



## **Preaching morality in the garb of Immorality in some selected Nigerian Home Video Movies**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines various forms of moral decadences, bizarre of unpleasant, unsavoury and incongruous social teachings in some selected Nigerian home video movies. It also attempts a review of when and how these barrages of immoral teachings skulk in and the extent of damages that the decadences had done to the morale of Nigerians. Since the gendered society is celebrated, the role of women in these selected films cannot be overemphasised. The female gender plays a vital role of upholding tradition and cultural norms in a society, but the Nigerian home video movies have made them sacrifice their dignity in the search of morality. The methodological approach in interrogating this work is an analytical appraisal of some selected Nigerian home video movies. Stemming from the approach enumerated above, our findings reveal that quests for modernity, promotion of cross-cultural relationship; mostly for economic gains and crazes amongst other factors are the notable bane of the derailment of home video movies producers from its initial moral mission. However, with the degree of the decadence notwithstanding, this paper asserts that in the theatre, movies inclusive, lays the medium for correction of the societal ills and the ill-perception of the female gender within the Nigerian society. This is achievable when collaboration is established with morally upright professional bodies and art practitioners.

**Keywords:** Home video, Nollywood, morality and immorality

## Background

The advent of cinema and film, especially the home video to the Nigerian entertainment market, which was dated back to 1960s, came as succour to the performative art, especially lovers of quality entertainment. This was largely because the popular live theatre performance, which was the domineering mode of entertainment prior to the 60s, had been threatened by extinction, courtesy of insecurity and some other insurgents in the Nigerian society. The overflow was also celebrated as a welcome innovation by theatre patrons who, prior to the advent of the cinema and home video phenomena were familiar with being entertained by itinerary theatre players then known as “Alarinjo Travelling Theatre” by Adedeji (222). The theatre troupes travel from one town to another to entertain their teeming audiences for a short entertainment treat. In addition to this, the advent of the home video brought entertainment live and direct to the rooms of yearning Nigerian theatre viewers; both at the rural and urban centres. Apart from the reasons enumerated above, the ease in processing home video movies presents a fair route for producers of films who hitherto had to contend with huge cost of producing analogous films on celluloid.

However, this joy short-lived when the phenomenon was beclouded by negative moral decadences found in the contents of most of the home video, which far outweigh the purpose for which they were produced in the first place. The home video, rather than live up to the didactic expectation that the society looks up to, got regally enmeshed in the gabs of immorality. This Enemaku (77) agrees with when he submits pungently that: “The gap between the pious moral proclamations and ignoble moral recklessness of the larger society creates a fertile ground for flowering of practices that are morally wrong, which find expression in the home video”. In an attempting to find a solution to the worrisome moral laxity that the home video entertainment productions brought to the Nigerian society and perhaps other African societies that have contact with Nigerian movies, this paper attempts to examine to the following:

How did these moral laxities creep into the Nigerian home movies?

What is the degree of damage that the phenomenon has inflicted on Nigerian society?; and

Whether it worth continuing to encourage production of the home videos devoid of heavy sensor.

In attempting to answer some of these questions, this paper endeavours an historical overview of the advent of film and home video into the Nigerian film industry. It also examines the moral goals of home video at its inception and find out at what point it veered off the track of being moral teachers. The paper also attempts to identify some of the factors that exacerbate the accentuation of moral decadence in our home videos. In this direction some selected Nigerian home movies are analysed. In conclusion, the paper provides some useful suggestions and makes recommendations on how we can stem the tide. However, let us clarify some concepts and terms that will frequently run through this work, which their meanings may be capable of having more than one meaning.

#### **Clarification of conceptual terms.**

We consider it expedient to illuminate on some concepts/terms that will appear in this work, which may be subjected to more than one meaning or interpretations. Some of the terms include; Home video, Nollywood, morality and immorality.

**Home video-** Home video is a recent phenomenon in the entertainment industry in Nigeria, which Ogunleye (1) describes as “the Nigeria’s filmic literary realism”, which brings entertainment in moving pictures to the living rooms of theatre patrons in Nigeria. Because the movies are mostly watched at homes, it is christened the Home Video.

**Nollywood-** is an imported entertainment trademark adapted for the Nigerian entertainment industry. It was a name that Oni (20), cited in Haynes (2005) says was coined by Matt Steinglass in the New York Times “who for want of name for the emerging Nigerian video film industry simply use N- to connote Nigeria and called it Nollywood after the American Hollywood and Indian’s Bollywood”. Nollywood therefore, is a name that Nigerian filmmakers conned for Nigerian movie making industry.

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**Morality** – is an ethical principle of decipher between right and wrong. It is a principle that guides the behaviours of human being toward doing what is right. *Immorality* on the other hand is the direct opposite of morality. In this paper, attempt will be made to identify and differentiate between morality and immorality in the content of some Nigerian home videos.

### **Films and Home Video in history**

Dated back to the colonial era, when Nigerians had the privilege of having contact with films, most of which were European films with their contents obsessed with racism. Later, that Nigerian audience begin to see Indian films shown in some cinema houses in major cities in Nigeria. In spite of the fact that no Nigerian participated, either as actors or members of the production crews, the production aesthetic of the films and the newness of the phenomenon fascinated Nigerian audiences, hence the robust eagerness to watch them.

Around 1950s, half a decade to the Nigerian independence in 1960, interests of Nigerians to replicating the visual exploit of the colonialist begin to accentuate. Initially, the quest by Nigerians to begin to shoot films was not first and foremost for commercial purposes but to introduce visual into the medium of entertainment and cause further improvement to the Yoruba Travelling Theatre (Alarinjo)'s aesthetics provided by the like of Duro Ladipo, Kola Ogunmola, Oyin Adejobi, Ojo Ladipo (aka Baba Mero), Moses Olaiya (aka Baba Sala) Ishola Ogunshola (aka I Show Pepper), Lere Paimo and host of others.

In the forefront of filmmaking in Nigeria were Ola Balogun, Ade Afolayan (aka Ade Love) and Hubert Ogunde. The Nigerian movies industry actually witnessed unprecedented boom in the 1970s during the oil boom era when “Foreign capital flew into the country as foreign businessmen, especially when Lebanese and Indians invested in the erection of cinema complexes” (Nificom.org, 2013). Shortly after the invasion of the Nigerian film industry by Lebanese and Indians, the urge in Nigerian theatre practitioners to produce films that are of Nigerian texture led to the promulgation of the 1977 Indigenisation Decree by the Federal Military Government. Ola Balogun blazed the trail when he produced *Wole*

Soyinka's *Kongi Harvest* directed by a Black American, Ossie Davis. Thereafter, Ade Afolayan (aka Ade Love) followed suit when he debut: *Ajani Ogun*, *Ija Ominira* while Ogunde produced *Aiye*, *Oseitura*, *Ayanmo* and Moses Olaiya (aka Baba Sala) who later came up with *Orun Mooru*.

The film, *Living in Bondage*, produced by Kenneth Nnebue's NEK Video links in Onitsha in 1992 sets the stage for what today is known as the *Nollywood* ([en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org) 2013). Subsequently, director and producers, the like of Izu Ojukwu, Chico Ejiro, Zeb Ejiro, Peace Anyiam Fiberesima, Tunde Kelani, Charles Novia and host of others, injected aesthetics and sophistication into the production of Nigerian movies. Their films address contemporary issues like; love, betrayal, family, war, corruption and other social vices in Nigeria, using various theatrical genres to put these messages across.

### **The Journey so far: A literary review of the Nigerian Home Video**

It was not immediately clear whether the sole aim of filmmakers in Nigeria was to produce films for the rejuvenation of our decayed society, to promote an enduring inclination for revival of the cultural values of the Nigeria nation or for commercial purposes. However, the initial purpose as we all thought it to be is how Adeyemi (376) unambiguously describes it, as: "affinity for social change...cultural nationalism...aesthetic recourse to the so-called motherland, especially in the face of threatening cultural annihilation". Interestingly, over time, the commercial notion behind the exploit begins to manifest in sharp contrast to the moral values that we thought it is striving to attain. Much as one is not apathetical to that intention, one is weight down with scepticism considering the aggressiveness with which the commercial intension is pursued at the expense of the promotion of the rich Nigerian socio-cultural, ethical and moral values. Bond Emoruwa, one of the respected director and producer of Nollywood movies submission seems to tally with what we felt is the cardinal aim of Nigerian Home Video films when he affirm that as we produce the films, "we are telling our own stories in our own way" Emoruwa (2013). The simple understanding of Emoruwa's submission is that the Nigerian

movies is intended to be used to tell Nigerian stories exactly the way we are; our culture, our values and the way we want the world to appreciate us.

Unfortunately, Emoruwa's submission presents the exact opposite of what we are. Be that as it may, one incontrovertible fact remains, Nigeria as a nation and its people are noted for unique cultural genuineness, sense of discipline, belief in communality and its giant strive at all time to hold to the concept of being ones brothers' keeper. As apt as Emoruwa's submission would have been, it is contradicted by a lot of cultural infiltrations that directors and producers have imported from other cultures, which put in abeyance the intention of using our movies to tell our own stories in our own way.

Some scholars in a bid to chart a way forward call the attention of stake holders to the barrage of misdemeanours and cultural bastardisation that most of our movies have filtered into our nation. Afolabi (11) in his work "Sexploitation and the Performing Arts in Nigeria: A critique" laments how issue of sex among performing artists is seen as "a common relaxation affordable by majority of the people (and how) Many performing artists have found the trick of good sales of their works in the purveyance of sex and obscenity, sometime in raw pornography". While condemning the act Afolabi (10) cites India films as a cinema genre that is noted "all over the globe for its love themes but never allow sexploitation in her performing arts". He submits further that: "Ordinary kissing is never allowed on the screen, not to talk of more serious forms of sexuality.". Viewers of Indian movies would attest to fact this is true of Indian movies. While we agree with the fact that promotion of sexuality in performing arts is a promotion of immorality, we see it more as a using the approach of immorality to preach morality.

At a Career Day Programme organised by the University of Ilorin on 13<sup>th</sup> February, 2002, a student who has been disturbed about how unprofessionalism has crept into theatre profession laments as cited in Musa (172) that: "As you know sir, some artist are spoiling your profession and we are not happy the way they opened their bodies on the screen and even the stage or is it true that

if one did not act nude one cannot make big money and be popular in the performing profession”. Incidentally, AbdulRasheed Abiodun Musa now AbdulRasheed Abiodun Adeoye who was one of the resource persons at the occasion spontaneously answers thus: “that is not totally true”. To any hurried listener, the answer may suggest that the observation made by the speaker is not true, but a careful analysis of the subtext of Musa’s response reveals a double-edged submission. However, Musa (172-173) is quick to join others in condemning such act when he queried painfully that: “why did the supposed defenders of cultural heritage, turned out to be the destroyers of our cherished heritage and culture? Is it Money? Fame? Artistic creative liberty? Professionalism? Or what?” This tallies with what spur us to embark on this critical assessment on whether the moral aim that the society looks forward to in video films as one of its dividends has not been jettisoned.

It is in this same vein that Afolabi condemns in clear terms commercial exploitation of interest in sex in the performing arts in Nigeria which Musa pin points as the socio-danger in the promotion of nudism in theatre performances. In expounding on this, Musa (2004, p.177), in unmistakable terms describes the act as “the demonic yet physical immoralities and sexualities pervading the Nigerian theatre industry”.

It is painful that what these scholars condemned almost two decades ago, rather than abate, has assumed a more worrisome dimension to the extent that the swell of immorality is treated with disregarded impunity. What comes on our screen, and on some of our theatre stages are morally odd. It is chagrin that even outside the screen and the stage, nudity is a fun viewed by moneybags some of them producers of the Home video movies at exclusively designated club houses, ostensibly to satisfy their immoral urges. This paper therefore, considers it expedient to sound a note of warning or if you like call it an appeal, charging us to reason before we run out of moral decorum.

In this cause of this work, we bring some pictorial illustrations that present to us stark naked some immoral actions that pervade our home video films. In our review, we shall examine *Azonto Classics, Naughty Doctor and greedy sex*. The study

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examines immoral elements such as mode of dressing, acts that could provoke viewers to immorality, act that could aid one to committing crime such as drug addiction, free use of arms and ammunitions etc.

To elicit on the effect of Home Videos as weapon that have the power to pierce our society we adopt the *Bullet or Hypodermic Needle Theory*. His theory posits that “the message is a bullet fired from the ‘media gun’ into the viewer’s ‘head’ while in a similar emotive imagery “the hypodermic needle model suggests that media messages are injected straight into the passive audience, which is immediately influenced by the message”. The theory asserts further that “the media is a dangerous means of communicating an idea because the receiver or audience is powerless to resist the impact of the message. There is no escape from the effect of the message in these models. The population is seen as a sitting duck”. It is therefore our aim in this paper that the mass media, of which video film is one, influences a very large group of people directly and uniformly by ‘shooting’ or ‘injecting’ them with appropriate messages designed to trigger a desired response.

### **A sift of some selected Nigerian Home Video Movies**

The video films, which we enumerated above to interrogate this work were selected selected from the pool of Nigerian movies, reflecting cross-cultural, language and contemporary dispositions. *Naughty Doctor* illustrates the burden of womanhood as tool in the immoral escapades in the Nigerian movies as well as the influence of cross-culture in the Nigerian movies industry. The choice of *Greedy sex* is to with the aim of showcasing subtle promotion of promiscuity among Nigerian couples.while *Azonto classics* is chosen for analysis to address some contemporary issues such as: cultism and prostitution that has enveloped our society. In these selected home videos, we sift some of the immoral displays that manifest in form of; nudity or near nudity, drug abuse and other moral laxities.



### **Immoral and indecent dressing**

Azonto Classics is a movie that showcases the ostentatious escapades and display of immorality by students of who are sent to the university by their parents to study but who on getting to the campus engage in all kinds of social vices, ranging from drug abuse and addiction, prostitution and other vices. The pictures below show these various display of immoralities.



*Fig. 1 The above picture shows indecent dressing that pervade our university campuses in Azonto Classic*



*Fig.2 The two pictures above shows the involvement of the ladies in fig 1 above engage in drug abuse and addiction in Azonto classics*

Much as one would want to agree that the enactment of these plays are down to earth display of theatrical realism, in the style of production, it is expected that some actions should be subjected to off view, yet the message would still be succinctly passed across..

### **Promotion of Nudity**

Most Nigerian movies promote nudity. In the name of giving the society what it wants.



### Infidelity

There is an unrestrained display of promotion of infidelity in most Nigerian movies. A confirmation of this social decadence is displayed in *Greedy sex*. A young man took advantage of his wife's exit from home and engage in another extra-sexual rendezvous right on his matrimonial bed. Only for the wife to return on a tip off and met the husband in an the act as shown in the picture in figure 3 (a) and (b) below



Fig.3 (a) is the picture of the man in action while the picture in (b) is the return of the wife to meet the husband in action.

### Professional misconduct

In the narrative in *Naughty doctor*, Dr Jerry is presented as a metaphor of professional and ethical decadence when he threw medical ethic to the winds by engaging his female clients in exploitative dehumanisation. As shown in the picture in figure 4 a, b, and c below:



*Fig 4 a, b and c are illustrations of flagrant display of professional misconduct (sexploitation) by a gynaecologist in his clinic. Picture courtesy of Ibaka TV*

### **The Female Gender as Exploitative Objects in Nollywood**

Feminism in African films needs to be analysed from the African women's perspective. In Nussbaum (1995, p.257) theory of objectification, she identifies seven features that are involved in the idea of treating a person as an object:

1. instrumentality: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;
2. denial of autonomy: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-determination;
3. inertness: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity;
4. fungibility: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;
5. violability: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;
6. ownership: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold);
7. denial of subjectivity: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account.

In addition, Langton (2009, pp.228–229) added three more features to Nussbaum's list that:

8. reduction to body: the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts;

9. reduction to appearance: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses;
10. silencing: the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak.

Some of these analyses are used to discuss the female gender objectification in Nollywood films. While a woman is always known as a wife, mother, bride, girl, daughter, individualised-unmarried mum, mother of two etc, women are further classified by cultural norms and values. Gender is complex, and the female gender is reinforced by cultural values. The biased undertone that limits women to decorative objects whose identity hinges on physical appeal is the powerful influence of human perception within the society that devalues femininity. Cameron (2008, p. 51) observes that ‘sometimes the gender differences which matter most are not differences between women and men, but differences between women and women or men and men’. This reiterates Ceulemans and Fauconnier’s (1979) UNESCO-funded cross-cultural study that examined women’s representations within several socio-political and cultural contexts found that advertising, television, films, news, and other genres in Western nations, as well as those in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, excessively emphasized women’s traditional domestic roles or portrayed them as sex objects (cited in Byerly & Ross: 2006, p.17).

And then the question of who to blame comes to fore as this point of analysis whereby the actresses in Nollywood movies want to treated as harlot, witches, sexually deprived women, diabolic, authoritative, inferior, manipulative and wicked. It is very easy to blame the script-writer, director or the producer on the roles and the presentations of the female gender, but what about the female actress who agrees to such roles? While most of these actresses (SUCH AS) are presented as emotionally and psychologically disempowered, they are systematically and symbolically stereotyped sex objects who are at the beck and call of any man in the films. Afolabi (2008, p. 6) raises concern over the content, themes and synopsis of many home video films in Nigeria. With the invasion of

obscene foreign culture in Nollywood films, Nollywood has mostly destroyed the representation, propagation and promotion of Nigerian culture whereby we now view pornography on set and so many immoralities which are not preaching the morality it tends to preach. Thus, with the Nollywood films, Nigerian culture are not represented through what Afolabi (2006) identifies.

On the issue of morality, the question remains are Nollywood films examining the idea of morality? Are they portraying the African beliefs at all? Why these films are supposed to be carrier of cultural values through which younger generations and the unborn generations can learn from, the reverse is the case for most of their presentations which celebrates, nakedness, sex, cocaine, indecent dressing, amongst other things. Considering the selected films from the objectivity perspective, the actresses are women who fall in the following categories.

### **Instrumentality**

This shows women as appendages to men, object of sexual gratification and lust which silences them within the patriarchal society.

### **Denial of Autonomy**

The female gender is portrayed as inferior at all levels right from the birth of a female child. The man in the movies own the woman's body as patriarchal system allows.

### **Ownership**

Most Nollywood films downplay the liberating and positive roles of women within the society, rather these women are owned either as a wife, daughter or a sister. Thus, making them be under the care of a man at one time or the other of their lives.

### **Denial of Subjectivity**

Women's issues are mostly trivialised in the films. Even while women are being exploited and abused, Nollywood portray women as sexual objects whose beings hinge on physical attraction.

### **Reduction to Body**

The female body is always a desire for men, but when women are seen as sex objects, weaklings and dependants, emotionally crippled.

### **Reduction to Appearance**

This shows women in relation to their appearances, what they wear, how they look, how they call for attention and how best the male gender could identify their beauty through what they look like.

### **Silencing**

Refusals to speak publicly against the ill-treatment of female gender is silencing because it denies one's voice, protest and self-revelation. Most of the actresses in the analysed films seek to redefine themselves outside their sexual/nurturing function, but ironically, they reinforce their own sexuality as they see it within the demands of society.

However, these selected films show the female gender is still trapped within a patriarchal society that objectifies her. Instead of the films being powerful tools for female empowerment, such films end up in creating identity crisis for women as they are emotionally and psychologically damaged. Thus, Nollywood females are largely man-made as they are objectified to suit the males' patriarchal demands.

One of the problems with Nollywood is like teaching from the insiders' perspective as described in Obioma Nnaemeka (2009, p. 573) that 'teaching as an insider poses its own set of problems. Over-identification with one's culture leads to the type of romanticisation that produces other levels of distortions'. For example, the Negritude writings showcase this attitude. Also, insiders can also be alienated from their own culture. Such is the incidences of these ladies in Nollywood films who dress provocatively to suit the outsiders' taste. However, these actresses are blind to their own enslavement which raises the question of economic advancement and professionalism. Thus, what these actresses engage in are self-defeating and self-crippling to their self-images.

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