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Nollywood, Declining Sociocultural Values and the Project of Nation Building in Nigeria: A Study of His Lord Bishop

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Abstract

This study explores the intersection between contemporary Nigerian cinema and the perceived decline in moral standards within Nigerian society, examining the implications for nation-building. As one of the most influential cultural platforms, Nollywood serves not only as entertainment but also as a mirror and molder of societal values. This research critically analyzes His Lord Bishop to investigate how narratives, character portrayals, and thematic elements reflect or contribute to the erosion of ethical and cultural norms. The study argues that while film has the potential to promote national consciousness and ethical rejuvenation, many recent productions tend to normalize or glamorize corruption, materialism, moral laxity, and social decadence. It also argues that time has come to explore morality and culture in well made films rather than the poor quality films. This will serve the dire need of providing standards of quality to poor quality filmmakers to emulate. Through content analysis and socio-cultural critique of social relationships, marriage, kinship, integrity, and justice in His Lord Bishop, (A film that captures the ideal moral and sociocultural crux of African life) the paper highlights the urgent need for filmmakers to embrace a more deliberate nation-building agenda by producing content that fosters integrity, unity, and civic responsibility. Ultimately, the research advocates for a recalibration of cinematic storytelling in Nigeria to support moral regeneration and sustainable national development.

Key Words: Morality, Film, Values, Sociocultural, Nollywood, Nation Building, Nigeria

Introduction

In addition to being an essential component of life and survival, communication has advanced significantly as a result of man's constant quest for more effective interpersonal relationships. One of the many

communications mediums that has evolved into a tool and platform for projecting people, places, and events in space and time is film (Owuamalam, 46). This implies that the cinema medium is culturally tied to its users. A certain set of people's lives and behaviours across time are depicted through the visuals

and sounds that are portrayed in movies. Persistent depictions of a people over time create a certain perceptions of/about them that influence how they are perceived and treated both domestically and globally.

Serious discussions have surrounded the current cinematic depiction of Nigerian society, with viewers, the government, and academics beginning to question the medium's role in nation-building and accusing it of contributing to the decline of moral and cultural norms in the nation. The majority of recently released films lack any noble qualities that might support the nation-building endeavour, particularly when it comes to morality and character, which are essential to any people's existence. This study adds to the current discussion on the pursuit of cultural values and morals on Nigerian screens.

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, has become a household name, with actors, directors, and technologists also becoming household names. The industry's growth has been driven by content, technological sophistication, and universal recognition. However, the social relevance of Nollywood has come under scrutiny, with scholars, critics, and moralists questioning its impact on Nigerian society. Some argue that the film

medium should complement cultural diplomatic policies and contribute to tourist boosts due to its aesthetics and sound features.

Recently, it has been argued that the current ritual killings, cyber-crime, and violence in Nigeria were fueled by movie content, leading to the fading ideal cultural and family values. This has put the unity of the nation, its image, and cultural diplomacy at risk. This study aims to ensure the sustenance of ideal cultural and national values through film art criticism, ensuring quality in the practice of filmmaking. The voices surrounding Nollywood films have focused on weak films that fall short of cultural and national values. Little effort has been made to appreciate films that do justice to ideal moral values and project culture as a platform for nation building, especially during times of peace and unity.

The researcher believes that when the ideal African moral and cultural templates are implemented in Nigeria, it can serve as a base to tackle various problems such as banditry, kidnapping, insurgence, ritual killings, and other criminality. By appreciating films that conform to the ideal moral and cultural perspective of the nation, the researcher aims to balance the hitherto negative narrative of

scholars who largely focus on poor quality films. The researcher believes that nagging about the content of poorly produced films alone will not bring much needed development.

Such positions on the other hand, relegates the efforts of good films to the background and seem to project the narrative that Nollywood films are generally poor quality and immoral. It also gives face to these poor films as their recognition by scholars provokes debates that reinforce the negative narratives. A counter approach to the study of film and morality from the standpoint of quality Nollywood films presents a novel perspective that points to, and project good films that stand as testaments for the makers of poor quality films in Nigeria as well as attract scholarly attentions to the good quality films.

By projecting ideal cultural and national values on screens, the researcher hopes to draw attention to cultural and national development in Nigeria. This position is spurred by Fagg's position that "ideal relationship between art and society was one which Europeans enjoyed for some centuries before the Renaissance. But western civilization has long ago lost this relationship

and Africa was in the process of losing it" (108)

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory, developed within the field of communication and media studies, explores how media and communicators influence audience perception by emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. It posits that the way information is presented—its "*frame*"—affects how people interpret and respond to it. According to Erving Goffman (1974), frames are "schemata of interpretation" that help individuals locate, perceive, identify, and label events and experiences. For Robert Entman, Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (52) Media practitioners, consciously or unconsciously, construct these frames to guide the audience's understanding of issues, people, and events. In the context of film and society, Framing Theory helps explain how movies can shape public attitudes toward moral values, social norms, and national

identity. For example, repeated portrayals of corruption or materialism as acceptable or rewarding can reinforce these behaviors as societal norms.

His Lord Bishop: Synopsis

The film *His Lord Bishop* is set in rural Southeastern Nigeria and tells the story of Ogaziamaka, a traditional religion believer and Chief Priest who believes in preserving the culture of the people. He is married to Janet and has a grown-up daughter, Chioma, who attends church and is a member of the Choir. Ifeanyi, a Corp member, worships with Chioma and becomes interested in her. Chioma's admirer Gospel confesses his love for her. Golf is accused of getting Chioma pregnant, which provokes Ogaziamaka, who inflicts him with an illness for defiling his daughter and denying it. It is revealed that Chioma's pregnancy belongs to Ifeanyi, whose father is a Bishop and General Overseer of a church. The Bishop is notified about his son's act and returns to meet with Ogaziamaka.

Gospel is bedridden with an illness projected by Ogaziamaka the Chief Priest, who makes frantic efforts to undo it but is beyond his powers. The meeting results in Ifeanyi having to marry Chioma according to African customs. The Bishop is asked to proceed with

the marriage process by coming along with his kinsmen for the rites. Chioma consults Nne, another seer, who offers a solution to Gospel's sickness. She obeys Nne and saves Gospel's life against all attempts made by doctors on his health. The issue of his strange illness is tackled, but how does he manage the social stigma even after being vindicated?

The Bishop reports to take care of the marriage rites and marry Chioma for his son. He is chased away by Ogaziamaka, who insists that traditional marriage is between two families, not one family and the church. Bishop is forced to return home to his kinsmen, who discover he has long abandoned family and kinsmen in pursuance of the Christian faith. He is fined, made to pay levies, and apologized to the entire family members. After reuniting with his family, he attends a successful wedding between Ifeanyi and Chioma.

Cultural Values and Morality Assessment in *His Lord Bishop*

The nation is grappling with demeaning moral and cultural values, leading to efforts towards a moral and cultural renaissance. *His Lord Bishop* (2020), directed by Ukaeze Obinna delves into the debate between traditional and Christian religions and values, as well as between traditional and western

cultures. It makes significant statements on culture and morality, highlighting aspects such as social relationships, marriage, kinship, integrity, and justice (which will form the basis for analysis of the selected film). These themes are crucial in promoting African culture and moral values, and the film's treatment of these themes, particularly from a debate standpoint helps maintain touch with the core of African cultural standards. The storyline can be seen as an advocacy for the reawakening of African culture and moral values, highlighting the importance of reviving these values in today's society.

Social relationships as the first angle of assessment are the connections that exist among and between individuals, with sustained recurring interactions that are viewed as having personal meaning (Lussier, 2018). In African tradition, social relationships are integrally linked to culture, and the concept of 'I' is viewed as antagonistic to the community. The relationship ideal in Africa is communalism, and it is from this relationship and obligations to community ideals that individual identity and rights are hinged and assessed. To be human for Africans means being in a community and participating in the beliefs, cores, rituals, and values of that community,

giving them a sense of belonging. Individual actions are expected to reiterate communal beliefs and interests, further reinforcing the notion of 'live and let live' and 'I am because we are.' (Mbiti, 1990)

The film *His Lord Bishop*, Ogaziamaka, represents an ideal African perspective on human relations, but the erosion of ideal traditional human relationships is fueled by individualism among African community indigenes. The film expresses the erosion of ideal traditional human relationships, which is fueled by the new religion, which in his opinion has further driven people away from their cultural obligations to their kinsmen and community. In many Nigerian communities, several individuals perceive human relations and communal dictates as sinful based on the dictates of Christianity, which is fast eroding ideal notions of human relationships among individuals and their immediate and extended families. Even in the same religion, human relationships in the area of sociality have been further polarized, as different Christian factions continually uphold certain doctrines that conflict with the doctrine of some others. The character of Bishop Humphery is questioned in the film as an allusion to others like him in the real sense of a typical Nigerian traditional society. His new found faith forces him to be cut off from his kinsmen and

consequently, cut off from family relations as he would not participate in whatever obligation the family and community ventures into. His actions are termed individualistic, and there is no room for individualistic tendencies in the moral and cultural tenets of traditional societies in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Lastly, as part of the moral and cultural rules of engagement, there is a place of chastity and sanctity among relationships with the opposite sex. Traditional African societies have stringent rules in place to guide and enforce discipline among members in the area of socializing with the opposite sex. Sexual immorality was frowned upon within the traditional setting, and punitive measures are meted on offenders. The study film upholds this position on social relationships when Chioma gets pregnant and Gospel is accused of being responsible for her pregnancy. Gospel's denial infuriates Ogaziamaka, leading to the strange illness. According to Okechi (2018), sexual activity before marriage is rejected in African societies, but the presence of western ideals and religion seems to have made it an individual and personal affair, leading to marital infidelity, divorce, unwanted pregnancies, spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and moral decadence.

Marriage as the second angle of assessment has been a subject of criticism, particularly regarding age-stage parameters and gender considerations. In this study however, the concept of marriage is defined as the process where a man and a woman come together socially, legally, or culturally to form a union for procreation (Ayisi, 1997; Ogoma, 2014). In Africa, marriage transcends beyond individual agreement and goes deep into the cultural and family roots of the parties involved. For Igbo society, marriage is considered on an individual, family, and community basis, with parties having to satisfy these criteria before consent is given by stakeholders (immediate and extended families).

In Igbo tradition, a man gives his daughter to the family of the suitor, who then hands the daughter over to their son who intends to marry her. Marriage is a link between families, and both families must be involved in the approval process before the marriage can take place. In cases where a man has sexual relationship with a woman and gets pregnant, custom demands that the man must marry the woman. The ideology on marriage is evident in the study film when Ogaziamaka insists that the person who impregnates his daughter must marry her as custom demands. Ifeanyi, a Corper, reports to his father,

Bishop Humphery, who begins the arrangement for the marriage. However, the marriage on the first outing did not yield positive fruits, as Bishop Humphery mobilized his church deacons and members to accompany him to marry his daughter. Ogaziamaka walks them out of his compound, arguing that church members are not the real stakeholders in the process of marriage.

One Church member, Bro Mark, supports Ogaziamaka's point and suggests that the Bishop should go back to his family for support for the marriage process to be complete and successful. He explains that the consent of family members is critical to the traditional marriage process and that couples get blessings from good spirits when there is agreement between both families. Marriage is a critical aspect of culture and it is moral for men to procreate like their parents before them. However, for Africans, certain principles with cosmic roots should be obeyed to ensure a smooth and blessed marriage, including the agreement of both families and their blessings on the couple. The situation in Nigeria today has seen certain marriages go against these communal tenets, potentially leading to increased divorce rates and marital problems.

Thirdly, one of the characteristics of African morality is integrity. The integrity of the African, equality, and justice in his interactions with others are the pinnacles of African morality. Through the role of Ogaziamaka, Bishop Humphery, the study film examines this important concept of morals and culture. After learning that he was not the cause of the pregnancy, Ogaziamaka goes to great lengths to ensure that he breaks the spell placed on Gospel. He acknowledges his error and tries to work with other top priests to keep Gospel alive. In another case, he remained steadfast in his adherence to tradition throughout the movie and never agreed to anything that fell short of cultural norms, particularly when it came to his daughter Chioma's marriage requirements.

These characteristics, however, were demonstrated by Bishop Humphery's readiness to make amends with his relatives and by his act of compensating Gospel for his son's suffering. In addition to offering to handle his cousin's WAEC registration, who took care of him throughout his illness, the Bishop donated Gospel two million naira. Integrity and fairness are essential to African normative ethics and guarantee the community's members live in harmony.

Last in the discourse is the angle of kinship. Kinship is a crucial aspect of traditional societies, particularly in less industrialized societies where cultural values are still prevalent. In these societies, the individual's relevance and identity are traced and assessed through social relationships arising from mutual rights and obligations. In these societies, individuals are part of a complex system of kinship relationships, where their relevance and identity are traced and assessed. For Obiagwu and Obasi (73), the vocabulary of social connections resulting from the reciprocal rights and duties that characterise the kinship system is the only way to understand social organisations and social structure in these small-scale traditional cultures. Punitive measures are in place for those who attempt to break the cord of kinship, such as suspension and excommunication from kindred activities. These measures are in place for those perceived to have turned their back on the family or not been part of or supporting their achievements.

Bishop Humphery and his family fall into this discourse, as his Christian life led him to forsake his family, believing they were unbelievers and idol worshippers. He made brothers of his church deacons and members but was never part of kindred activities or

supported them. His nieces and nephews got married, and his people learned to live without him for many years. The African system also has structures for reconciliation among kinsmen when the offender acknowledges their wrongs and is willing to atone for them. Bishop Humphery was reintegrated among his kinsmen after fulfilling all duties and paying levies while away. He was also told to offer financial help to certain family members, which he fulfilled. In the end, he was accompanied by his kinsmen to marry Chioma, finding peace in such reconciliation.

Culture Values and Morality as Conduits for Nation Building: Potentials of Nollywood

The ideas of morality and culture are such that they guarantee the long-term identity of a certain people, and to build a country without taking into account their moral and cultural perspectives is to make them outsiders in their own land. National progress has been impacted by the polarisation of the family system and the growing awareness of individuality. According to the principles of African morality, individualism is both immoral and cultural. Utilising all available resources to reaffirm and restore the ideal cultural and moral awareness is necessary to

revitalise a nation that is on the verge of collapse due to increased individualistic inclinations. This is where the media, particularly the film medium, may be helpful in the nation-building endeavor especially as captured in the study film.

The morality and cultural values of a people significantly impact their existence, and this is particularly evident in Nigerian society. The media's influence on morality and cultural landmarks is a topic of ongoing debate. Nollywood films have the potential to create narratives that capture life with fidelity, rewriting the cultural narrative of a people either positively or negatively (Amaefula. 62). While some films betray positive and collective morality, the study film conforms to the cultural and moral tenets of an ideal African society. The current shortfall in Nigerians' cultural and moral ideals is due to the imbalanced projection of negative images in various media. The amoral dispositions of Nigerian youth and children are largely a product of what they consume. Media consumers tend to view objects and phenomena in the light that the media paints them. The contention is that Nigeria is becoming bereft of African morality, and the film medium can raise consciousness by replicating positive and

personal morality as a panacea for nation building.

The study film is a bold step in the project of nation building, celebrating the beauty of Nigeria's morality and culture. They set a balance for the assessment of the sociological imperatives of films on Nigerian society by showing that filmmakers have the license to utilize any approach to engage societal cultural and moral issues. However, according to Shaka (2011) many filmmakers have chosen to focus on financial satisfaction, as directed by producers who sponsor the production of these films. Film is a powerful cultural resource and inherently laden with potency for fostering greater understanding among people of varying cultures. The study film demonstrates that filmmakers have the freedom to choose their approach and position on societal issues, and the society they serve is also impacted by them (Bardi, 108). Culture and morality are important pillars for nation-building. Given the characteristics of the average African society, our moral and cultural beliefs are such that they influence other facets of life and guarantee that people live in accordance with the rules set forth by society, which guarantees both the survival of the society and the acceptance of the individual within it. Nollywood filmmakers can begin to frame

these cultural and moral values to rewrite the present negative narratives in society as well as contribute meaningfully to national identity locally and internationally.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Nollywood, as a powerful cultural force, plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values and, by extension, the project of nation-building in Nigeria. Through the critical examination of *His Lord Bishop*, it is evident that while Nigerian cinema has the capacity to promote integrity, cultural identity, and national unity, much of its current output often falls short—perpetuating themes of moral decline, materialism, and social disintegration. The study underscores the necessity for a conscious shift in cinematic narratives toward stories that reflect and reinforce ethical standards, civic virtues, and the socio-cultural richness of Nigerian life. As Nigeria grapples with challenges of national cohesion and moral degeneration, the film industry must take up the mantle of cultural responsibility by producing high-quality, value-driven content. Only through such deliberate engagement can Nollywood contribute meaningfully to the moral regeneration and sustainable development of the nation.

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