Critical Perspectives On Language, Literature And Communication Studies:
Festschrift In Honour of Siyan Oyeweso

Edited by
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and
Tunji Azeez
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
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CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BETWEEN OBSCENITY AND PROFESSIONALISM IN NIGERIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE VIDEO FILMS: THE EXAMPLES OF DIRTY SECRET AND BATTLE FOR PRIDE.

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Introduction
The film as a medium of entertainment initially copied from Stage Drama and absorbed some of its qualities, such as characters and dialogue, and added other elements and developed its own language, non-iconic signs and techniques of its own. The world of drama is a world of make-believe and a reflection of the society. The culture of a people is said to be the totality and embodiment of their way of life. This is manifested through their actions, traditions, mode of conduct and social practices. At the inception of Western theatrical practices in Nigeria, indigenous cultural values were initially upheld and esteemed, but following the global integration of cross-cultural practices, the dominating influence of the West has left the country short-changed of her cultural integrity. Nigerians have, therefore, become psychologically disposed to the seemingly superior way of life of her foreign colonial masters. The Western ways of life have now become the set standards and preferred mode of living. Any theatrical production, whether on the stage or the film medium, must fulfill the obligations of informing, educating and entertaining its audience. This is because the work itself is a product of the society and a response to some yearnings of the people. The way and manner this is done rests more on the dramaturgy and the use of appropriate audio-visual elements which depict the location and historical background of the work. To this extent, the dramatization of the action should not contradict the dialogue, the setting and all other theatrical or filmic elements deployed in the execution of the play for the attraction of the viewers. Meanwhile, drama presentation on the screen has more viewers than the stage and it has greater dramatic influence on the audience. In the words of George Kernodole (1967:483):

Drama in the mass media has an audience much larger than the theatre has ever had before, and it has an influence over the mind and imagination perhaps greater than any traditional act has ever had.
The video film in Nigeria happens to be the major channel through which drama gets to heterogeneous audiences that must view it through the screen. The impression projected remains with the viewers and often serves both as a source of information and entertainment.

The characters created are the medium of dissemination of the socio-cultural life of the people, and these are taken in as true, because every work of art has an intricate and visceral link with the culture of the people. This is why Alfred Opobor and Onuora Nwuneli (1979:29), propose that: '...The pattern which Nigerian-made films should follow is that of projecting the cultural, social and economic outlook of the nation and Africa'.

But how do we justify and align this idea with young ladies in Nigerian films who are willing to give huge sums of money to men that cheat on them, play pranks on their emotion and knowingly sleep with four friends on the pretence of love. The girls in Battle for Pride, though fully aware of each other's affair with the same young unfaithful guy, would still go out of their ways, even go borrowing and lying to find him the money as a way of proving their love to him individually.

Jonathan Haynes (1997:83) takes a swipe at this trend of creating negative characters when he writes:

> Often times we create characters that negotiate a new set of social values that are different from those of their original tradition, yet we look back to that tradition when it suits our purposes

Although, this statement was made specifically about Living in Bondage, the same sentiments are applicable to many of our English Language films especially Battle for Pride and Dirty Secret which shall be examined in this essay.

**Women in the African World View**

Views concerning the position of the woman especially in Africa can be referred to as double-faced. On the one hand, she is traditionally viewed by the male as less intelligent and a domesticated being. She is also seen as completely dependent on the man and at times as a sex object to be used to satisfy the male. Many African traditions do not see any difference between women and children! At times the male child is accorded certain honour and privileges than the mother. Till date, the woman is restricted from participating in certain cultic, religious and social functions of the society. In certain quarters, the woman is abused and even dehumanised. Dankelman and Davidson (1994:5) inform us that:

> although, women represent half of the world's population and one third of the official labour force, they receive only one percent of the World income and own less than one percent of the World's property.

Though, the foregoing report is in accordance with the submission of the UN Conference in Copenhagen in 1980, Dankelman and Davidson submit that, even recent developments in the Global environment have worsened the position of women especially in third world nations, where there is "dependency on western monetary economy and other factors such as development in technology, the shaping worldwide division of labour, religious fundamentalism, accelerating degradation of living environment “etc” (P.6)
Meanwhile, the female gender is an integrated member of the society whose view and voice ought to be respected in the political, economic and social matters, and be accorded respect as her male counterpart. Indeed, African history has it on record that, some women have played prominent roles in African development and civilization. For instance, at the time of inter-tribal wars, certain discoveries were made through the bravery of women. In the works of Soyinka, Osofisan, Ladipo and others, men did not only yield to the advice of their wives, but carried them out to the letter. The African woman is said to be conscious of what she has and knows how to use it to get what she wants. This is in terms of being resourceful, although this is usually misinterpreted in canal and immoral terms. According to Dorcas Akintunde (2005:349), the African woman:

Yeams for a society in which women can assert their innate resourcefulness by rejecting the fetters of (old customs) and any aspect of socialization that put them at a disadvantage. African women are interested in dehumanizing the world by enhancing their roles positively even as they consider themselves more suitable for certain roles than men.

Also in the words of Tunji Azeez (2001:343),

Women, among the Yoruba are not excluded from politics, economics and social matters. They are even given places of eminence in social matters. Women are allowed to own property, partake in economics and even be active participants and initiators in political matters.

This is a reflection of the form of feminism that originates from Africa and for African women. The names and roles played by Queen Idia and Madam Tínubu in the civilization and development of Bini and Yoruba Kingdoms, respectively, remained unalterable in history. Although the rulership of towns, villages and kingdoms do not rely on women, many kingdoms depended on the contributions of Queen mothers whose words are laws at times. For example, in Oyoko Clan in Ghana, the Queen mother must approve most dates, time and forms of celebrations in one of the Asante kingdoms before such could hold and be honoured by the citizens. Yoruba women for instance are known for their industry, prudence and courage as exhibited in trading and other political, religious and social matters. This makes them very influential, wealthy and often times independent of their husbands.

Nigerian Women in the Theatre and Movie Industries

Osita Ezenwanebe (2005:61) opines that women, as represented in African theatre can be grouped into two – The Active and the Inactive. The inactive refers, “To women who are dependent on men and whose lives are conditioned by patriarchal culture”. He explains that Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to blame* (1971) and Zulu Sofola's *The Song of a Maiden* (1991) are representatives of such plays that portray women in Nigerian theatre as inactive. The active women on the other hand, “are women who do not merely feel or express their feeling, but courageously and confidently step out to act out that feeling. He says plays such as Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel, Death and the Kings Horseman*, and Osofisan's *Morounmodun* etc are examples of plays where women are represented as agents of cultural preservation and social change.
However, a look at contemporary Nigerian video films reveals that the female gender is being progressively denigrated and debased as evident in the two movies examined below. This view is supported by several critics of the Nigerian film industry. Mulvey (cited in Steve Ogunsuyi 2005: 40), regards women displayed as sexual objects, "as the leit-motif of erotic spectacle". Ogunsuyi, in his article "The Nigerian Home Video: Arguments and critical Comments" reports how Foluke Ogunleye, another film critic, scholar and practitioner during the 1999 conference of Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes (SONTA) called for a change of heart on the part of our film makers, really as a reaction to the Stereotyping of Women in Nigerian home videos" as we find in our case studies.


The movie is about a spoilt young lady, Pandora, Cain, a sex machine, some wayward married women and Chief Otunba - Pandora's father and a gubernatorial aspirant. At this time when there are fathers all over the world serving jail terms for sleeping with their daughters and raising children by them, this film presents a girl who finds pleasure in sleeping with her father. The film also exhibits a crop of married women that find pleasure in having sex with far younger men, one of them under her husband's nose. The girl tries all within her power to discourage the father from contracting another marriage after the death of her own mother all because she wants to continue with such illicit and shameful act. The married women involved are Flora, the Honourable, Florence and Mrs. Elvis. Florence is the step mother of Pandora and a necessary political wife of Otunba, the gubernatorial aspirant of the state. Florence has to join father and daughter to enjoy the expertise of Cain at the end of the day. Florence tries very hard to talk both the husband and step daughter out of this shameful act, but always she receives humiliation, disgrace and threats from both. The major reason why her step daughter would not approve of her marriage to the father is simply because of their sexual ordeal. Florence finds them out, could not believe her eyes and tries to put an end to it. She gives up trying when both father and daughter are found in romance with Cain, the sex machine by the pool. Her case is a helpless case of self imprisonment all because of political position as first lady.

Mrs. Elvis shamelessly lies about her identity just to engage Cain in sexual immoralities. She takes her concubine to her husband's own hotel for this shameful act. She pays Cain three hundred thousand naira for sleeping with her. Pandora, the spoilt brat would stop at nothing to get any man, including her father to have sex. She shamefully sleeps with her father at will and would only not agree to her father taking another wife. In order not to stop having sex with him at will, she actually humiliates her closest friend Florence when accosted and advised to desist from the act. She lies to Mr. Elvis to win Cain over to her side and ruins Mr. and Mrs. Elvis' marriage, also causing Mrs. Elvis' death at her husband's hand.

Analysis of the Film

Dirty Secret opens in a hotel reception with Pandora and the female receptionist before us. Shortly, Cain the sex machine walks in and asks if he has any message from Mrs. Clara Elvis (Mrs. Peters) identifying himself as Mr. Peters. The receptionist directs him to the room where Mrs. Peters is. As he turns to leave, Pandora gives him a seductive look which he acknowledges thereby establishing an agreement between them. As soon as Cain enters the room, he observes Mrs Elvis' exposed boobs and remarks that he likes them. The woman invites him to bed saying:
Mrs. Clara Elvis: (to Cain) You love these? (She fondles her breasts seductively). Why not come and show me what other parts of my body you love.

They have their "sexual transaction" and a handsome sum is paid for the service rendered including a cheque of three hundred thousand naira for a fake birthday party. The woman reminds him of her request to remain hers alone and that she would keep trying all within her power to keep the millennium creation. Richie, Cain's friend, advises him to desist from this kind of life but Cain and the women in his life have all thrown manners, shame and morals into the dustbin and all that matters is the 'servicing' and the handsome payment that follows. To Richie, this is complete madness, as he believes his friend needs repentance and redemption.

Between Pandora and her father is a more worrisome situation. Pandora would neither pretend nor hide her jealousy for her step mother. She vehemently and openly disapproves of Florence's marriage to her father and challenges her father on why he should take another woman when she is always there for him. She would constantly remind him of the "bond" and promise between them:

Pandora: (in annoyance) Go away dad, go away! You promised me that no one will ever come between us and all we hold. And you will ever love me as you loved my mum. How could you think of taking another wife when I am here for you?

At first, when Pandora complains to her friend Stella, who tries to let her see reasons why her father should remarry, but she insists:

Pandora: Dad has no reasons to remarry. He has me and I have him. We have each other. What is his problem?

The full meaning of the foregoing statement comes to the fore, when the unimaginable love affair between daughter and father become glaring and an open secret. Pandora's father, Otunba sees nothing wrong in whatever she does as long as it does not affect their "relationship". Otunba commends Pandora for giving her uncle's wife, Mrs. Clara Elvis, who is seen as a stumbling block to her dating Cain and sending her out of her matrimonial home just to have her way. In this conversation between Otunba and Pandora it shows that he approves of her daughter's action.

Pandora: Cain is a beautiful guy and any woman would love to have him. I think aunty seduced him with her money.

Otunba: Imagine the money she does not know how my brother amassed. It is good she's been sent out of our family. Such person is not worth to be a member of our family. But, be careful of this Cain guy.

Otunba cannot be said to be a good brother to Clara's husband and with his kind of behaviour, it is also glaring that Otunba is not in control of the sacrilegious relationship between him and the daughter because on many occasions, he tries to call her to order, but she will never listen and would always have it her ways. The whole essence of this evil affair is explained by Otunba to Florence after she discovers:
Florence: (shouting) What a shame. You are a shameless man Otunba. What devil possessed you to commit such a sacrilege? For how long have you been indulging in such shameful acts?

Otunba: I said enough or I would shut your mouth for you!

Florence: (still shouting) It will never be enough until you tell me what devil got into you?

Otunba: Florence you can never understand! I owe you no explanation. Pandora and I have always been there for each other. We lean on each other. We cry on each other's shoulders. We give each other comfort. I decided to transfer the love I had for the mother to her. What other way to express such love?

To Pandora, this act has nothing to do with the integrity and relationship between her and her dead mother. She always sees Florence's displeasure and complaint as act of jealousy. Otunba also becomes jealous of the affair between her daughter and Cain. She would only be comfortable with it, if she would allow him to share him in bed with her.

The film parades some good actors and actresses and the quality of the production is above average. However, it lacks certain cinematic details and relevant information of actions that would make it pass as a very good work of art. For instance, though we were made to understand that Otunba married Florence because of his political ambition and Florence's influence in the party, there was never a political meeting, campaign, address and any gathering of politicians apart from a dinner in Otunba's house which is basically attended by close family friends and relatives to establish the fact that it was just to bring Ken around to the house. Besides, Florence never called, welcomed nor visited anybody to really establish the connections available and necessary to make Otunba win the elections.

Pandora on the other hand does nothing more than scheming and flirting around with her father and Cain. The only friend she ever visited ceases to exist as soon as she meets Cain, and all actions centre on Otunba's family to the exclusion of all other characters that have earlier been established either as friends, lovers or in any other capacities. The whole story is based on lust and sexual obsession. The word love was rarely used, instead "attracted to", "like", "enjoy", "freak" are used by Pandora, Otunba, Florence and others at different times. This shows that the objectives of all the adventures are sex and money which can not buy or win true love anywhere.

Another point that needs to be examined is the duration of the actions in the film. Although the period coverage of the events or what is called the "real time" of the story contradistinguished to "film time", is not clear. However, by estimation the period could not be less than six months. It is amazing to discover that the women in the film did not change their hair for so long, and this is far from being real and natural. This is peculiar to the above mentioned films only, but most other Nollywood films that deal with city live situations. Perhaps what could be responsible for this lack of finance professional over sight on the part of the director and other interpreters or crew members such as costumier or make-up artist. Whichever way, Nigerian film producers need seriously look into this and make amends.
Ifeanyi Ogbonna’s *Battle for Pride* (2010)

The story centres on Michele who is an old school mate of Georgean, but in order not to look cheap before her friends she does not introduce him as if she is having a love affair with him even though she actually is.

This makes Tasha to go out for him because he is cute and handsome. Tasha does not care if Michele is dating him or not. Michele and Tasha become enemies. This cold war degenerates to the level of inviting their “Matron”, Madam Nazareth to settle the quarrel. They were fined five million naira each and they prefer to pay the money than make peace with each other. Every female character in the film is into prostitution, blackmailing and other illicit acts from which they dangerously make their monies. Georgean does not give a damn if they are arrested or get killed in the acts, but would play on their “intelligence” to sleep with them at will. He runs away with Nelo, a friend and house mate of Mihelele’s, Rubby and Tasha to America, after duping them to the tune of fifteen million naira. Although he marries Nelo, but this is with a motive to use her to acquire wealth. He eventually kills her and in the end, he alongside with others get arrested and sentenced for various crimes such as, impersonation, human and drug trafficking, attempted murder and fraud.

**Analysis of the Film**

Michele returns home to find out that Tasha has gone out on a launch date with Georgean her boy friend. Michele is surprised that her friend would do such a thing, but is instantly corrected that Tasha is not a friend:

Michele: Georgean came to this house and went out with my friend?

Nelo: Who do you call your friend? Can’t she turn down his request? You need to see the look on her face the first time he came to this house!

She goes to the restaurant, picks up a quarrel with Tasha and shamelessly, they call each other names, remind each other of their bad pasts and to spite one another they recount all they were and recount all they ever did for each other.

Looking at this movie, it is obvious that there is no iota of love between Georgian and the girls. There is a lot of pretence in the relationships. This is how Georgean would let himself be “bought” with their money as a proof of their love for him.

Tasha: I love to meet him so that I can tell him thanks for bringing my friend to her old self.

Rubby: So that you can snatch him as you tried to snatch Michele’s boy friend? Sorry I am not bringing him close to you!

Tasha: Tell them they have lost! I did not snatch anybody’s boyfriend; I am a big girl, I am a chequist I have money, so I can afford to buy any man of my dream.

Michele: Well why don’t you look around and you would find many men to buy with our supposed money, but certainly not my man because he is not your kind and out of your reach.
There are a lot of inconsistencies in the film. The actions keep moving back and forth and the situations often times confuse the viewers concerning the actual time and place of the actions. Throughout the duration of the play, none of the characters interacts with any other human being apart from house mates and their boyfriends. Not a single office scene, or business to establish how they make their money to be able to afford the degree of luxury displayed in the film. Could this mean that money falls from heaven for Nigerian big girls?

It is also interesting that there are no cases of human trafficking, child abuse, drug trafficking, impersonation and forgery for which the 'criminals' are all arrested and charged. It is not enough to parade beautiful and handsome faces in films but there should be some lessons to teach the viewers. It is expected that the array of artistes featured in the film should be able to discuss and contribute positively to issues of national concern and humanity in general even when they deal with the themes of love.

General Observations and Recommendations on the Nigerian English Video Films
Nigeria is a society where integrity and moral lessons are held in high esteem. The film and other art forms serve as media and channel of cultural integration and preservation of the norms and values of the society. For these works of art to derail and preach some other forms of message is not only unethical, but retrogressive with grave implications on the future of the society. Some of the reasons why these video films are branded with scenes of immorality, violence and decadent ways of life include but not restricted to the following:

1). Desperation: The high level of economic depression being experienced in the county has led so many into believing in the dictum of “survival comes first”. Yes, one must survive in order to keep life going, but, what then becomes the worth of a man who for a plate of food sells his birth right? The level of poverty is so high that someone is not sure of the next meal and in order to keep body and soul together, any venture that can put food on the table is considered first before integrity and so it is with most Nigerian movie producers, actors, directors and marketers.

2). Lack of professional training: For those who are formally trained in the theatre profession, monetary reward is not usually the priority; it is secondary, while the love of the profession comes first. But for the amateurs and those who are untutored in the arts, fame and monetary gains are their main motivations for coming into the profession, so they are easily lured into taking up of such roles that promote indecency. The 'pioneers' of these obscene roles are mainly from the latter category.

3). Over-commercialism of the arts: Also the need to maximize profit is another reason why some producers who are themselves 'uneducated' in the arts of the theatre and its cinematic counterpart prefer stories that promote obscenities. Such producers would jump at any amateur actress who would collect whatever they have to offer. Notable professional actors and actresses who knew their onions and are properly schooled would not, normally associate with such immoralities. An average Nigerian video film viewer would want to see a good work of theatre that would uplift his personality and challenge his love of creativity and appreciation of the arts. The current standards of Nigerian movies reveal a great deal of lack of patriotism affect
image of the artistes and cause lack of sponsorship from corporate bodies and government. The time has come for the entire industry to go back to the drawing board and rework its script contents in order to rejuvenate love for creative excellence. Film stories that do not conform to the norms of the society and project its values have great negative impact on the society at large and the future and wellbeing of the citizens in particular.

4). Need for proper classification by Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board: The classification and distribution of such works are not properly done by the board and society, hence the children have unhindered access to them and use them as models. This have greatly affected the perception of the youth about moral values and exposed them to vices such as disrespect for parents and constituted authorities, premature sex, indecent dressing and prostitution. Also the distinction between adult and children programmes is missing. The screen is not only out to entertain, but must educate and inform its audience as well. The screen has given a new reorientation to the children and makes them to strive more for equality with adults in every aspects of life. The children programmes and films are at times full of adults’ actions and message that make the children feel left out and regard themselves as adults. Proper classification and labelling should be done and the distribution well monitored for effective impact on the viewers and the society at large.

5). Need to check borrowed Global trends over local cultural values: The loss of Nigerian traditional and cultural institutions of education such as folklore, oral lessons and exemplary lives of the adults are being eroded through the films. The television screen and whatever that comes through it at the inception was of high quality and standard, however, this has been jettisoned for love of money and fame including foreign civilization and borrowed cultures that are not fully understood by the borrowers.

6). Need for more family guidance in the home: Disorganisation and lack of focus stare the youths in the face and there seems to be no way out for the confused ones. Parental love and guidance are projected as secondary duties of parents while fashion, infidelity, unfaithfulness, prostitution, corruption and other vices are given prominence and credence by such productions. Children are left to fend for themselves and at times for the family despite the promulgation of the child rights act.

Conclusion

No doubt, there are reasons no matter how feeble they are, that have made present day Nigerian actresses to take up roles that put their personal and professional integrity to the question. Such actrees and actors should bear in mind that their worth and professionalism will be eroded as the society strives to reorganise itself and its values and make them irrelevant and outdated as time goes on. Every artiste and work is expected to impact positively on the society in the conservation and promotion of its values.

The need to urgently draw a line of demarcation between being in a “profession” and being a “professional” must be addressed by various bodies in the film and the theatre
industries. Some of the culprits claim to be professionals by acting such undignified roles and in the process abuse the intelligence of our audience. It should be realised the audience is mature and knowledgeable enough to distinguish between obscenity professionalism.

The Nigerian Film and Video Censor’s Board should wake-up and inject sanity proper classifications of Nigerian films to stem the rising tide of obscenity and education of the Nigerian child. The future and continuous existence of the society a stake due to inappropriate and wrong messages being projected by a large number Nigerian video films. Not only are moral values being ridiculed, they may be completely relegated if frantic efforts are not made to preserve them. The culture of a people is to be their history and identity. A people that take no pride in their cultural institutions will be subjected to cultural enslavement by other cultures and by so doing, jeopardize the future of its youth and people.

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