

The Contemporary Yoruba Film Industry and the Question of Identity

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Abstract

The developmental trends of the contemporary Yoruba film industry reveal the movement from the arena to the stage, the television screen, the celluloid and the video film in chronological order. The theatre stage of the Yoruba entertainment industry was a reflection of the cosmology of the ethnic nationality in terms of linguistic preference (the indigenous language), thematic choice and expression, as well as the sociological and political relevance of the performance to the identity question. With the transition from the traditional theatre to the modern medium of video film, the Yoruba film industry has been characterised by identity problem, as shown in the choice of language, the mindless adaptation of Hollywood and Bollywood films, the celebration of violence and unwholesome expression of Yoruba cultural episteme. All these shortfalls are reflections of identity questions since every film, irrespective of climes and nationalities, is expected to be a cultural artefact, providing an insight for an alien to such culture. The paper, therefore, traces the historical development of Yoruba film industry, identifies the shortfalls in the industry and how all these have been affecting the construction of cultural identity, and then offers some suggestions on how to improve the state of the contemporary Yoruba film industry. It is concluded that video film has emerged as a popular medium of entertainment, and hence, its opportunities should be used to ensure sustainable cultural identity for the Yoruba nationality in particular, and other ethnic nationalities, in general.

Introduction

The large expanse of cultural artefacts of Yoruba nationality is a demonstration of the creativity and ingenuity of the practitioners and their patrons. These creativity and ingenuity are reflected in the medium, the content, the aesthetics and the overall productive process of these artefacts which are classified here as tangible and intangible. The tangible cultural artefacts are those that have physical representation for the appraisal of their aesthetic qualities such as handwork and craftsmanship in weaving, carving and other forms of ornamentation. The intangible cultural artefacts are festivals, ceremonies, dramatic enactments and ritual observances that delineate one cultural group from another. These intangible cultural artefacts have sociological and psychological significance in the lives of a people and nationality. The primary significance of these intangible cultural artefacts is that it helps in the construction of identity.

The cultural artefacts of a people, particularly the intangible, do share semblance with those from other ethno-cultural backgrounds. In this instance, reference is made to festivities, ritual observances and dramatic enactments. In the pristine cultures, ritual observances and dramatic enactments share some commonality in the pre-performance, performance and post-performance processes as in costuming, acting, make-up and performer-audience relationship. Despite the semblance in the process of the cultural production and consumption of the intangible cultural artefacts across African nationalities, the whole production process also delineates one culture from another to ensure cultural identity.

Identity is a slippery and amorphous term with relative semantic connotations. The non-unified approach to the study of identity is not unconnected with its multifarious and enigmatic nature (Aboh, 210). In this context, and for our purpose, identity is seen as those social and cultural markers such as language, norms and traditions, literature, belief systems and overall cosmology that delineate one ethnic nationality from another. Different variables such as personality, psychology, sociology, culture, tradition,

economy, politics, etc. of a people and nationality are put into consideration in the determination and interpretation of identity construction. Besides the different variables that have complicated the identity question, interdependence of culture due to the factors of slavery and colonialism, particularly in Africa, has made identity construction of Africans complicated. This complication is not unconnected with the duality of cultural experience that Africans were exposed to during the era of slavery and colonialism: Africans first saw themselves as Africans and later they were made to see themselves as Europeans with the colonial policies in different parts of the continent. This duality of cultural experience influences African culture as a product and process of identity construction.

As an ethnic nationality in Africa, Yoruba people have had their identity influenced by the interdependence of culture and this sphere of influence covers the tangible and the intangible cultural artefacts such as weaving, dressing, language attitude and pattern, literature and literary expressions, drama and theatre, aesthetic values, etc. The attention here is on the intangible cultural artefacts of drama, theatre and film as well as how these have aided cultural identity of the Yoruba or otherwise. The discourse focuses on the genealogy of the contemporary Yoruba film industry from the theatre tradition through the media of television and celluloid to the video film medium. In the process, the strengths and lapses of these performance medium in the construction of Yoruba cultural identity are examined and discussed.

Yoruba Theatre and the Oyo Factor

The past centuries of Yoruba society were characterised by series of intra- and inter-tribal wars that threatened the survival and continuity of some towns and communities in the Yoruba nationality. Old Oyo Empire, which was acknowledged as the administrative headquarters of Yoruba people, had her own rough share of the internecine wars that threatened her hegemonic control over the towns and communities in the Yoruba nationality. These

internecine wars, coupled with the external wars from the northern parts of the country forced Oyo people to relocate from Katunga to Igboho for safety (Toye Ogunyemi, 2016; Samuel Johnson, 2008). After many years of living at Igboho, Alaafin Ogbolu (the last king in exile) resolved to return the capital of Oyo from Igboho to Katunga (the original capital of the empire). The resolution of Alaafin Ogbolu (a.k.a. Abipa) to return the kingdom to the ancestral site in Katunga was met with stiff resistance from the chiefs, who plotted to foil all the attempts made by the king. As customary, the king was expected to do site inspection and thus, he sent emissaries to inspect the old site at Katunga. These emissaries were waylaid on their way to Katunga. On the advice of Ologbin (the king's cymbal man), Alaafin Ogbolu made a second attempt by sending six trustworthy hunters that were able to overpower the masked individuals that prevented the first set of the king's emissaries from reaching Katunga. The dramatic re-enactment of how the masked individuals were caught can be said to be the genesis of the de-ritualised drama in Oyo Empire and Yoruba nationality in general. This corroborates the earlier view of this writer that:

The incidental performance and/or experimentation of the 1590 between the six masked (stock) characters otherwise known as the ghost mummers and the six ghost catchers later blossomed into (itinerant) theatre tradition. At the inception, the re-enactment of the "ghost-catching" performance enjoyed court/royal patronage, particularly during important ceremonies and/or festivals such as the annual festival of Orisa Oko (farm god); Festival of Orisa Mole, during Oduduwa Festival and during the installation of new Alaafin. By the middle of the seventeenth century, the performers of the "ghost-catching" performance have gained much prominence in the royal and communal theatre tradition that their name later metamorphosed to be known as Oje or Egungun Apidan (Sesan, 3).

The above observation shows that dramatic enactments in the then old Oyo Empire were not predetermined by the practitioners (Alaafin Ogbolu, Oyo Empire, Council-of-Chiefs, the ghost mummies and the ghost catchers). It was during the re-enactments at important occasions and festivals that these practitioners realised the theatrical values of what they had inadvertently "invented". Until the death of Ologbin, the dramatic re-enactment of the ghost-mummies and ghost-catching was close-ended in terms of plot, characterisation, costuming and performance. The overall performance did not require dramatic creativity and ingenuity of the actors.

The death of the king's Ologbo extended the frontiers of the performance beyond the palace and this was opened to interested individuals that were not from *Oje* (masquerade family). Unlike the mono-thematic performance of the ghost-mummies re-enactment, the performers after the death of Ologbo had different themes, subject matter and plots in the repertoire of the troupes. The proliferation of the troupes ushered in the period of innovation and creativity among the contenders to attract and sustain more patronage. Among the troupes that emerged after the death of Ologbo were *Eiyeba*, *Lebe*, *Aiyelabola*, *Agbegijo*, *Ajangila* and *Ajofeebo* (cf. Adedeji, 32). These troupes engaged in masque dramaturgy for the entertainment and mockery of people and society. Their repertoires comprised praises, sarcasm and satire. These troupes performed from town to town and from community to community, and hence the name *Alarinjo* (the itinerant performers).

Despite the proliferation of the troupes, the ethics and the aesthetics of their performances positively influenced cultural identity of Yoruba nationality. The stories to be re-enacted were taken from the collective sociological, historical and political experiences of the people and this re-enactment was usually done without adulteration of the plot and the thematic thrust. This fidelity to the plot and subject matter of the story to be re-enacted

presented Yoruba people to the Europeans, who first came as a people with unique cultural practices and identity.

Apart from the fidelity to the plot, the performances of the masked strolling players enhanced the cultural identity of Yoruba nationality in terms of language of expression. All the performances were done in the indigenous language (Yoruba) of the performers and this ensured mutual intelligibility between the performers and the community. The props and costumes used by the actors during performances also projected the cultural identity of Yoruba nationality. The performers carefully selected their props and costumes to reflect the mood and theme of their plot and to ensure sustainable cultural identity.

In the 1940s, there was a gradual movement from pristine traditionalism to "neo-traditionalism" of Alarinjo theatre tradition as pioneered by Hubert Ogunde with his company African Music Research Party. "Neo-traditionalism", in the context of this paper, refers to a gradual departure from the pristine traditional values and ideals due to the factors of cultural syncretism. Ogunde theatre tradition is seen as "neo-traditional" because of some professionalism that he injected into the Alarinjo theatre tradition as reflected in the off-stage and on-stage activities. In his repertoire, he blends the traditional and the modern as shown in his earlier plays such as *The Garden of Eden* and *the Throne of God*, *Israel in Egypt* and *Africa and God*. In practice and performance, particularly in the ethics and aesthetics of performance, Ogunde departed from the Alarinjo tradition that came before him, hence the term "neo-traditionalism". The opinion of this paper is therefore consistent with the view of Clark (4) on the contributions of Ogunde to the professionalism of Yoruba theatre that:

Although Ogunde may not have given Nigeria her first professional theatre, his theatre differed from that of the masked players in many ways. In the Alarinjo Theatre the professional actor is masked; in the theatre of Ogunde the professional actor threw away his mask and showed his person for the first time to his audience. We

can therefore say that Ogunde began the first professional theatre without masks in Yoruba. It was also Ogunde who withdrew the theatre from the traditional patronage of the court and religious organizations to rely solely on the patronage of the public. Ogunde thereby gave birth to the first Yoruba commercial theatre.

The above view of Clark describes Ogunde's theatre as neo-traditional in terms of pre-performance, performance and post-performance activities.

"Neo-Traditional" Theatre and the Video Film

A careful study of the genealogy of video film in Yoruba nationality cannot ignore the place and role of pristine and "neo-traditional" theatre practices. This is consistent with the view of Layiwola (217) that:

The precursor of the genre that is generally referred to in the latter part of the 20th century as the home video emerged from the activities of the travelling theatre troupes of the 1940s through the 1970s. Most of these troupes were located in the various towns and villages of Western Nigeria....

Engaging in the genealogy of video film suggests the pre-existence of other media of theatrical expressions and dramatic enactments before its emergence as a popular medium of entertainment through dramatisation of human actions and experiences. By situating the commencement of Alarinjo theatre tradition in the 1940s, Layiwola suggests that Ogunde, who came to prominence in 1944, began the professional Alarinjo theatre tradition. Ogunde's 1944 presentation therefore marked the turning point in the trend of dramatic performances in then Lagos (Ogundeji, 32). As a "neo-traditional" theatre practitioner, Ogunde deviates from the norms of the tradition and the church. He blends the two to project the cultural identity of his people. The Bible stories are adapted and

performed with the indigenous cultural aesthetics as reflected in the props, costumes, acting and language (cf. Clark, 2008; Ogundeji, 2000, 2014; Adediji, 1978).

The recognition accorded Ogunde with his "neo-traditional" approach to Alarinjo theatre made other actors of the erstwhile traditional Alarinjo theatre depart from the old tradition and they "modernised" their performances to serve the need of the cultural identity of the people. Thus, from the 1940s to 1970s (as suggested by Layiwola), there were different genres of Yoruba popular drama. Ogunde's theatre was basically on topical issues of politics and the fight for freedom as seen in some of his plays such as *Strike and Hunger* (1945), *Tiger's Empire* (1946), *Bread and Bullet* (1950), *Yoruba Romu* (1964) and *Otito Koro* (1964). Duro Ladipo, another "neo-traditional" theatre practitioner that came after Ogunde, had specialty in mythico-historical plays (cf. Ogundeji, 1988, 1999, 2000 and Clark, 2008). Among the mythico-historical plays of Duro Ladipo are *Oba Moro*, *Moremi*, *Oba Koso*, *Osun*, *Obatala*, *Oluweri*, etc. Another important theatre practitioner of the "neo-traditional" movement was Kola Ogunmola. He began the first stage of his movement with the adaptation of Bible stories as in *Joseph and his Brethren* while at the second phase of his theatre career, Ogunmola adapted Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard*. What is common to these three theatre pioneers is that they all utilise the folkloric resources of Yoruba in the making and performance of the plays. In their series of travelling across Africa and some parts of Europe, they present Yoruba as a people with cultural identity through the presentation of the norms and traditions of the race. These practitioners and others that came after them (e.g. Oyin Adejobi, Isola Ogunsola, Lere Paimo, Akin Ogungbe, etc.) utilised the resources of photoplay, radio, and television in their dramatic presentations. Much work has not been done on the role of photoplay and radio in the development of popular drama and theatre. These two media should therefore provoke further research because they played significant roles in the development of the drama components of the contemporary Yoruba video films.

The advent of television, coupled with the availability of reversal stock for the making of celluloid, gave another dimension to dramatic presentation by the Yoruba popular theatre artists. Particularly with the advent of television in 1959, popular theatre of "neo-traditional" movement began to eclipse because there was a rush by the practitioners to have their plays on the television screen. At the inception of the television in Nigeria, there was a search for issues that would fascinate the audience. From the late 1950s till the late 1980s, the authorities of the television house were mixing local and foreign programmes. It was at this time that Nigerian television audience were exposed to Indian films, Chinese films and American films. These foreign films were usually screened in the morning and at night. The exposure of Yoruba television audience to these films prompted their adaptation in the later years of cinema culture and video films. After an uneasy false start, the first drama presentation on Nigeria Television was broadcast in August 1960 (Olusola, 372).

The first appearance of drama presentation on Nigeria television gave the Yoruba popular theatre artists hope of appearing on the television screen. Thus, plays with local contents and cultural significance began to appear on the screen from the mid-1960s till the late 1980s before the emergence of video film culture that Nigeria currently experiences. Alongside the production of teledrama was the production of local stories on celluloid. The common features of the plays of this period in the demonstration of the cultural identity of Yoruba people are given below:

- i. The materials/contents of the play were drawn from the folk materials such as history, myth and legend of the people. The essence is to show that Yoruba people have worthy past before colonialism. These historical/legendary/mythical plays re-present the Yoruba worldview by negotiating the past with the present through characterisation and impersonation of mythical/historical figures that have played memorable roles in the old Yoruba

kingdom. Thus, these plays delineate the cultural identity of the Yoruba people from other ethnic nationalities. Examples of plays in this category are *Bashorun Ga*, *Moremi*, *Oba Koso*, etc.

ii. The costume, make-up and props of the characters are usually the reflection of the overall subject matter of the play. These are not exaggerated or under-utilised in the making of the play. The appropriate and adequate use of all these present Yoruba culture in a proper shape to an alien.

iii. The dialogues are made in pure Yoruba expressions including the language aesthetics such as proverbs and idioms. In these dialogues, there are no cases of code-mixing and code-switching. Language is an important cultural denominator that projects the identity of a people.

iv. When non-folkloric films of contemporary and topical issues were produced, they were presented to the audience as a cultural product that had the capability of differentiating Yoruba culture from another culture. Examples of films in this category are Ola Balogun's *Ajani Ogun* and Adeyemi Afolayan's *Taxi Driver*. Despite that these films had contemporary setting as at the time, they did not lose their cultural role of identification.

The actors and the practitioners did not place too much premium on money but they rather wanted to be in the service of their people. They went about their profession with commendable passion and dedication and thus were able to serve as the cultural ambassadors of their ethnic nationality. These practitioners (script writers, screenplay writers, dialogue and artistic directors, cinematographers, etc.) carefully and thoughtfully selected their story from scripting through shooting to editing to project the ethics and aesthetics of Yoruba culture.

The economic recession of the late 1980s made the production of film on celluloid difficult for the producers and practitioners (see Ogunleye, 2012, Ojeyemi and Sesan, 2011, Haynes and Okome, 1997). Since the time of the economic recession that brought an end to the production of films on celluloid, the practitioners and the audience of Yoruba films have

been relating with the video film medium in the chronological order of VHS, video compact disc (VCD) and Digital Video and Disc (DVD).

Video Film and Yoruba Identity Question

The passion and dedication that characterised the entry of neo-traditional theatre practitioners of the Ogunde tradition gave way to mercantilism by the modern day film-makers whose sole interest is to make money from every film with little or no regard for the sociological and cultural relevance of their productions. To avoid error of judgment and over-generalisation, some contemporary film-makers such as Tunde Kelani, Tade Ogidan and Kunle Afolayan, in the video film format, have made frantic efforts to revitalise Yoruba cultural identity in the modern cinematic idiom. This they do by sourcing their stories from the Yoruba cosmology and blending same with filmic imagination that will appeal to non-native audience at the local and international scenes.

The reason for the commercialisation of the video film medium cannot be far-fetched. The whole enterprise began with a commercial interest of an Igbo marketer, Kenneth Nnebue, who used his initiatives to sell some of his video tapes. Based on his success in this attempt, he began to make films on low budget in the video film format. Nnebue produced *Living in Bondage*, which was released in 1992 and *Glamour Girls*. He also produced *Aje Ni Iya Mi* (1989) for Isola Ogunsola. The opinions of practitioners, scholars and critics, however, differ on the pioneer of the video film production in the Yoruba film industry. A section of these scholars refers to Muyideen Aromire (Alade) as the pioneer of the video film format in the Yoruba film industry. Another section acknowledges that there had been production of films in the video film format before the daring efforts of Aromire. Alamu (67) submits that there were some video films that preceded Aromire's production and among these were Kola Olatunde's *Igi Da*, Oso Daramola's *Aja Dudu* and Ebun Oloyede's *Ode Osan*. Whatever the positions taken by these film scholar-critics, the indisputable

fact is that the video film production in Yoruba film industry had external influence at its inception in the 1990s, particularly with the ingenuity of Kenneth Nnebue, a shrewd Igbo business man.

Since the inauguration of the video film format by the initiators and propagators, there have been different entrants of independent production companies and individuals into the business. This situation has impacted negatively on the quality and cultural essence of these films, thereby affecting the cultural identity of Yoruba people. The following point-by-point observation by Jimoh (79-80) on the attitude of Yoruba filmmakers to the worldview provides a good starting point for argument on the shortfall of Yoruba video films to project and preserve the cultural identity of Yoruba nationality.

(i) The movie industry has tremendous power to influence, shape and condition people's outlook with regard to a particular perspective on the world. This contrasts sharply with the untenable defence often offered by many Nollywood filmmakers that they give what society asks for.

(ii) A lot of the Nollywood producers, directors and scriptwriters who present Yoruba tradition and world view to the world actually lack the competence and authority to accurately portray the Yoruba thought system, mainly because: (a) they are really not sufficiently schooled in that culture, but are short of humility to admit it; and (b) the vast majority of them are adherents of foreign religion and so deliberately present the Yoruba traditional world with negative and pejorative bias.

(iii) In the light of the above, therefore, significant portions of their representation of the Yoruba tradition are very inaccurate, illogical and, in many instances, very wrong. These also would seem to contradict the assertion by the moviemakers that they are simply portraying what is happening in our society, a claim that rings hollow in the face of the evident logic that you cannot accurately depict or represent a culture of which you have little grasp or understanding.

Jimoh's position is valid to this discourse because no one can separate culture and tradition from the identity construction of a people. Some Yoruba film-makers, consciously or otherwise,

engage in the dialectical system that characterises postcolonial discourse. With their attitude to the indigenous culture and tradition, it can be said that they perceive Yoruba culture as the demonic other, as against the foreign culture that they have seen as the ideal and the exotic other.

Apart from cultural revivalism and promotion, video films are also expected to have sociological significance to the overall societal and national (re-) engineering. Considering the attitude of Yoruba film-maker and, by extension, Nigerian film-makers, to the cultural and sociological significance of their films, Sesan (122-123) classifies film-makers into four categories:

- i. Those who make their films for nothing else but the good of their society, people and culture. This group of film-makers uses their art to teach moral, promote normative standards of behaviour in the society and to make social and political statements. Nearly all the films from Mainframe Productions (e.g. *Saworoide*, *Agogo Eewo*, *Campus Queen* and *Koseegbe*) fall in this category.
- ii. Those who make their films for nothing else but themselves, families, relatives and associates. This group of film-makers only makes films to immortalise the names of their families or to comment on certain issues in the family and thus it is occasional with no intention of making profit. Films in this category have the qualities of a biography. Examples of films in this category are *Ekun Oko Oke* for Pa Abraham Adesanya (SAN) and *Ejiogbe* for Lam Adesina (the former Executive Governor of Oyo State).
- iii. Those who make their films for nothing else but to demonstrate that they are 'wise investors' who know how to make money work for them. The pioneer film-makers such as Kenneth Nnebue and Eddie Ugbomah are in this category. This is a current phenomenon in the Nigerian film industry. The film producers and marketers in Nigeria churn out films weekly or

fortnightly with little or no consideration for the moral content of such films. All their concern is rather profit maximisation.

- iv. Those who make their film for specific purposes (FSP). In this category are films meant for evangelisation, socio-political sensitisation and propaganda.

The third category of film-makers is common in the Yoruba film industry. Many of the Yoruba film producers and marketers have the primary motive of profit-making before embarking on the production of a video film. This phenomenon has encouraged the emergence of amateurish film-makers that believe that to the movie anything goes. The films released weekly or fortnightly by these amateurish film companies lack ethical and aesthetic values for the projection and preservation of Yoruba cultural identity. The emergence of different film production companies make the availability of different genres of films inevitable and among these genres are comic, historical, thriller (crime and detective), epic, political, etc.

The film-makers in the third category also search everywhere for story in the erroneous belief that every story is camera-compliant. These film-makers adapt stories from history, foreign films (particularly Indian and American/English), etc. In these productions, they usually fail to make their adaptations truly reflect Yoruba cultural identity particularly in the adaptation of Indian and American/English films as evident in the plot of the story, the language aesthetics and the projection of indigenous worldview.

The identity construction of a nationality can also, to some reasonable extent, be linked with its history and historical experiences. In this context, history is taken as the totality of experience of a people or a nationality from the memorable past for the analysis and interpretation of the present. In the recent past, Yoruba film-makers have turned to history and myth in the making of their film texts and this is evident in films such as *Bashorun Ga*, *Efunsetan Aniwura*, *Afonja*, *Ogun Adubi*, *Ogun Agbekoya*,

Fabunmi Okemesi, Lisabi Agbomgbo Akala, etc. Ogunleye (2012, 2014) classifies Yoruba film-makers into two, using history as the source of materials: the educated and the philistine. Whatever informed the categorisation made by Ogunleye, the important fact is that the producer of Yoruba films of historical content should demonstrate a modicum of experience in historiography in order to bridge the gap between historicity and actuality. To this end, "the historical film should not be a piece of art for art's sake, but an art form that performs the social responsibility of providing images that can inspire confidence in the populace and present credible characters that can be emulated to move society forward" (Ogunleye, 247).

It is quite unfortunate that some Yoruba producers of historical films have been found wanting in their responsibilities to preserve and propagate the history of their nationality. These producers fail to draw a line between non-fictional/imaginative films and historical films, while this failure accounts for the series of shortfalls that are found in some historical films. These producers hide under the guise of filmic licence of literary imagination to pervert history. This perversion of history or the presence of gap between historicity and 'actuality' validates the assertion of Rosenstone (1173) to the effect that:

... no matter how serious or honest the filmmakers, and no matter how deeply committed they are to rendering the subject faithfully, the film that finally appears on the screen can never fully satisfy the historian as historian (although it may satisfy the historian as filmgoer). Inevitably, something happens on the way from the page to the screen that changes the meaning of the past as it is understood by those of us who work in words.

The above view is a reflection of the laxity that is prevalent in some historical films. This laxity is a revelation that some historical films are not adequate in the propagation and promotion of cultural identity of a people or nationality.

The following are the pitfalls in the ethical and aesthetic values of Yoruba films that bear negatively on the cultural identity of the people.

(a) **Presentation of Pornography and Obscenity:** The Yoruba film industry is besieged with pornographic and obscene films that negate the ethics and morality of the nationality. It is not uncommon in the contemporary Yoruba society to have exposure to movies produced by the producers of Yoruba extraction celebrating naked sex on the screen. In Yoruba ethics and morality, sex between a man and a woman is a private thing that should not be known by the third party. It is, therefore, a cultural aberration to see films that emphasise pornography, obscenity and prostitution. The pristine Yoruba society frowned at adultery and fornication and any woman caught in the act automatically became an "outcast" of the immediate and larger society. It is, however, disheartening to see how Yoruba film producers celebrate adultery and fornication on screen with little or no poetic justice for the culprit(s).

(b) **Misrepresentation of Yoruba Cosmology:** The producers of folkloric and epic films misrepresent Yoruba cosmology as evident in the content of those films. Some of the film-makers do not have adequate knowledge and understanding of the Yoruba traditional thought pattern, belief system and religious practices and to this end, they muddle points and facts about Yoruba culture to the extent of confusing an alien into the culture. Some of these producers present the terrestrial powers of Yoruba (*aiye*) as malevolent with no positive side. In the Yoruba cosmology, *aiye* (the terrestrial powers) are both malevolent and benevolent and for this reason the *iya aiye* (mothers of the earth) or witches are categorised into three colours of black, red and white. In the Yoruba traditional thought, black and red witches are notorious for their wickedness while the white witches are appreciated for their kindness towards whoever deserves their favour. Unfortunately, some film-makers tend to misrepresent these values of Yoruba

cosmology owing to their indoctrination in the values of modern religions (Christianity and Islam) and the Europeanisation of Yoruba society and thought pattern.

(c) Misrepresentation of Yoruba personality and character: Some of the Yoruba film producers do not adequately and properly present Yoruba character and personality. The lowly placed characters such as gatekeepers and house helps are presented as never-do-well individuals that should always be at the mercy of their masters. They, at times, wear shabby dresses and, in most cases, lack decorum in dealing with their masters and colleagues. The highly placed individuals such as the rich and the powerful in the society are often presented as individuals that attain fame and stardom through diabolism. This misrepresentation of African personality and character negates Yoruba conception of *omoluwabi* (someone with a good character), industry and dedication aimed at worthwhile life and harmonious relationship with neighbours and the larger society.

(d) Deficient use of indigenous language: The use of Yoruba Language in nearly all the films produced by the film producers of Yoruba extraction is deficient and impure. Many of the characters in the non-folkloric films and modern films use Yoruba Language with avoidable lapses that are not befitting to the cultural identity of the nationality. It has to be emphasised that language is an intricate element of culture. These characters engage in code-mixing, code-switching with specific reference to English and Yoruba languages. Some of the following factors may account for this situation: (i) the dominance of English Language in the linguistic profile of Nigeria; (ii) the elitist nature of the contemporary Yoruba society. Many Yoruba elites pride themselves on the use of English Language for communication in the private and public spheres and this ugly trend has found its way into the medium of film; (iii) similar to the second point is the language attitude of Yoruba elites and masses to the Yoruba and

English languages. The attitude to Yoruba Language is negative while the attitude to English Language is positive. This attitude to Yoruba has made it assume the status of an endangered language which needs revitalisation for survival. In addition, the sub-titles of some of these Yoruba films are ungrammatical, untidy and improper.

Recommendations

Based on the submissions of this paper on the question of identity in the Yoruba film industry, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Regular workshops and training programmes should be organised for film-makers to sensitise them on their role as cultural ambassadors that have the sole responsibility of propagating and promoting the cultural identity of their people.
- (ii) There should be decentralisation of the Nigerian Film Institute that is situated in Jos. The Institute should be re-structured to have multiple campuses across all the geo-political zones as it is with National Open University of Nigeria. This will make film-makers, scholars and critics have adequate training in the production and criticism of films produced in different ethnic nationalities of the country.
- (iii) Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should be more proactive in the assessment of films to be released for the consumption of the audience. The Board should be conscious of how indigenous language is used in the films under screening. The indigenous language (in this instance, Yoruba language) should be used in its purest form without any trace of code-mixing or code-switching. Any film that has this should be rejected outright until necessary corrections are made.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the issue of cultural identity in Yoruba film industry. Culture is categorised into two which are, tangible

and intangible. The paper focuses on the intangible aspect of culture, specifically drama and theatre. Having done the categorisation, the historical development of drama and theatre in Yoruba nationality is traced and in this direction, the contributions of Old Oyo Empire, the three pioneers of Yoruba theatre (Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola) as well as the medium of television in the growth and development of the contemporary Yoruba film industry are acknowledged. It also examines how Yoruba film producers abuse history in their films and how this situation has been affecting the construction of Yoruba identity. Four critical areas where Yoruba film-makers and critics have been affecting identity construction of the nationality are identified as misrepresentation of Yoruba cosmology, misrepresentation of Yoruba personality and character, presentation of pornography and obscenity and the deficient use of indigenous language. These four areas call for critical attention of the stakeholders (the producers, actors/actresses, the regulatory body and the critics). Among others, the paper recommends that Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should be conscious of how indigenous language is used in the films under screening.

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