

Beyond Fun

Media Entertainment, Politics and Development in Nigeria

Edited by

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Portrayal of Moral Lessons in Nigerian Movies: a Study of Tunde Kelani's *Maami*

- Lanre Olaolu Amodu, Oladotun, Motunrayo Aminat, Olusola Oyero, Thelma Ekanem

Introduction

Every film is inspired by an idea. This idea is channelled to the audience through a well-written story that depicts characters and circumstances that the audience can easily relate with. The idea, which is also known as a theme, represents the central meaning that viewers are expected to derive from the various images and symbols they see in the film. While some films possess strong and obvious themes, some others possess subtle themes. Also, a film maker may choose to produce a story with a single unique theme, while another may adopt a central theme with one or more sub-themes. Whatever is the reference, it is expected that every film should have a message to pass across to its audience. Onabajo and Oladapo (2009, p. 120) also express this view by stating that:

Every home video or literary work must have a theme, which can adequately summarize what it is all about. Some have one clear-cut theme, while others have two or three interwoven themes. Themes attract the attention and arouse the curiosity of the audience.

The strength of a film is not only in its story, but, also, in the way the Director interprets the script. A director should be able to engage all the elements of production to present a powerful theme that connects with the audience (Proferes, 2015). Proferes observes that when a theme is seen as abstract, it becomes problematic; it becomes extremely powerful, however, when it is seen as "a matrix in which a character lives and breathes, profoundly affecting that character's relationship with others and with the universe itself" (p. 232). The author emphasizes that the theme is one of the sources of a story.

Story telling or folktale is an integral part of the African culture and should not be treated casually. This is because the stories in the African society originate from and contain various aspects of the people's culture and tradition. Some of these stories tend to explain the origin of the people, why they hold dear certain values and the consequences of violating generally accepted norms. Some other stories make use of animals and other characters to elucidate moral values highly revered by the society.

Amali (2014) identifies some of the major functions of folktales as entertainment, enlightenment and provision of cultural, as well as traditional orientation for people. The author observes that both the young and the old in the society learn alike from the experience. The World Affairs Council of Houston (n.d) also emphasizes the belief that every African story must have a lesson or value to inculcate into the listeners, who are mostly children. The stories are usually told by the elderly members of the society or household to transmit wisdom and morals to the young generation.

As in the case of folktales, films also possess educational attributes. Oyero, Amodu and Usaini (2015) observe that though film is considered to majorly entertain, one cannot take away its educational functions. Whether deliberately or not, subtly or overtly, films communicate meanings to the audience from which they deduce lessons.

However, a general observation reveals that several Nigerian movie producers, perhaps motivated by commercial gains and other foreign factors, have jettisoned the morality component of the African culture. Unfortunately, this tends to 'miseducate' young people who dedicate a considerable part of their time to watching such movies. This chapter, therefore, explores the moral contents of the movie *Maami*, a 2011 movie produced by Mainframe Film and Television Production, owned and managed by Tunde Kelani. The movie is an adaptation of Femi Osofisan's novel of the same title.

Literature Review

Sambe (2008, p. 143) observes that film is a powerful medium for enlightenment. This is because it has the capacity to educate, entertain and, at the same time, inform those who might be exposed to the messages it carries. Consequent on a research finding of selected Ugandan film audiences, Dipio (2008, p. 56) posits that film performs several functions, which may include education, entertainment and therapeutic function. The author notes that:

A number of viewers assent to the educative value of the film in which they are informed. Some parents use the examples there in teaching their children while others watch films because they act as surrogate parent/teacher on many things, especially relationships with the opposite sex and respect for the aged (Dipio, 2008, p. 56).

Usman, Ohwovoriole, Owoicho, Dik and Torutein (2013, p. 236) opine that the traditional oral culture in Africa consist of myths, religious practices, epic tales, dance, songs, folktales, etc. Cultural norms, such as respect for elders, storytelling and communal living are also passed down through the oral means.

The significant development of media forms, particularly film, has further aided the process by which generationally-held beliefs are handed from one generation to another. Home videos, movies and cinema films are powerful tools for transmitting cultural values. Arulogun (1979) explains that film could be effectively channelled as a vehicle used by the society to transmit societal norms as well as taboos.

However, globalization has taken its toll on the structure of the African culture. For example, it was common place to have families sit in circles, listening to elders tell stories of their experiences while growing up. In recent times, unfortunately, the modern trends, such as massive rural-urban migration and urbanizations have eroded this cultural practice. In contrast, an increasing number of people depend more on media

technologies, such as the television and Internet for cultural transmission and knowledge gathering. Considering the increasing amount of time that children tend to spend with the media in recent times, it will not be surprising if media contents are major contributors in the development of their world view.

The Entertainment-Education (E-E) Strategy

The Entertainment-Education perspective to media and art is a predominant technique adopted by some media professionals to creatively craft educational contents into entertainment and art (Singhal and Rogers, 2004). This strategy is premised upon the belief that even while being entertained, education can be on-going. The ultimate of this strategy is to create new levels of awareness that never existed in the minds of viewers, after media contents may have been absorbed. Entertainment-Education model ensures that a media product provides audience members with "knowledge about educational issues, create favourable attitudes, shift social norms and change overt behaviour" (Singhal and Rogers, 2004, p. 5).

Alawode, Atofojomo & Fatonji (2015) identify the Entertainment-Education strategy as one of the major methods adopted by professionals who engage in designing interventions that focus on stimulating behavioural changes among people in a particular community. An (2008) explains that entertainment-education initiatives were adopted previously by developing nations to improve public knowledge, necessitate behavioural change and create awareness of changing trends. Issues related to life expectancy and uniform national growth were communicated en mass via this strategy. The foregoing goes on to validate the existence of media strategies capable of fusing education (whether those previously done through the oral culture or those regarding current world trends) into entertainment. Thus, even when an average audience member is being entertained, education is taking place.

Every media product (in this case a film) comes with themes; a theme is the central message behind a literary work. The theme is more or less a summary of the story behind the act. It is an intrinsic element of the story, embodying the message the producer wants to pass across (Onabajo & Oladapo, 2009, p. 120). More often than not, a moral lesson is a useful experience that is shared for the benefit of others. It stands for what is learned and what has been encountered at the completion of particular action, set of behaviour or an instruction. UNESCO (1994) defines culture as including the whole complex of distinctive, spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or a social group. These features and beliefs often differ from region to region and from one cultural setting to another. Moral lessons are often built around these beliefs and wrapped around stories.

The adoption of audio-visual effects to communicate moral values tends to catch the attention of media users more in comparison with oral tradition era. Oladapo (2009, p. 272) states that there are higher possibilities for learning to last longer in the minds of media users when it appeals to their senses- especially the sense of sight and hearing. People also learn better and tend to retain knowledge when such learning is related to their day-to-day activities.

The Moral Lessons in Themes

Themes are essential because they give a general meaning to films. A general observation reveals that in recent years, some themes have been repeated in the Nigerian film

industry which tends to make viewers lose interest. Most African films constantly focus on the same parochial themes-employing the use of witchcraft and traditional medicine to settle scores among presumed enemies. This is part of the regular themes that are seen in the film. This reality reinforces the well held belief that some film producers, as a matter of concern, do not conduct any form of research on their audiences before adopting a story line or producing a film.

Farinde (2008) observes that as at the early 2000s, the Nigerian film industry still portrayed and promoted specific images that were not totally representative of the nation's reality. Images portraying abuse of women, ritualistic tendencies, violence and portrayal of "oligarchic society images" were fuelled by profiteering intentions and not the flair for art as it used to be decades ago (2008, p. 286). The author queries the accuracy of the images reeled out by many movie makers to the viewers. The existence of this problem gives an average viewer a different world view, which, with time, according to Gerbner's Cultivation theory, will be believed and adopted as a way of life-affecting perception, behaviour and ultimately, every bit of human life.

The quality of the story and production of Nigerian films, however, appear to have improved over the years. Giwa (2014) observes that the influence of Nigerian films has attained newer heights in the production process and content. The author further notes that Nigeria's talented directors have made considerable effort to reintroduce professionalism and quality into the industry by improving on scriptwriting, cinematography and film direction. Nevertheless, the author considers most Nigerian films to be structured the same way, with consistent plots, unrealistic twists and inappropriate portrayal of some persona.

Concerns linger about the moral content in the themes of Nigerian films. Generally, the term morality refers to rules of appropriate behaviour with respect to what is right and wrong. While discussing moral compensation in Nigerian films, Omoere and Anyanwu (2014) observe that since the inception of the industry, Nigerian films have been accused of several offences, chief of which is their depiction of morality. Though the authors agree that there has been an improvement over the years, they insist that too much time is devoted to showing the "benefits" of wrongdoing while minimal time is allotted to the retribution. The authors perceive the delayed justice to be as bad as justice denied. While they admit that moral compensation exists in Nigerian films, they believe its delay waters down the impact of the message on the audience. The excess and prolonged exposure of the audience to ill-gotten wealth, for instance, may increase the attraction and diminish the consequence.

Statement of the Problem

Films perform educational functions, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Consequent on the audio-visual attributes of movies, they tend to make lasting impressions on the minds of viewers. This makes movie a veritable medium for propagating moral values.

In modern-day Nigeria, however, it has been observed that several movies are produced with weak themes and little or no moral messages. The situation has so degenerated that several parents choose to preview movies before granting access to their children to avoid exposure to immoral contents. Considering how much time children tend to devote to movie viewership, parents fear that their wards may be misguided right 'under their roof'.

Omoera and Anyanwu (2014) emphasize the power of films to influence, not only by the actions seen practically, but, also, by the ones implied. Unfortunately, the authors observe most film makers see themselves first as business persons while their storytelling function comes after. The consequence of this is that such film makers tend to project themes that will be commercially viable at the expense of the ones that will be morally impactful. It becomes pertinent, therefore, to investigate if children, who are the focus of this study, even notice any moral lesson in films they watch. We also want to know if they consider the moral lesson relevant to their current lives or "old fashioned". Therefore, this study examines the moral lessons contents of Tunde Kelani's *Maami* and children's appreciation of such contents. The specific objectives of this paper are:

- (i) to find out the moral lessons in the movie, as identified by the respondents;
- (ii) to find out the extent to which the respondents consider the movie relevant to their life experiences morally.

Research Questions

- (i) What moral lessons are identified in the movie by the respondents?
- (ii) To what extent do the respondents consider the movie relevant to their life experiences?

Theoretical Perspective

The Social-Cognitive theory, propounded by Albert Bandura (1986), states that media viewers may adopt certain behaviours portrayed in accessed media messages based on information concerning the rewards and/or punishments of such behaviour. The implication of this, therefore, is that when viewers are informed of little or no negative consequences of an act viewed, there is a higher tendency to indulge in such an act over and over again (Alawode, Atofojomo & Fatonji, 2015, p. 299). The Social-Cognitive theory posits that viewers may adopt and exhibit positive or negative themes exhibited in media messages (in this case films) due to the perceived benefits or negative consequences of such actions as portrayed in the media.

Previous Studies

In a study of fifty Nigerian films conducted by Alawode *et al.* (2015, pp. 302-303), it was revealed that 85 cases of good morality, such as respect for parents, elders and constituted authority, hospitality, and respect for others were found in the films. On the other hand, there were 237 cases of moral decadence or immoral practices found in these same films. Notable amongst those vices included bribery, extortion, prostitution and hooliganism, among others. The practice of sex before marriage and drunkenness were also prominent on the list.

As regards the portrayal of the rewards and punishment for engagement in such acts, 57.6% of moral acts within the selected 50 films were neither rewarded nor punished. However, only 32.9% of the moral acts were commended in the story lines. The neutrality of a larger percentage of moral acts not being rewarded or appreciated may inform viewers' perception of little or no reward for imbibing moral values. This may serve as a discouraging factor also. In addition, good acts are never to be punished; however, 9.4% of good and moral acts within the story lines of the 50 selected films were punished.

The social-cognitive theory, therefore, provides a useful framework for this current study to assess the respondents' views of moral depictions in Tunde Kelani's *Maami*. The nature of the moral messages communicated in the storyline of the film will be evaluated through audience's identification of such messages. The respondents will also assess the relevance of such moral messages to their current lives, which will provide suggestions of their desire to adopt such moral virtues.

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design. The population for the study comprised the boarding students in Lagos Model College (a public school) and Anglican Comprehensive High School (a private school), both in Lagos State of Nigeria. Since the objectives of the study did not include recall of moral lessons, the researchers did not explore the residual knowledge of the respondents. Hence, there was need to place all the respondents on the same pedestal by viewing the movie at the same time. To achieve this, and, at the same time, not disrupt the academic programme of the selected schools, the population was narrowed down to boarding students who would watch the movie at a convenient time without any distraction. The students were between the ages of 8 and 19 and their classes ranged from Junior Secondary 1 (JS 1) to Senior Secondary 3 (SS 3). Out of 1, 250 boarding students in Lagos Model College, 251 students were selected, while 59 students were selected from the 297 boarding students of the Anglican Comprehensive School, thereby making a total sample size of 310. Considering that the two schools had varying population figures for the boarding students, which is understandable since one is public while the other is private owned, the sample size was determined through the proportionate sampling technique, using the formula:

$$p = \frac{\text{One of the selected school}}{\text{Total population of both schools}} \times \frac{100}{1}$$

The entire boarding students of the schools watched the film but the respondents were selected through the simple random sampling technique.

Table 1: Moral Lessons In Maami

	Anglican Comprehensive High School	Lagos Model College
Strongly agree	72.9%	85.9%
Agree	23.7	13.7
Undecided	3.4	0.4
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	-	-
Total	100% (n=59)	100% (n=249)

Table 1 shows that almost the entire population of the respondents in both schools was positive that the movie *Maami* contained moral lessons. This result shows that the

Children could identify rules of proper behaviour in the movie. Only a negligible percentage (3.4%) of the respondents was undecided in Anglican Comprehensive High School and disagreed (0.4%) in Lagos Model College.

Table 2: Respondents' Identification of Moral Lessons in the Movie

	Anglican Comprehensive High School	Lagos Model College
a. It is not good to do evil	3.4%	6.8%
b. Every mother need to be loved and respected at all times	8.5	10.1
c. Don't let fear show on your face	6.8	4.8
c. Don't let fear show on your face		
d. It is good to be good but don't be foolish about it	6.8	1.2
e. Life is a game, some want to eat while some end up being eaten	5.1	6.4
Option a and b	25.4	19.3
Option a, b and c	16.9	22.1
Option a, b, c and d	8.5	12.4
Total	100% n=59	100% n=249

Going a step further to find out the moral lessons identified by the respondents result can be seen on Table 2. A larger percentage of students from Anglican Comprehensive High School choose option a and b as the moral lesson in the movie while on the other hand, Lagos Model College had its highest percentage of respondents choose option a, b, c.

TABLE 3: Respondents' Views on the Relevance of the Movie to Them

	Anglican Comprehensive High School	Lagos Model College
Yes	93.1%	94.8%
No	6.9	5.2
Total	100% n=59	100% n=249

Table 3 shows that more than 90% of the respondents in both schools believed the movie was relevant to them as children. This is perhaps an indication that the students found messages in the movie that they could relate with and connect to their personal experiences.

Table 4: The Movie's Ability to Inspire the Respondents

	Anglican Comprehensive High School	Lagos Model College
Yes	93.2%	95.2%
No	6.8	4.8
Total	100% n = 59	100% n = 249

In response to the researchers' inquiry about the movie's ability to inspire the respondents, Table 4 shows that more than 90% of the respondents in both schools again admitted that they were inspired by the movie.

Qualitative Data Presentation and Analysis

In order to provide a deeper dimension to this study, some open ended follow-up questions were asked. The responses to the questions are qualitatively presented below.

FIGURE 1: Themes in the Movie Identified By the Respondents

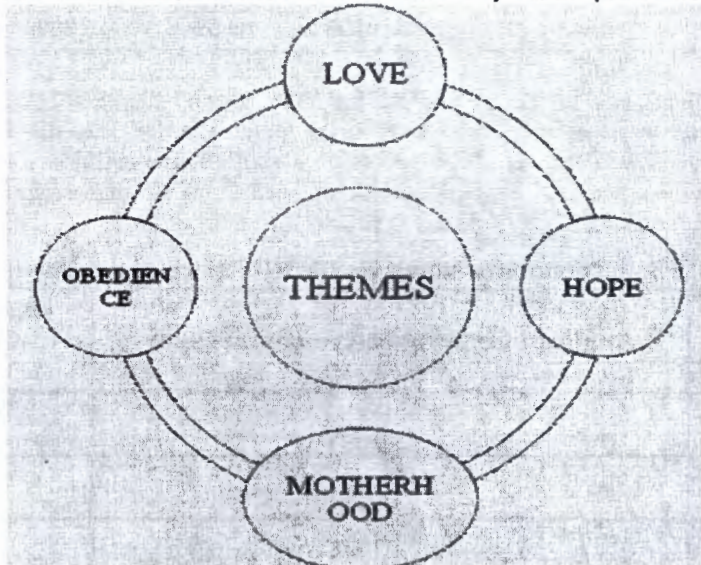


Figure 1 shows that the respondents identified love, hope, motherhood and obedience as the themes in the movie. Some respondents gave examples of the love

between the mother and son and the role a mother plays in the life of a child. Earlier in this paper, we stated that a theme is the central or subject idea of a movie. Every film or literary work must have a theme, which can adequately summarize what it is all about. Some have one clear-cut theme, while others have two or three interwoven themes. Themes attract the attention and of the audience and arouse their curiosity. Nigerian home video or film themes have over the years captured popular criticism and audience interest (Onabajo and Oladapo. 2009, p. 120).

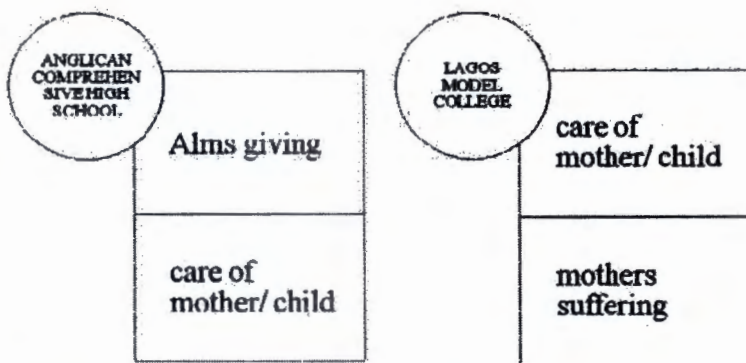


Figure 2: Inspiration Drawn By Respondents from the Movie

Both schools were able to identify care of mother/child as part of the themes that inspired them and, when asked the question about how it has inspired them, some of the respondents explained that they liked the way the mother and Kashy, the lead character in the film, showed love to each other. Anglican Comprehensive High School also identified alms giving and Lagos Model College was inspired by mother's suffering.

Discussion

The first research question of this study aimed to find out the ability of the respondents to identify the moral lessons in the movie. The result showed that 25.4% of the respondents from Anglican Comprehensive High School, which was the largest percentage, chose the first two options, "it is not good to do evil; and every mother needs to be loved and respected at all times" as the moral lessons in the movie. On the other hand, 22.1% of the respondents from Lagos Model College identified the first three options, "It is not good to do evil; every mother needs to be loved and respected at all times; and don't let fear show on your face", as the themes of the movie. Thus, Oladapo (2009, p. 272) observes that learning lasts longer with people when it appeals to their senses, especially the sense of sight and hearing. People also learn better when learning is related to their day-to-day activities. Therefore, the findings revealed that the respondents were indeed able to identify the moral lessons in the movie, *Maami*.

Research question two was on the extent to which the students considered the movie relevant to them. In table 3, 93.1% and 94.4% of the respondents from Anglican

Comprehensive High School and Lagos Model College respectively agreed that the movie was relevant to them. These percentages, of course, formed the majority of the sample population. Consequently, the movie has been shown to be relevant to children in the propagation of moral lessons.

Conclusions

Oyero, Amodu and Usaini (2015) observe that video film production in modern-day Nigeria has evolved into a multi-billion naira industry, which has also produced actors that are nationally and internationally acclaimed. Not only do the movies directly or indirectly educate the audience, the actors also become role models to be imitated by admirers. Consequently, movie producers should come to terms with the amount of influence they tend to have on their audience. The findings of this study reveal that the secondary school students who were between the ages of 8 and 19 were able to identify the moral lessons in the movie *Maami*. This shows how receptive their minds are to messages that are presented through the video format. It is logical, therefore, to assume that if movies contain negative messages, such young ones may also imbibe the same. Hence, this paper recommends that movie makers should wake up to the reality of their influence on their audience, particularly the children, and use the medium to preserve the moral fabric of the society.

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