African societies; a truly African film may not over - celebrate the image above the sound. It may, perhaps, be receptive to both elements, especially in a bid to make sense culturally and at the same time communicate beyond the shores of local or national boundaries. Tade Ogidan's film, *Madam Dearest* is thus guilty of placing undue emphasis on language possibly in its attempt to picture the Yoruba as primarily linguistic in communication but shies away from its universal functionality, forgetting that a good film requires international appeal.

Incidentally, our findings have revealed that the Yoruba are not limited to speech for communication purposes. They employ a gamut of other semiotic symbols for communal interaction. For instance, the Aroko symbolic system is more visual than linguistic while the use of sculptural objects in religious shrines provides pungent pictorial codifications. We cannot over - stress the importance of the gestural in Yoruba pre - literate setting; by which gesture may be employed as a singular, comprehensive semiosis or, in some other way, used in complementing speech. This possibility is well utilized in Jogunomi (2002) in which facial gestures are deployed in passing across the message in the film. A particular scene in which the wife of Abogunrin tries to lure a young man to bed is worth stressing. The woman invites the man to her room to assist her in bringing down the heavy load she is carrying. In the room, after fulfilling her bidding, the woman tries to woo him but he refuses. She threatens to accuse him of wanting to rape her but while the man tries to plead, she pulls him down to her bed and places her head gear on his lap. This act is obviously an imitation of the Aroko system: the head tie which signifies her all, her *ori* or person (see Abimbola, 1986) has been surrendered to the man. This is an unspoken, but intelligible, symbolic means of wooing a man. One of the subsequent scenes is also deserving of mention. In this scene, Abogunrin in one of his hunting expedition in the company of his aides sights the young man coming. The latter on seeing them becomes jittery and takes to his heels. Abogunrin then orders his men to pursue him, interpreting the man's action as born out of a guilty conscience. This non - linguistic, highly imaginative scenario is created to reveal the interior state of the young man on seeing the man he has been sexually defrauding.

In essence, the drive towards a unique film language of Nigerian, or Yoruba, descent must discreetly incorporate the linguistic and the visual codes in exploring our indigenous themes. The filmmakers only need to be more creative, digging into the retinue of our symbol systems to weave the two codal systems together in a highly imaginative manner. This level of imagination is well achieved in *Saworo-Ide* and *Thunderbolt*

FILM CONTENT: THEMES AND STORY CREATION

One of the basic recommendations of the federation of African filmmakers (FEPACI) is that, in forging an authentic African cinema, African films should represent Africa from an African point of view. (Murphy, 2000, p. 240). It should be a true reflection of the social realities in Africa by African filmmakers. It is undoubtful that most representations of Africa on film (celluloid or video) by non - Africans have presented unwholesome, untrue, highly prejudiced view of Africa, depicting Africa as a dark continent and Africans as " the face - painted warriors who danced frenzied -rituals, grunting unintelligible languages, often inflamed by some primeval hostility (Ladebo, 1992, p. 153).

Most of the colonial "cinematic images of Africa had been dominated by countless jungle epics, from the *Tarzan* series to *The African Queen* (1951) and the various adaptations of Rider Haggard's deeply racist 1885 novel, *King Solomon's mines* (Murphy, 2000, p. 239), so much that the people of the West and the Rest of the world never saw any harm in colonialism. In fact, most of them felt it was the best for a continent still in the woods. Ladebo (1992, p. 53) argues that even recent Hollywood pictures such as *Africa* (1986), *Gorillas in the mist* (1988), *Cry freedom* (1988), *A Dry White Season* (1989), and *Mister Johnson* (1990) are not presented from an African perspective.

Sad enough, the neo-colonialism engendered by information technology, especially satellite cable system has turned Africa to a consumer of both the good and the ludicrous from the western world. Our indigenous culture(s) is threatened by the influx of cultural images of the West, and when Africa is presented, it is in advancement of the Hegelian vision mentioned earlier, in which Africa is presented as a war-torn, crisis-laden continent. The worrisomeness of this cultural tilt made the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to launch an identity attack by establishing NTA International which is expected, as the voice of Africa, to beam the authentic Africa from African perspective to the rest of the world. It is the belief of this researcher that practitioners in the Nigerian film industry should take a cue from NTA and review the content of their films not only to reflect the social realities in Africa but also to serve as image launderer of African continent. Hence, our films should be thermostatic – providing models – rather than merely imitating happenings in our society.

In line with the foregoing, Adesina (1992, p. 170) advocates that film should be employed to complement the service of moral rearmament in Nigeria. Prior to western education, she contends, Nigeria had a rich cultural heritage, a unique judicial system and a well-orchestrated social order. All these were brought about through the use of folklores, myths, legends and a hierarchy of governmental rules garnished by enviable custom of respect for elders and constituted authorities. Adesina thus opines that all these cherished virtues have been eroded by western modernism, requiring urgent rearmament of our cultural armory. She argues further that:

There is no longer the respect for elders, for a different set of values has taken over. There is pre-marital and extra-marital sex, fuelling the spread of sexually transmitted disease. There is the craze for wealth at all cost. People give undue reference to rich men, not minding how they acquired their wealth. These are just a few of the social malaise fostered by the characteristic moral bankruptcy of the modern society.

She thus posits that the Nigerian film industry can be repositioned to change this downward moral trend and effect moral re- armament of the society. This view may be supported with the fact that, African art is a functional art; it is primarily anchored on its didactic value. The moonlight tales of the Yoruba, and all African societies, is chiefly meant to instill moral decency in the child – audience. A truly Yoruba, truly Nigerian, film will therefore not neglect the sacrosanct province of the morality while at the same time providing a highly enriching entertainment value.

A review of the production contents of Nigerian celluloid films reveals about three or four varieties (Shehu, 1992; Ladebo, 1992). We have films that serve as social commentaries, falling under the area of social realism. A second type adopts cultural approach to film making, exploring and adapting local myth, legend and traditional lores. Prominent in this category are the films of Hubert Ogunde and the Yoruba traveling theatre troupes. Then the historical films which explore the history of certain personages with great historical essence. Finally, we have anti-colonialist films which view colonialism from African perspective. A typical example is the adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* by Calpenny Films, under the title: *Bullfrog in the Sun*.

Hubert Ogunde's magical film genre which was wholesomely copied by other Yoruba popular theatre troupes was criticized for "not been able to transcend the glorification of culture; the idealization of culture" at the expense of contemporary issues. Incidentally, when the home video succeeded celluloid, most of the style of this genre was imported into Yoruba video – films, creating a proliferation of magic, rituals and witchcraft activities. To Adesina (1992, p. 175), "these exercises in mysticism possess nothing more than entertainment and historical values," leaving the modern society nothing to learn in terms of "models for living in a 20th century society". There is therefore a dire need to reposition Yoruba historical/cultural genre to help in solving some of our contemporary problems. A step in this direction has been taken by the producers of *Boju Boju* which uses local tales to address present problems of murder and armed robbery wrapped in the cloak of culture, *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Eewo* which resolve the nagging issue of corruption in our local polity.

However, there is also a preponderance of video films exploring family problems of adultery, childlessness, love, armed robbery, political assassination and a medley of other themes. These films have transcended the simple enclave of entertainment to the cherished domains of committed art by addressing social ills. However, some of these films are deficient, not only in quality but also in their recycling of the same story material. A successful theme invariably becomes the magic joker with which all other producers invade the audience for a sweet harvest of profits. Nonetheless, the thematic coverage of contemporary Yoruba films has grown beyond the limited compass of the early celluloid era. Virtually all topics and issues, from politics to love, HIV/Aids, armed robbery, war and history etc., are treated by the ever ambitious practitioners (Ukadike, 2000, p. 254). The main problem resides in the shallowness of their treatment and

creativity. It is our perceived notion that these indigenous movie makers have not been able to marry a film's artistic role with its commercial drive. They seem to be oblivious of the fact that film is first an art before it is business.

THE FOLKLORIC APPROACH

Egudu cited in Oyewole (2004) in his discussion of what constitute Africanness in Modern African drama submits succinctly that:

Certainly, the first requirement for the Africanity in any work of literature is that its author be an African – other requirements include – myth, legends, tales and songs taken from African oral literature; African traditional symbols; the paraphernalia of African vernacular rhetoric (what Solomon Iyasere calls traditional modes of linguistic expression) and African indigenous imagery.

From the above, it could be inferred that there is need for recourse to African narrative art for the emergence of authentic African film just as it is for African literature. It is the creative use of the traditional story teller's art in a way that recognizes the peculiarity of the film idiom that expresses the Africanness of a film. As Diawara (1988, p. 6) rightly opines, to prevent African cinema from being forced "into an imperfect appendix of western cinema, one must question Africa itself, and African traditions, to discover the originality of its films". A folkloric approach to movie making, therefore, affords African filmmakers the necessity of interrogating Africa in contemporary African films by sourcing for cultural images found in oral tradition to distinguish the ensuing films and make them truly African. Certainly, nothing can evolve out of nothing, and as such, an African cinema can only evolve out of a repertory of its oral traditions such as myths, legends, folktales and other folk modes. This is why Diawara further notes that "when African films are examined, one sees that all the directors resort in different ways to oral story telling forms" (7). This is simply because that is the only cultural link they can establish.

It is in the light of the above that we shall argue in this paper that Yoruba video film could only maintain its individuality of existence by incorporating into its story content a good but creative dosage of oral traditions. We admire, in particular, the creative deploy of folktales in *Boju-Boju* to address post-colonial dilemmas like murder and armed robbery. The film meticulously uses a popular tale to impinge upon the essence of a contemporary profession of 'policing or modern detective'. Though arduously employed in *Agogo Eewo*, the folkloric elements are not discreetly wielded into the main story, making them to stand out like a sore-thumb. The resultant movie appears like a medley of particles without a connecting tissue.

Nonetheless, we cannot overstress the impact of folklore in delineating a true Yoruba video-film. What makes African literature unique is not in the dexterous use of the English language by the writers but in the way they masterly weave African cultural modes into the story material. The essence of Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* lies in the culture and philosophy that gave it life. We are daunted by the cyclical form of existence – the worlds of the living, the dead and the unborn – that harbours the story as well as a subtle mix of the traditional arts of music, dance, chants, incantations, oral poetry and the attendant spiritual significations. Ola rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*, though adapting Sophocles' original story in *Oedipus Rex*, successfully translates the work to Yoruba cultural milieu through the use of oral traditions in form of a language laced with Yoruba proverbs and idioms, a cultural life that is rich in predestination, the worship of poly-deities as well as traditional music and dance. In the same way, Osofisan's adaptation of *Antigone to Tegonni* could not have been possible but by localizing the story within a historical epoch in Nigeria and by weaving it around the myth of Yemoja mother-goddess. It is, no doubt, admissible that African writers now use the English language in a way that was never contemplated by the native speaker, chiefly because it has been subjected to the ritual of indigenization. African film is thus expected to follow this hallowed direction.

Unfortunately, Nigerian video-films now ply the glamorous lane of materialism; a wanton and unabated invocation of Hollywood and all it stands for. According to Ukadike (2000, p. 257-258), "video has become a fertile ground to display the current quest for materialism. It has also become a cankerworm subject to criticism". The films now parade "high-profile, working class people", he adds, "especially businessmen and women 'who have made it', branding about in the latest kinds of expensive posh cars, expensive cloths, and imported wines and whiskeys in the get-rich-quick mentality of the fast age. Some of these video-films are significant for their outrageous fashion shows rather than the entrenchment of an artistic tradition that mirrors local content or 'national character'. It is not uncommon, sad to admit, to see a Yoruba movie (though Igbo films are the most affected) whose lead character is jobless, yet living in an apartment that even an average working class Nigerian would find idealistic to acquire, with a delectable car in spite of the high cost of fuel.

Undoubtedly, this new phase in Nigerian film, and Yoruba genre specifically, was heralded by the mad drive to imitate Hollywood and its larger-than-life artistic realism. The industry has exalted glamour to the gross neglect of artistic truism of the social realities in Nigeria by merely recreating modern life styles found in most Hollywood films. Certainly, our bourgeoning video industry needs highly ingenious filmmakers who are not simply moved by sheer commercialism but

by strong artistic passion to represent and present our culture in its truest form, adapting it to the dynamics of the changing society. Yoruba fiction films must, as Diawara (1988, p. 8) puts it, create a movement away from Western film language, towards a predominance of traditional narrative codes. However, these traditional codes can only be found in folklores and traditional arts. But in our quest for this new folkloricism, conscious efforts should be garnered to depart from over-glamorizing or idealizing the past as encapsulated in the films of Ogunde and his accolades which only remind us of the 'glories' of traditional past laced with voracious use of magical powers and incantations dialogue. The new folkloric Yoruba film should be practical rather than purist; it should examine issues and themes that are germane to contemporary society rather than celebrating its outmoded past. Our examination of *Saworo Ide* and *Agogo Eewo* reveals how contemporary issues can be viewed through the binoculars of the traditional past. These films express a discreet marriage of culture and contemporaneity necessary to evolve a new Yoruba folkloric cinematic language.

RE-INVOKING BRECHTIAN STYLE

The theatrical style of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) known as the 'alienation effect' has been found highly amenable to African drama. It has been used tremendously by the likes of Femi Osofisan, Kole Omotosho, Bode Sowande, Wale Ogunyemi and a host of other African playwrights. Brechtian alienation theatre negates the bourgeois, Aristotelian theatre, accusing it of coaxing the audience into empathizing with the tragic hero (Gbilekaa, 1997, p. 42-43). Its chief enemy is illusion, which Brecht considered as beclouding the audience from reasoning out the issues raised by the drama, having been awashed by emotion. An 'illusionist' theatre is such that attempts to create the illusion or feeling that the unfolding stage events are 'real' with the intent of making the spectator forget that he was watching a performance in the theatre. It provides an escapist entertainment in which man is trapped in the assumption of 'reality' and is unable to fully use his mind. Brecht, therefore, believes that, for theatre to perform its function, the audience and the actors should be distanced or alienated from the play, that is, they should be emotionally dissociated from the evolving drama so as to engage their mind.

Brechtian actors should "...show the characters they act (and show themselves showing them), rather than become them" (Eagleton, 1981, p. 65). Epic theatre insists on emotional coolness in acting, on inhibiting the psychological processes of identification between actor and character. Also, to prevent his spectators from being immersed in the pool of emotion, Brecht encourages the introduction of elements such as the use of the narrator, episodic or disjointed plot, choreography, music, slides and graphics etc in-between scenes. All these are to make the viewers conscious that they are only watching a play, not actual life events. The theatrical elements are introduced to terminate any emotional growth the story may necessitate.

In the cinema, the Brechtian alienation approach has been invoked as an alternative style to the popular Hollywood commercial illusionist film which places high premium on glamorous setting and the weird craze for naturalism. Brechtian filmmakers break established convention of illusionism, infuses certain elements that discontinue the existence of pathos and present film as purely an artistic representation of reality rather than a duplication or reproduction of reality. One of such elements used for emotional discontinuity is the use of the narrator. This element establishes a fictional impression; that the artistic product is nothing short of a mere imaginative recreation of reality. The narrator conjures the image of a traditional story teller who is conscious, as well as his audience, that the narrative discourse is purely a figment of imagination. When constantly utilized in movies, it simply destroys the illusion of reality and reduces the work to its true nature; artistic imagination. Apart from the above, Brechtian film artists also employ a device often referred to in cinematic parlance as "breaking the fourth wall". This is a process by which the actor-cum-character in a film destroys the fourth wall that creates the illusion of reality in a film by directly interacting with his audience, as though he is conscious of their presence. This simply runs counter to the naturalistic theory of Emile Zola which impresses that the audience of a naturalistic play is only present by chance. A good example of "breaking the fourth wall" is found in *Two Can Play that Game* which combines elements of defamiliarization used in epic theatre in telling the story of a young lady who battles with the need to rescue her boy friend from the clutches of "modern Jezebels". In the film, the lady constantly dialogues with the audience. She consciously tells them her ordeal, asks them questions, tells them her impression on some unfolding scenarios and consciously romanticizes with them in the course of the narrative. Some Nigerian television commercials have also creatively employed this technique of distanciation. Examples of adverts like Dettol soap, Diamond Bank and Always sanitary pad easily strike the mind. These adverts use dramatic stories that employ Brechtian story telling and distanciation to establish striking connection between the viewers and their products. Other Brechtian elements that are used in movies include montage, insertion of graphics and subtitles, cartoons etc., all in the name of establishing the fictionality of the story.

It is the submission of this paper that there is a strong connection between African narrative technique and Brechtian alienation effect. Like the Brechtian actor, the African story teller is in close touch with his audience who are also expected to participate in the narrative discourse. He uses call and response songs, asks them questions and is poised to answer any question they pose in the course of the narration. The African narrative performer is also conscious of the

fictionality of his product and does not attempt to shy away from this reality. The different stories of how the tortoise broke his back reported above vigorously reveal that both the narrator and the audience in African performance contexts are aware that the stories enacted or narrated, no matter how real they seem, are mere imaginative tales meant to achieve a didactic end. Hence, modern playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ahmed Yerimah and a host of others find it highly convenient to adapt Brechtian epic form to African story telling environment. To invoke Brechtian narrative style is, therefore to invoke the spirit of African traditional story-teller who never attempted to confuse his/her audience with the 'mystery of illusion'.

Another film technique traceable to Brechtian alienation effect that is also akin to African traditional narratology is the use of the documentary approach. In the contention of Bindea (1977, p. 131), "there is at least one aspect which brings the documentary film nearer to folk art: the popularity it enjoys". But apart from its popularity, the naturalness of narrativity employed by the documentary makes it truer to nature than any other narrative styles employed by film artists. As Maingard (1995, p. 659) opines, documentary film, "unlike fiction film, claims a certain access to reality". He is, however, apt to note that though representing reality, documentary film cannot be regarded as reality in itself, just as art at the height of realism cannot be construed as life. It is against this established backdrop that we shall argue in favour of the documentary style in generating a true African film aesthetic.

The documentary could be described as the closest to the traditional African story telling mode. It diffuses the subtle technique of orality with the graphical representation of images in its narratological gesture. More so, documentary, though utilizing cinema verite, does not deny the narrator his/her real estate: the narrator remains unarguably the supreme figure that brings a sense of logicity into a stream of sometime disparaging footages. Thus the enigmatic status of the documentary film resides significantly in the personality of the narrator who welds together other production elements. The narrator in a documentary film is no doubt the creative cousin of the traditional story teller. In African setting, the traditional story teller is at the nerve centre of the story, weaving together all the narrative elements through his oratorical expertise and dynamism of creativity as he sings, dances and impersonates to bring alive his characters (Okpewho, 1992). He is also aware, just like his popular audience, of the fictionality of his narration, thus creating an element of distanciation advocated by Brecht. It is, therefore, not out of place that prominent African filmmakers draw the sensibility of Africanity in their films from oral narrative forms (Diawara, 1988, p. 7). We wish to posit that the documentary style is African just as Brechtian epic form is akin to traditional forms.

It is in the docu-drama that this great potentiality of African narratology is fully realized. The docu-drama combines both the features of oral narration with those of realistic illusion. It tells its stories by employing Brechtian 'anti-illusion' approach while at the same time creating mimetic situations that enliven the story events. The narrator is used, in the fashion of Brecht, to prevent the actors and the audience (specifically) from being emotionally immersed and as a vacuum filler for events that cannot easily be enacted. Thus the narrator constantly reminds the audience that the unfolding episode is mere imaginative figment not capsules of reality.

The few Nigerian video-films that employed this narrative technique have created great cultural aesthetics, though using the conventional film codes. Such films include *Igodo*, *Sanngo* and *Saworo Ide*. These indigenous films have invoked the spirit of the traditional story teller, presenting themselves as mere enactment of past events rather than creating "the illusion that the events which were taking place...were, in fact, 'real' (Willemen, 1971, p. 63). In these video-films, certain characters of appreciable old age are created to narrate the events in the story. Though the bulk of the stories is built around realistic acting and setting, the narrators are intermittently infused to remind the audience of the fictionality of the events.

The didactic nature of Brechtian theatre also makes it a viable model for African performing artist whose predominant motive is to present a form of art in which the audience, reader or viewer can draw some ideas or moral lessons. Obviously, African art, like Brechtian epic theatre, is a functional art. The idea of art-for-art sake has found no permanence in the conception of the African artist and audience. Inventing Brechtian style will certainly empower Yoruba movie makers to realize that, apart from its economic viability, film "has enormous educational and propaganda potentiality" (Ukadike & Ugbomah, 1994, p. 153). By this, they will be able to deploy film to the service of their culture and nation. They will be able to use film as a committed art, an instrument of change without which every human society becomes culturally and politically moribund, lacking the exigencies of modern transformation.

TOTAL THEATRE TECHNIQUE

African theatre is admittedly a total theatre. It is a composite fusion of drama, dance, music and plastic art. According to Walker (1983, p. 14), African theatre involves more than one creative art form as it completely integrates acting, music and dance to form a composite art that is unique on its own. Unlike western theatrical tradition which has finely demarcated the three theatrical genres of dance, drama and music, African theatre sees them in an integrated form, with one invoking the other (Okpewho, 1993; Ogunbiyi, 1985). Walker (1983, p. 14) further notes that at different occasions in

the performance, African actors “would begin singing and dancing, usually inviting the audience to participate” and having been familiar with the song, the audience would join willingly, thereby collapsing the thick wall of dichotomy between performers and audience often established in Euro-American theatre.

African theatre is no doubt an all-involving one. As observed by Osofisan (1999, p. 7), “the spontaneously ceremonial format of performance, the animist ethos underlying the conflict, and the demand for “total actors” are the basic elements that often make performance of African plays a Herculean task on Euro-American stage. He submits that unlike in European plays, “dance and dialogue, song and music, movement and mask etc are brought together” in African drama. Thus when the literary dramatists sought for an authentic African drama, they negotiated the traditional performance forms, though using European stage, to evolve a hybrid kind of “total theatre” which is now considered as the authentic African form (Osofisan, 1999, p. 4).

To create a film form for the burgeoning Yoruba video-film, therefore, the video-graphers should be reminded, in the expression of Hubert Ogunde - the father-figure of Yoruba popular theatre - cited in Adedeji & Ekwuazi (1998, p. 64) that “African theatre is a celebration; the creative rapport between the performance and the audience must result in celebration. It is in the use of the technique of “total theatre” that this celebration can be fully realized, creating a deep theatrical encounter between both ends of the performance – the performers and the audience. Justifiably, when Ogunde abandoned the ever-tasking stage itineraries for the more glamorous silver screen, the uniqueness of his films lies predominantly in the use of the total theatre tradition. The various criticisms against his folkloric films notwithstanding (Ekwuazi, 1991; Adesina, 1995; Opubor & Nwuneli, 1979), the recognition of the essence of ‘celebration’ has made Ogunde’s films a worthwhile theatrical experience.

It is essential, therefore, to opine at this point that an authentic Yoruba video-film cannot denigrate the component of “total theatre” if it must provide a true African aesthetic for its primary audience who are, invariably, Africans. The video form needs to brew a ‘total theatre’ format that hybridizes the traditional performance forms of dance, music and drama with the western film codes, just in the same version that African literary drama evolved from an amalgam of traditional forms and relevant European stage conventions. However, in our use of total theatre form, especially music and dance, we should not lapse into sheer imitation of the Indian film form which is characterized by over-bloated musical extravaganza. Yoruba filmmakers should be reminded that the use of music and dance in African arts negates this practice. Music and dance are essential festival components in Africa rather than mere theatrical embellishment. A severance of the musico-dance element of a typical Indian film leaves the entire story still intact, as the music and dance stand out of the entire film especially when unnecessarily protracted. But in Yoruba films, taking as examples Ogunde’s *Aiye* and *Jaiyesinmi*, music and dance are integral, not incorporated into the entire film language, highlighting the essence of communality and societal ethos among the people. As Adedeji & Ekwuazi (1995, p. 65) aptly reiterate, “the celebrative function of African theatre is aimed at ensuring communal participation”.

NEGOTIATING THE UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

The universality of the film language is incontestable. All films, notwithstanding the verbal medium employed should gravitate toward the same universal nature of communication in motion pictures. The language of film is basically of images rather than words. Film derives its names “motion pictures” and “movies” from its characteristic tendency to communicate its message(s) through moving images and this is the idea that underpins its existence, since it is the element of movement that makes it depart from photography. Kracauer (1960) submits that though film has the capability of recording virtually everything within the external world but “there are certain subjects within that world which may be termed cinematic because they seem to exact a peculiar attraction on the medium.” Among the four subjects he discussed, three of them are specifically related to the characteristics of “motion”. These are chase, dancing and nascent motion. The fourth one is inanimate object. This explains why virtually all western films usually introduce the dimension of chase to evoke the true cinematic character of the medium. Hitchcock writes that chase “seems to me the final expression of the motion picture medium” (p. 42). The elements of ‘dancing’ and ‘nascent motion’ are also accorded premium in films for similar reasons. It is our perceived notion that the above adjudged cinematic elements can be indigenized to assume local expression in Yoruba video films. For instance, the various forms of chase that are seen in western cinema can be given local sensibilities. While car chase is apparently alien to Nigerian cultural environment, leg chase is a common phenomenon. It is an observed commonality to see people run after one another for obvious and unknown reasons in market places, on the street, on the farm or in the jungle etc. The cinematic impact of this technique is overwhelming in *Agbalagba Akan* (2007), a Yoruba video-film directed by the present researcher in 2004 bringing intriguing dimension to the encounters between Lapade and the two sides of the law – the police and the robbers. In *Ikekun* (2009) as well, the element of chase is utilized to create tension, infuse suspense and build tempo as Kayode tries to escape death in the hands of callous police officers. Drawing from its workability in these video films, we can categorically state that, if well utilized, the chase will further lift the communicative potentials of Yoruba video-films, as it communicates non-verbally across cultural boundaries, making for international intelligibility.

In addition, as discussed earlier that dance is integral to Yoruba culture and society, its ample use, as evidenced in some Yoruba video films, will make our films more cinematic and extend their global acceptability. If creatively utilized, dance will not only transport our culture beyond local shores but also make the films visually accessible to a non Yoruba, non African viewer. Incidentally, our dances conform to Kracauer's view of the 'cinematic dance' which he says "attains cinematic eminence only if it is part of and parcel of physical reality"(43). As earlier explained, African dances are functional part of ceremonies, festivals and social life. This makes dance one of the most cinematic constructs that could be deployed by Yoruba filmmakers.

Apart from the elements of movement discussed above, other features that have been tested universally and found successful in conveying cinematic messages across cultures extra-linguistically are also open to the Yoruba video artists. This position may be termed contradictory to our earlier opinion that African film should reject commercial Hollywood codes. But this purist view will only deny the fact that film itself is a western phenomenon which other cultures try to adapt and re-invent (Ekwuazi, 1991;Murphy, 2000). As Hitchcock (2000, p. 264) succinctly writes:

...if we stripped away every vestige of western cinematic, psychoanalytic, post-colonial, or Marxist theory from the edifice of an African aesthetic in film, we would still have to confront the irreducible materiality of cinematic technology: one can purge Eurocentricism from expression, but what of the camera lens, and the implied technologies of vision?

Hence, all we need do is to indigenize such universal codes like the montage, the close-up and other conventional shots and techniques, and then utilize them to express indigenous thoughts in our own unique ways. In a sense, apart from ensuring conscious portrayal of culture in form and content, Yoruba films should also note that "the cinema", borrowing a leaf from Horatio-Jones earlier cited, "is the only industry whose market is the world". There is therefore a salient need for international intelligibility of our film contents. This fact places great demand on the need to overhaul the predominant dialogue-driven style of the genre and adopt a more image-based technique with its extra-linguistic connotations. This is the only factor that ensures wider distribution of our films in the international market. To achieve the above, the Yoruba videographers need to develop home-grown film codes that will stand the test of international intelligibility. This is a strong factor that delineates the Japanese cinema and makes it a unique form. Ekwuazi (1991) reports that because the Japanese sit predominantly on the floor, thereby viewing the world around them from that low ebb, their camera position is made to imitate this worldview rather than dogmatically maintaining 'eye line level' characteristic of Hollywood aesthetics. As Hitchcock (2000, p. 264) further observes, while the resistance to reassertion of Euro-American domination must vigorously continue, there is nonetheless a genuine need to internationalize African cinema. He thus warns against the danger of isolationism which, according to him, often produces "the logic of I/others which marginalized or essentialized African culture from the outside in the first place".

CONCLUSION

Yoruba video film has undergone series of transformations as it tries to evolve its own unique narrative aesthetics but much of the efforts have been on the contents of such films. There is an urgent need for the form of Yoruba video films to also reflect African worldview just like the Japanese cinema. We need to evolve a form that peculiarly indigenizes foreign film codes within the matrix of African culture. This could be achieved through a meticulous blend of traditional African narrative forms and conventional film codes. It is, therefore, until we have an indigenous form in style and content that we can truly lay claim to a flourishing Yoruba video-film industry.

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