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Musings on Compositional and Presentational Incongruities in Some Nollywood Movies

Abstract

If movies and video dramas are expected to be of any real service to the society then to that extent these pieces must be open to observations, opinions, criticisms and commentaries.

Such thoughts which are voiced out or scribbled should, however, be responsible and constructive order to engender necessary improvements in content and management.

This particular effort attempts to do just that by pointing out incongruities that threaten the industry's advance to a more exalted status, whilst also proffering an array of solutions. This is, of course, as it has to do with the compositional and presentational components of acting, speech and directing. The study is non-numerical, relying heavily on observation, close study and analysis.

Introduction

In just less than two decades, the Nigerian movie industry has grown to wrest the second position from the U.S in terms of the sheer volume of titles turned out every year. The United States of America, however, holds the first position in value terms while India is next, followed by Hong Kong.

Although "Kongi's Harvest" by Wole Soyinka in the late 1960s remains Nigeria first feature film, the first home video in the country came in 1992 when "Living in Bondage" was released to the local viewing audience. The video which starred Bob-Manuel Udokwu, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Ngozi Nwosu and others, pioneered what is now known as Nollywood, a colloquial coinage after Hollywood and Bollywood.

Today, thousands of video dramas are available in English, Igbo,

Yoruba and Hausa. For the purpose of this study, seven representative video films have been used; while six are in English, one is in Yoruba. These titles are listed hereunder:

Merchant Empire
 Mother's Love
 The King's Battle
 Super Hero
 Kiss My Pain
 Before The Light
 Nkan Agbara.

The above titles constitute only a cross-section of Nollywood movies and will serve as examples as well as representative samples in this work. No attempt is being made here to condemn any drama in entirety. Efforts would only be made to use them in explaining and underpinning the wider challenges faced by all Nollywood video, films, as it has to do with acting, speech and directing.

2.0 Composition/Content

Everything presented in a movie through sounds and pictures make up its composition or content. Therefore, when we talk about acting, speech and directing in a film or video drama, were only talking about the content, composition and presentation of the video film under discussion.

2.1 Acting

Any serious observer would have seen that acting is a lingering problem in all Nollywood movies. The actors and actresses appear to be too pre-occupied with the delivery of their lines that they forget about the task of playing their roles believably. Outside a shortlist which includes (but is not limited to) Tony Umez, Bob-Manuel Udokwu, Charles Okafor, Olu Jacobs, Desmond Elliot, as well as Genevieve Nnaji, Mercy Johnson, Stephannie Okere, Patience Uzokwor and Kate Henshaw-Nuttal, the rest is "anything goes".

Acting goes beyond living the life of the character being played at the mental, physical and psychological levels, it also entails relating to and responding to the set, props, as well as the other characters on the set. In "Mother Love", there is a flash back scene,

where the father of Chuks was to enter the apartment drunk, and then stagger into his bedroom. What came across was a man at the start of an epileptic crisis, suffering fits and spasms across the sitting room and finally bundling himself into his bedroom. If he wanted the viewers to believe this piece of acting, he could have taken time out to observe a few tipsy-to-drunk persons in clubs and bars. He would then have rehearsed this experience several things over until it sticks.

As if this was not enough, when much later in the drama, Chuks was involved in a car crash and was rushed to the hospital, the "Doctor" who explained the patient's condition to his mother was not a doctor at all. He was severe and almost hostile to the woman where he was expected to calm, reassure and keep hope alive.

This, otherwise interesting drama was directed by Olu Jacobs (2006), and starred Olu Jacobs alongside Mike Ezuruonye. In it, a woman (Uche Osotule) will do anything to save her son, even if it means using her body. Along the way, however, she loses control and begins to work against the said son of hers.

Still discussing acting, let us look at another Nollywood movie and highlight the challenges presented in this particular area. In "Merchant Empire", a naive lady is unable to live peacefully in her home because her mother disapproves of her every move.

She decides to confront her mother about a certain secret from the past .. and then the beast is unleashed. Directed by Moses Eskoh (2007), this particular video film starred Enebeli Elebuwa and Benita Nzeribe.

The shooting of Rita in this drama was laughable and contrived. The detectives who immediately arrived to arrest the culprit were neither detectives nor policemen. They appeared harassed and diffident, when they spoke they failed to exude authority and power; even their guns shook visibly in their hands. Also, the lady who was left in charge of the kidnapped girls only succeeded in shouting herself hoarse without being able to portray the carriage and control fundamental to playing the role. That is not all, in this drama we also find a trained and experienced actor in the person of Enebeli Elebuwa, failing to show that cigar is not smoked like cigarette. This happened in the boat scene, when he came to check on his 'prisoner'.

2.2 Speech

If there is another incongruity that be-devils all Nollywood video drama, it is the challenge associated with diction and speech. Speech combines with acting to tell the story of movie; together, they present the plot, theme, and spine of the movie. All six dramas in English used for this story attest to the fact that no serious attempt was made to at least get the characters to pronounce correctly. The significance of speech and diction is especially grave if Nollywood intends its products to be accepted by the international audience.

As an article on the site *www.naijarules.com* rightly observes:

Movies are all about make belief (make believe) and if the audiences can't be convinced about the authenticity of..., scenes 'which often happens', then movie makers certainly have a big problem on their hands. Bollywood has leveraged on its collaboration with the Masters of the game in Hollywood to produce better quality movies

One cannot agree more with the above position film is 'make-believe' and the strongest vehicles of accomplishing this are acting and speech, and Nollywood must wake up to this reality.

2.2 "The Kings Battle" is another exciting video drama out of Nollywood. In the movie, Susan had lived in the United States of America for several years. Suddenly she is obsessed with the idea of visiting home in Africa. She arrives and is confronted with the dissonance of life in Nigeria when juxtaposed with what obtains in the U.S. Susan is later involved in an 'arranged' marriage with the Crown Prince. "King's Battle" stars Patience Ozokwor and Omotola Ekehinde amongst others; and it was directed by Lancelot Imaswen in 2008.

Here, Omotola's vibrance and expressive physiognomy lights up the entire show; however, this was drowned by her failed attempt to speak American English. As a matter of fact she could have passed for a "been to" if the story had portrayed her as coming from the United Kingdom instead of the United States of America.

Again, whenever Patience Ozokwor tried to speak American English, the movie shifted to a comedy, bordering on farce. Her heavy Igbo accent and lack of research and rehearsal simply made

it impossible to accomplish the task.

A number of some other characters in this video drama made varying efforts to speak America English but the entire attempt was abysmally poor and unacceptable. Neither Ehowon, nor her friend Adesua, nor indeed any character in the movie took time out to work on America slangs and slurs for a start.

The movie "Super Hero" is quite a remarkable piece in which Obike's greed and wild ambition lead him to commit Patricide. Thereafter, he seized the throne and proceeded to systematically annihilate all his perceived opponents. He succeed in entrenching himself as the meanest of all truants, but when he attempted to arrest and eliminate his junior brother, the latter flees to another community. He would return later to wage war against his tyrant big brother and impostor.

Some of the stars in this production are Charles Okafor, Alex Osifo and Ramsey Noah; while artistic direction came from Sunday Nnajiude (2008).

Apart from the basic speech challenge that has to do with correct pronunciation, this movie presents us with a good example when it comes to another level of speech- that of accent and intonation.

Alex Osifo was the Igwe who would be murdered in his sleep by his first son-Obike. He was the most important man in the land, yet he did nothing to integrate the Igbo accent or intonation into his delivery.

He was not alone in this, Ramsey Noah, a master wrestler loved and respected by the entire community, also failed to work on his accent and intonation. In addition, his pronunciation of Igbo names was guaranteed to draw laughter from all who understood the language. More than ever before, budgets should provide for speechldiction teachers on a continuing and increasing basis.

2.3 Directing

On directing, a few Nigerian directors such as Zeb Ejiro, Chico Ejiro, Tade Ogidan and Lancelot Imasnen, to mention a few, have shown creative vision and great talent. However, taken holistically, Nollywood directors do not possess the depth of talent or the height of vision needed to elevate the video film Industry in Nigeria. What one finds, consequently, are movies with unpardonable/directorial

gaffes and blunders.

In "Merchant Empire", almost every scene could have benefited from a better "take". When the 'king ping' of the kidnappers said his line incorrectly, the director simply allowed the camera to continue rolling. At the point where he asks "where's my glass", a good director would have "cut" in order to give the actor the opportunity to correct himself.

"Mothers Love" also presents a lot of blunders, from the directors. The most glaring being the many and irritating cut-aways to the traffic. This took away from the unity of the story. As another internet site—www.cybercollege.com would instruct.

Strive for a feeling of unity. If a good film ... is studied, it's generally evident that the elements ... have been selected or arranged so they "pull together" to support the basic idea. When the elements... combine with the basic visual statement (then there is) unity. The concept of unity applies to such things as lighting, colour, wardrobes, sets and settings.

Undoubtedly then, since such elements as make-up, costume, lighting, location, set, colour, settings, props and camera work come directly under the director's purview, he is expected to fabricate them all into a unified whole, acceptable to the audience.

Still focusing on the movie "Mother's Love", it can be seen that the management and execution of the car crash involving Chuks was both amateurish and unconvincing. Also, Chuks the teenager was too dark and square-headed to be the one who transformed into Chuks the adult. He bore absolutely no resemblance to Chuks the grown-up.

Looking at "Kings Battle" it can be found that the scene at the river where the Crown Prince meets Ehowon for the very first time was hurriedly and abruptly executed; so much so that it came across as incomplete and confusing.

Moving to "Super Hero", the tournament at the wrestling arena presented a tremendous opportunity for a creative and engaging camem work. However, most of the sequence was shot by an overhead camem set mostly at a long shot.

"Kiss My Pain" is not entirely free of such directorial lapses. Immediately Chibunna's wife put to bed, he quickly went to see

the baby at the hospital. The new born baby turned out to be a one-month old infant. While calling his friend to break the news of his son's birth, he kept moving his cell phone from one ear to the other and failed to reflect the punctuations in time and activity.

In "Before the Light", Richard Mofe Damijo brought his huge presence into the show but the director did little to co-ordinate and rehearse the rather rowdy crowd in the church. Additionally, camera work could have taken advantage of the huge congregation to try some fresh, creative and daring approaches. Dollies and hovering shots would have improved overall composition as well as aesthetics in this drama. As in all the movies used in this study, the management of time by the director was not good enough. Hence, the church scenes were too many, and they tended to drag on each occasion.

Let us again draw more insight from www.cybercollege.com:

And speaking of slowing things down "slow" is commonly associated with boring, excuse enough to switch the channel to try to find something more engaging. And with dozens of the channels to choose from, there's real competition for viewer attention. If information is presented too slowly or at a level that is beneath the audience, the production will be perceived as being boring.

Although this position is directed at television, the same applies to film and video drama. The fact that the above assertion brings in the most important factor in the business the audience, further emphasized the need for Nollywood directors to always have the audience or the viewer in mind. He is the person to accept or reject, approve or disapprove at the end of the day.

As the director's work starts at pre-production, through production and on to post-production Nollywood directors must remain focused and committed till the very end. Once again, if we return to "Kiss My Pain", one of the six video films in English used in this study, one immediately finds an incongruity from the editing suite. At the grave side of the star actress's late husband, where Mercy Johnson must say a final bye-bye, as Mike Ezuruonye takes over, all the lines of the two characters were drowned by incidental/mood music laid on during editing. This came across as a glaring oversight on the part of the director- Ikenna Aniekwe.

It is also in the area of post-production that we shall analyse

and discuss the only Yoruba movie used here to represent the typical Yoruba movie from Nollywood.

Most Yoruba video films are now intended for the non-Yoruba speaking audience in Nigeria, and abroad. Apart from suffering all the incongruities earlier discussed in Nollywood's "English videos" on a larger scale, the Yoruba dramas have a peculiar challenge of their own.

Sub-titling is a post- production activity which falls squarely on the lap of the director. As the Director of "Nkan Agbara", Jide Kosoko failed woefully in either ensuring that the subtitling was correct, or in seeking expert input when it became absolutely necessary. In this video film, almost every other sentence presented with spelling errors or grammatical flaws or both. This is certainly not good enough for non-Yoruba viewers in Nigeria, not to talk of the international audience.

3.0 Conclusion

There is no Nollywood video film which does not have its fair share of compositional and presentational incongruities. The video films used in this particular study are only fair representatives of the countless pieces churned out since 1992.

The solution lies in the quality of personnel and equipment. Actors and directors must continually hone their skills both formally and informally. As things currently stand, the industry cannot advance in quantum leaps except the observed incongruities are noted and systematically improved upon. Else, as <http://Ezinearticles.com> observes viewership will continue to drop to a point where the entire industry would be heading for a decline:

However, the common dominators of flawed scripts, parodies, water shed plots, embarrassing verbal blunders, choppy editing, high predictability rate, abysmal sound tracks, bland, prosaic, monotonous, technologically deficient, formulaic movies have all added to the declining rate at which home videos are watched. There has been a clamour for movie makers to introduce new dimensions ...

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