

**Nollywood: How will I fare in Hollywood?****Abstract**

This paper in a way contradicts the much-glorified Nigerian home movie in the sense that no matter its pride of place in our local environment, there is need for international assessment. A good movie is the product of genuine knowledge of the art of film making beyond the peddling of cameras; the content of a film and the theatricality of it determines the quality of that film. The Nigerian home movie as it were is a courageous initiative of a party video agent, whose job was to capture merrymaking at parties with little or no theatrical artistic excellence; that humble beginning has continued to be its albatross. This accounts for a high level misconception in the Nigerian movie kingdom where any form of narrative dialogue is considered 'acting'. The second slapstick is that the Nigerian movie director has little or no professional pride in the area of casting and imaginative theatrical directing; hence any model or fine-face takes a lead role in the Nigerian home movie. Some observers believe it is a phase that will pass, but this paper is of the view that, that 'time' will depend on the willingness of the present crop of movie makers to expose themselves to the arts of the theatre as the human emotions plotted into a captivating story is still what the enthusiasts watch in films.

### Introduction

I wish to commence this paper with the correction of a major fallacy which I think has confused quite a number of people who are in the theatre profession, and as well misled a number of people in the film business. You may have heard that “film is not theatre”. I wish here to disagree with the supposition about theatre and film. A Cameraman may be pardoned for making such a claim to his boss in a government film corporation in order to control the budget meant for theatre or performance generally, but it should not come from a thoughtful scholar. Like an office secretary, a cameraman records the proceedings of a meeting, nothing more. He is as creative as a secretary recording for documentation, the picture of all the acts in the proceedings using the right grammatical techniques to focus, capture and arrange the events of that proceeding. At the end, he cuts and sews; removing what is not required from the draft. In the final analysis, the principal actors in that proceeding determine the content and veracity of the meeting. This later activity illustrates the power of “editing” in the kitchen of postproduction; where the cameraman just like a secretary captures and may as well edit. Do all the technicalities and manipulations of editing separate film from theatre because a camera is involved in theatrical action? It is like saying that the football we watch on television is made in the editing suites of the English Premier League *and not with the players in action*. The camera does not play or act, it only ensures that the best moments of action are seen through the right shorts. Michael Powell made this distinction in *A Life in Movies* when he noted:

With the coming of synchronized sound, sound effect and dialogue became the masters, and action became more and more confined to the studio, trick-work became important. The aim was to convince the audience that a film had been made in real locations, *when it was actually a combination of actors in the studio being superimposed upon real backgrounds by various means such as back projection, front projection and what we called “matte painting (194).*

The emphasis here is still the actor whom the actor relates whom the audience relates with emotionally in the context of the story and the environment (scenery). “Film is not theatre” is a hyperbole used in film classes to show the difference between raw action on location and what finally goes out to the public after so many “effects” in both sound and visual additives would have been inserted. The work of a filmmaker lies in the creative use of every item of the film art found in editing technology. There is need to clarify this misconception and face the rudiments of theatre that makes the film art; the actor, director, scenery and sewing machine (camera). With regards to Nigerian, the millennium development goal is call for a proper examination, overhauling of the film industry (home video) both in content, production quality and marketing in order to attract wider patronage locally and internationally.

### **The Local Performing Environment**

Who among us is really qualified to give an objective analysis of the local performance environment as it affects the artistic, the business, and the ethical practices of the movie industry in Nigeria? Is it the academic in his theoretical and utopian approach to standards, is it the artist in his desperate drive for employment and popularity, or is the producer who is more interested in the multiple financial returns of the principal invested? Could it be the journalist who opinion offered by the producer at the premier or public launch of the film? Pathetic, you would say. But I think that we should be more sympathetic to that of the academia because he is like a scientist who builds a robot that goes into the society to pillage and destroy rather than build.

The content of our film is actually a bastardised form of its foreign influence, especially the American lifestyle (socially at least). A simple example is attempting to place ourselves where we do not belong. We tend to equate ourselves with highly developed practices in its specializations spanning centuries. Is it not ridiculous that a film industry must have links with “*wood*” after the American Hollywood? Hence, there must be Bollywood and Nollywood! But Hollywood is the name of a city that came to be the centre of the American film industry. But what identical

bearing does Nolly and Bolly and their *woods* have with the Indian and Nigerian indigenous nomenclatures? This is only but a lack of faith in the development of an authentic indigenous film art irrespective of significant input of local aesthetic flavour in the stories.

Of course, this situation is more despicable in music where our young musicians adopt the ghetto American slang in diction and dressing yet infuses pidgin and local dialect. And doesn't the music sound like a thousand pieces of broken china. But what is more disturbing is the *accent*, which is like putting a square peg in a round hole. They never bother to reason that the accent the American musician uses is not different from the one that he uses in daily communication with his family; grandpas and grandmas. It is not as if a few of them like Wizkid does not stand out from the crowd but I would rather speak of Lagbaja rather than Wande Cole. Some dramatic artists feel it must be done the American way on the excuse that they mirror what obtains in the society. From this perspective, many appearances of Jim Ayke have been seen as entertaining (as they could be). But is it not important to consider the primary audience? In *New Plays from the Black Theatre*, Ed Bullins is of the view that:

Those writers and artists who pursue bourgeois art become misfits because they separate themselves from the people to become dilettantes, personifying decadent culture instead of exposing and examining it (x)

But there is a difference between imitation and imbibing the wrong ideologies. The difference lies in the approach the Japanese adopted in their technology; they copied through serious study to develop a truly indigenous but universally accepted culturally driven science. For instance, fifteen years ago the Japanese auto engineers began to redesign the headlights of most Japanese vehicles to take the form of the eyes of the Japanese man in what Nigerian adverts then tagged "the eyes of technology". But Nigerians copy little research that is capable of taking us beyond the copy point: for instance, the issue fake American accent! What percentage of Nigerians speaks like them?

So much has been written since the resurgence of film in Nigeria not as an imported leisure of the 1970s but as a sector and an industry in the Nigerian economy. It took over twenty years for Nigerians to see the economic potentials of drama through films as a major income earner. That is, from Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* (1970) to Kenneth Nnebue's *Living In Bondage* (1992). But a comparison of the two productions reveals a marked difference in quality. First, *Kongi's Harvest* was shot on celluloid while *Living in Bondage* was shot on VHS. Second, the reception of *Living in Bondage* indicates our preference for cheap and substandard products. Third, preference for home based entertainment to live theatre. Nevertheless, the two films remain reflections of the elitist and the populist viewing experiences.

Although Nollywood producers recorded remarkable progress in 15 years (1992-2007), I disagree with Steve Ogunsuyi's categorical statement that "the Nigerian film business has matured" (19). With glaring contradictions in *African Theatre Aesthetics*, he recognizes the ever increasing:

Need for Nigerian film of Nigerian origin to reflect the aesthetic values of Nigerians and be truly Nigerian, at least, in the bid to depart from foreign models: in *the dialogue, setting and locale, in the set pieces and costumes* (19).

There is no maturity in an environment, which Bullins describes as rife with ideological mediocrity. Secondly, in the time under reference, Nollywood had not moved too far from the elation that greeted *Living in Bondage* especially in the areas of storyline and thematic emphasis. For instance, *Living in Bondage* is the story of a young man's desperate desire for quick wealth and ritual provided the easiest opportunity to achieve that. The next few films that followed had similar story lines. However, these observed lapses did not take away the prospects of Nollywood as an industry of inestimable commercial value in Nigeria.

2012 with even greater progress made, Ogunsuyi's observation is an apt point of departure regarding the current standard of our home video production, which calls for corrective attention. Any artist or group of artists who dares to do so would be sharing Bullins' fight of the late 1960s to change not only the face of black theatre but also the psyche of the black Americans in search for a new theatre for black consciousness in the United States. This call for artistic revival carries universal admonition to black art all over the world. At this time in Nigeria, a film like *Ijele* made a good start as if responding to Bullins' call to:

*Work* (italic mine) towards something entirely different and new that encompasses the soul and spirit of black people, and that represents the whole experience of our being here in this oppressive land... take all the things that are positive in us, our music, our very strong religious expression, our own life style, and incorporate them into our art on a collective basis... to become better artists, individually and collectively, to create a uniform positive art (xii)

If our film makers will accept this humble appeal, then what Ogunsuyi means by meeting "the aesthetic values of Nigerians and be truly Nigerian" (19), and what Edie Ugboma (2008)<sup>1</sup> refers to as authentic "Nigerian/African cinema" would have been achieved. Without doubt, patronage would soar and the artist would earn more and better. The millennium development goal is not a united nation's funded industry budget for a theatre but a humble appeal to artists that society can be better empowered by their art and all those involved would be richer for it. But to do this, our films should be able to meet international standard in authentic local content. There lies its value, not in the disgraceful foreign accent.

### **Looking At The Series Of Albatrosses**

The Nigerian home movie industry is a child of necessity because it is an industry pioneered by amateurs. Sadly, the current practice is an emasculation of an industry by cabals of desperate amateurs wishing to maintain a hold on the multibillion industry.

But they should not be allowed to drag it to a pinnacle of mediocrity. Currently, the industry is filled with associations like Actors Guild of Nigeria (AGN), Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN), Independent Movie Producers Association (IMPA), Coalition of Nollywood Actors (CONA), Association of Movie Markers of Nigeria (AMMN) etc that are reluctant to avail themselves of the views of researchers in the industry. These associations present stumbling blocks through articulate proposals for corporate industries and wealthy individuals to put down funds to develop the Nigerian theatre industry using professionally trained people in the field.

Parallel associations like National Association of Theatre Arts Practitioners (NANTAP), and Association of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practitioners (ANTAP) have not found it convenient over the years to present a comment front on programmes of national importance until 2011 when NANPTA secured N32m funding under its president, Greg Odutayo. The national body of practitioners has also initiated the resuscitation of the Nigerian Universities Theatre Arts Students Body (NUTASA) and its performing arm (NUTAF) which into comatose since 1993.

Television drama has had its own challenges. Up to 2009, it was in vogue for corporate industries to look for ready-made operas from foreign countries to screen to our Nigerian audience. It was cheaper paying cost of airtime to screen soap operas like Brazil's "The Rich Also Cry", and Mexico's "Paloma" to Nigeria's audience. The interest generated was high among youths for their romantic story. Thus, it opened the flood gate for current ones like "Passion", "Secret of the Sand", "Second Chance", "when You're Mine" and "The Gardener's Daughter". This is not partnership in the development of an industry begging for help. Although the trend has not ceased but many Nigeria soaps like "Tinsel", "Jacob's Cross", "Family Ties", "Edge of Paradise" and "No Where to be Found" have also come up to reduce the imbalance. None is yet to match "Checkmate" of the late 1990s.

Nigerian home movie will continue to witness a stunted growth until the influential amateurs among our directors, actors, designers, and indeed all involved avail themselves of training that can uplift their art. As counterpart to that, returns on investment cannot be anything but marginal if the production and marketers fail to learn from those whose art they copy, to understand theatre

and how theatre is marketed. Our marketers adopt a *bole kaja* attitude to marketing due to piracy and self-knowledge. But piracy is a worldwide phenomenon and often, it is beyond the artist when it crosses borders; the best trick is to curtail the home pirate. Beating the pirate depends on proper marketing network with a strategic plan to reach all the nooks and crannies of the target area within the shortest time frame. And most importantly maintain constant availability of the product. Given that Nigerian movie marketers plan a shelf life of two weeks for a new movie means that they are yet to develop a marketing design for movie marketing in the country. This is difficult because of their inability to involve seasoned professional marketers, desire for quick return on investment and the greed to pocket every kobo accruing thereof. For this reason, professional marketing proposals appear utopian and inconceivable. Ogunsuyi believes that the producer merely:

Takes on the excuse of structural conduciveness and prefers to act in between as his own film contractor and distributor in addition to being the film maker, hereby, in a way continuing to the problem of undefined pattern of film making in Nigeria” (36).

Ogunsuyi’s *structural conduciveness* to my understanding is actually the *structural lapses* that make it possible for one man to clutch the bag of opportunities for many in a clenched fist that feeds only himself; this is against the poverty alleviation spirit of MDGs. Reviewing *My Idol* in the Daily Sun Newspaper, Eddie Ugboma believes that as against N5million, “They would have made a better film for between N20-N50million and yet earn millions for the next four years. Now, the film lasted only one week at Idumota” (25)<sup>1</sup> Of course while the kingpins of the Nigerian home movie industry cannot be dethroned easily until serious investors take over as producers and marketers, let us look at the artistic aspect which may touch the conscience of a few concerned partakers in the movie industry. These are the actors, directors and designers. But beyond the time available, not many of them are truly knowledgeable in the theatrical art.

### **Memoir of the Nigerian actor**

Consider this scenario of how a Nigerian female artist became a star:

One day I was sent to deliver a letter to a director, when I got there, he thought I was one of the actresses that came for audition for one of his movie. I said no that I was not an actress, he asked if I can act, I said yes...and that was how I got my first movie role. The director still owes me for the role I played in that movie. My career started 10 years ago and I have featured in over 50 movies (*The Sun*, Friday, July 25, 2008. p.24).

In ten years, she has almost equaled the number of works Michael Powell did in sixty years! But the total earning for the fifty movies is yet to equal Powell's hotel allowance for two movies. Going by Uche Jumbo's account; meet the director's fancy, get recommended by marketer/producer, earn peanut or be swindled for one or two roles and get known – opportunity meets opportunism. Directors like the one above lack integrity either for casting or interpretation. Picture any Nigerian actor in your mind, reflect on the roles he has featured in one hundred movies and you will discover that only the story line makes him different from himself; the costume is his wardrobe of years, the “acting” is stereotype of previous efforts. Often, the director demands a similar action from previous movies. This together with other loads of ineptitude in the packaging of Nigerian movies is the reason to shield the consumer from these barrages of junk being churned out by these desperate moviemakers.

The consumer has always been at the receiving end. If reasoned critically, one of the thesis and viewpoints of McLuhan's “The Medium is the Message” (7-21) is that the viewer is helpless when he is forced to absorb packaged opinions through the electronic media, especially film. The viewer at the moment of intake becomes a prisoner of his own reactions in this participation; for or against, a victim of a bad article purchased with his hard earned money. This, perhaps, is the danger, and a more challenging reason why the critic confronts the amateur with undaunted vehemence.

**All That Screaming!**

With all the screaming one absorbs from Nigerian movies, one wonders if it would not have been better if they were confined to the era of “silent movies”. Looking at acting professionally, or rather, in the spirit which Stanislavski, Grotowski, Brook, Lewis and a few other directors see and applied it, you wonder why the word ‘acting’ as pretence has not been expunged from theatre dictionary in order to emphasize how serious this pretence really is. We have cried many times with movie characters, we have shared their humour as well, while many acts have filled us with revulsion. But is it not a misnomer that the actor is seen as a pretender in his official/professional capacity? My answer to this question is “yes” if it is well done, and “no” if it is poorly done.

When is it well done? According to Harold Clurman, in *Toby and Chinoy’s Actors and Acting*;

Every actor acts as his disposition and talent dictates. The playgoer reacts according to his taste and cultural formation. Actors and audiences of different nations vary in their appetites and needs, which enter into formation of different styles” (xii).

In the light of the above statement, it is important to know what the right disposition and what level of talent is required to give an acceptable performance. It is equally imperative to know what quality of performance that will meet the taste and generate the right kind of reaction from the playgoer in his cultural background. When these two ends are met then the needs and appetites of the audience have been met be it on radio, film or stage. But is it possible to achieve this without the right attitude and training? Permit me to excuse the environment for now.

Acting is communication using your whole being for expression; vocal, gestural and mimetic to execute emotional and psychological responses as natural as anyone could truly feel it. The actor must play his own part truly and faithfully: it is consciousness that comes with submission to professional knowledge. In *Systems Of Rehearsal*, Shomit Mitter reproduces

this position which Albert Hunt credits to Peter Brook that to be faithful and true: “The actor must dig inside himself for responses, but at the same time must open to outside stimuli.” (6) This outside stimuli refers to the audience and other activities that influence the performance of the actor in terms of motive. Stanislavski concurs that for every “physical action there is an inner psychological motive, which impels the action, as in every psychological inner action there is also a physical action” (6).

Acting is about the search for balance between inner motive and outward action and which describes the personality of the character. According to Grotowski, this balance convinces the audience or viewer when “the inner/hidden self and the outward/portrayed personality” (111) are believable. Shouting and crocodile tears hardly meet this principle in acting. Aristotle in his treatise reveals that it is the only way to involve the audience emotionally. Sometimes, gestures alone bear the internal rumblings of passionate feelings, and which determines the mood of speech. Quoting Toby and Chinoy in *Actors On Acting*: “We share the agitation of those who appear to be truly agitated - the anger of those who appear to be truly angry” (11)<sup>2</sup>. Of course, it is obvious that bellowing and brawling are particularly not the only way to portray agitation and anger. This is the main difference between our movies and the foreign ones, which we imitate apart from attention to detail and production quality.

The reason for this established views is to show the contrast which exists in our home video movies; lots of screaming and shouting with little motive for such high pitched yelling and barking. Such exhibitions present most of our film personnel as not actors but mere narrators. One position is that the level of loquacity in our movies is characteristic of the reaction of the African to shout. The view that Nigerians are noisy, culturally loud and extravagant in gestural portraiture received further grounding in Peter Enahoro’s “How to be a Nigerian”. However, the inability of our dramatic characters to speak in more controlled manner contrasts greatly with Stanislavsky’s emotional acting which theatre authorities acknowledge as professionally effective. For instance, the sad posture of a bereaved woman with her eyes red

and her face streaming with tears conveys more pain than barrels of shout. In this regard, our movie directors have fallen short in the knowledge of interpretive art required for dramatic and pictorial message.

It can be said that another reason, which holds sympathy for Nigerian movie art is Harold Clurman's view that taste, disposition, and cultural formation make the audience tolerate what they are given rather than what they desire. But it is easy to know what the people desire through patronage. Patronage must not be misunderstood to mean the movies screened on DSTV African Magic Channel but rather, how long a movie sold in the market, and how much earning the stakeholders make in the long run. How much did *Titanic* earn, how much did *Slum Dog Millionaire* earn, and how much has the best Nigerian movie earned? MDG in the area of theatre is about empowerment and the sustainability of the earning power for all those skilled in the theatre profession.

### **Acting and Directing – A Lesson For Nigerian Home Movie (Mis) Directors**

Theatre directors and true theatre professionals know how difficult it is to discuss acting without directing or directing without acting, it is like the chicken and the egg; both are inseparable. Academic actor/directors like Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Dapo Adelugba have proved this fact on stage. Ayo Akinwale, Kola Oyewo have also attested to this fact on stage, television and movie. They have also aligned themselves more with Tunde Kilani, a cinematographer and technical expert in film production whose production suite released "Agogo Ewo", "Saworoide", and "Afonja".

A director is a sculptor, he sees the images beyond ordinary visionary perception, his preferences are driven more by imagination than spontaneity. Selection in casting and artistic blocking is conditioned often by preconceived movements. He is the actor in the actor, and in his vision "the actor is obligated to take an imaginary person and make a living person out of him" (Steyan120). This fact as Steyan understands it in his *Total Theatre*, supports Gordon Craig's belief in *Toward a Poor Theatre* that "the stage director alone has the potential to be an artiste of the theatre" (61).

Most of our movies are in the fiction genre, and most fiction directors are shrouded in myths that are not too difficult to unearth. The first category is linked to the television. By virtue of being university graduates and overseeing productions they became directors or producers by official designation. Transition into film was easy. An example is the Ejiro brothers; Chico and Zeb. Nigerian films at the stage of home movie still glide in the realm of television production. Only recently (2011 onward) digital cameras of advanced capabilities begin to make remarkable difference as seen in Kunle Afolayan's "Phone Swap" and "Figurine". Ambitious efforts are increasing with better story lines, cross-boarder locations and manpower collaborations in Obi Emelonye's "Mirror Boy" (2011), and Cheneze Anyeze's "Ije" (2010). Emem Isong's "I Will Take My Chances" (2012) moved up with latest technology being among the first films to be shot with Sony F3 camera.

The second category belongs to those who grew out of Nnebue's *Living In Bondage* fame. Being part of that film in one capacity or the other provided them the exposure. They became instant celebrities of the newfound glamour cum money spinning industry. They met the admiration of the Idumota trader who found them easy business partners. At this stage, the emphasis was not on the technicalities of movie making. Rather, he believed that having seen your face in a movie picture makes you a specialist in moviemaking. And so the myth grew among uneducated traders who wish quick money in the new industry.

Having recorded a few tapes for the stall-kings of Idumota, they glorify themselves in self-elevation with such bombastic aliases and ridiculous acronyms as Mr. Hollywood, Mr. Prolific, Mr. Fantastic, and Mr. China etc. But in time, a few professional attempts will spotlight them as flukes only deified by mediocrity. Similar accolades were showered on Robert Flaherty until Helen Van Dungen's comparative study, which concludes, "Flaherty's films do not readily warrant the name that surrounds him" (Barsam 209). Robert Flaherty, according to Barsam, is "one of the first and one of the great names in non fiction film history" (209).

Whether it is from the point of view of art or creativity, only a wider critical opinion of Flaherty's film can tell. In television film documentary, Ekwuazi recalls though that "there are

still people who nurse the belief that documentary cannot be a work of art” (14), perhaps, because it is a narrative sometimes backed by a study and sometimes not.

The call is for professionals to intellectualise their art (show how it is done in practice) rather than watch as bystanders, as locusts evade the lucrative profession. The crop of participants in our movie industry before 2005 will surely be remembered for the privilege provided for them by chance but posterity would judge their works based on the degree of creativity applied. Universal rating knows the standard of a good movie using the talents and technologies available in the industry at the time Nollywood took off and the improvement on productions thereafter.

Views on art can be contentious, acting as a branch of art is not different. According to Onyero Mgbejume:

In Nigeria, there are not many professional television and film actors. However, there are quite a lot of Nigerians who have acquired acting talents from various departments of theatre and drama in Nigerian universities (155).

This is a contradiction<sup>3</sup> as well as the misleading view of a TV college technocrat and journalist who believes that a theatre graduate intellectualism is in the acquisition of “acting talent”. A television and film actor far extends beyond those trained by Nigerian television college, Jos. No professional theatre artist requires further training to be a television actor. All that a skilled actor needs is an equally skilled director who knows his onions. The areas of emphases are usually in voice level control. That is, voice projection appropriate to the distance of the camera as against the voice level projection required for the last man in a 3000 capacity live audience of the national theatre. If critically considered, it is a drop in the intensity of acting required for stage, rather than training to the demands of television. Even though Mgbejume’s opinion is over twenty years old. He made two identifications;

The problems of using amateur actors are many ...they may find it very difficult to deliver their lines...professional actors however, are always overconfident and tend to dictate to their directors (155).

This is right. There is no need to teach a professional what he already knows! What is meant by *overconfident* and *dictation* could be reactions to instructions from bags of years of mediocrity in the name of experience, but which has not produced any television programme worthy of international mention until the theatre graduates actually came into the scene! The Village Headmaster of 1970s and Checkmate of 1990s are good examples. This is because what the TV technocrat knows is tied to the convention of television studio rudiments of image capturing of the newscaster, or the unsteady pictures associated with chasing a political office holder around while inspecting projects. Of course, this is a far cry from Michael Powell's experienced description of the magic of film production.

#### **A Rudimentary Start For The Amateur.**

Another problem of Nigerian movie industry is the belief that the theatre profession is for all-comers without sacrifice. It is so because *Living In Bondage*, which should have been a demonstration tape of how not to make a film, became the standard for Nigerian films. Those featured in it, by acting standard, cannot be said to have acted but rather, they barely managed to narrate that unwritten story. The example of that video presented one misconception. The impression given was that since both the producer and the majority of his crew was not professional, every Dick and Harry could come from their respective offices to pose for the camera to moisten the synopsis of a dry story, which eventually ends up driven by improvisation.

A theatre can always accommodate anyone with the desire for acting. Reading books could help on acting and also nurture the desire. Robert Lewis' *Advice To Actors*, which according to Clurman is "pro method or anti method, pyrotechnic or pro emotion" (xiv) is one. So acting has a methods and techniques. A

book like that has a lot to help improve all those who took an oath never to read theatre arts for what it's worth, or take up acting because of negative opinion which they helped to create. Unfortunately, most acting books have much to do with physical exercises. How many Nigerian home movie actors take exercises before posing for the camera in the name of acting? How many actors know that freeing their muscles and joints energize mental alertness? Perhaps, it is time for movie actors and their director to learn to adopt design approach to their own art; plan it, organize it, coordinate it, before executing it. To do so will create a process that reveals the moment to insert mood, variation, harmony, unity, balance and measure in acting.

I witnessed the recording of some scenes of *Living in Bondage 2* (1994) and as at 2012, the following observations on exercises have not changed. These so called movie makers ignore even the most basic exercises required to meet the necessary kinesthetic functions. It is important to understand what is meant by *exercise* in the theatre. According to Tony Barr's *Acting For The Camera*,

Most acting lessons begin with exercises of one sort or the other. They maybe theatre games, sense memory exercises, emotion memory exercises, imagination or concentration exercises, or whatever. Only after extended study in the so called basics are the acting students given scenes to work on (12).

Exercises come natural to seasoned professional as heritage from training and discipline. Joke Silva tuned herself up with exercise before going on stage for Yerima's *The Sisters* (2001) at the MUSON Centre, as well as Olu Jacobs at the National Theatre before going on stage for Yerima's *The Trial of Oba Ovonramwen* (1997). It points to exercises as crucial to loosen the body energies especially as earlier engagements had been in unrelated activity. Although Barr believes however, that "an actors emotions are freed more quickly through scene work that exercise work if the scene approached properly" (13). But how proper is proper? Barr differs with Stanislavsky (1994), Grotowsky (1975), and Brook (1978).

Many would opt for the shortcut suggested by Barr. It takes professionals to understand what Barr means by “emotions” in relation to Stanislavsky’s emotions. The amateur will easily misunderstand Barr’s emotion in the sense that the actor in film is any image in action captured within the camera frame. So it is not unusual for this category of cast to come from unrelated activity to pose for the camera without the acting techniques that generate emotions. Emotional acting is important because the camera is just an equipment to capture the actor whose dramatization becomes the content of a film as an entertainment art. All other additives or effects are projections from or around the actor’s initial action.

A further guide to an artist who desires improvement is to seek criticism at the right quarters. No actor improves by reading soft sale gossip magazines, which dwell more on the evasion of privacy than performance criticism. That is why books on the techniques of the profession are more important, valuable and desirable than journalistic frivolities.

An actor is advised to spend valuable moments to develop the power of observation, because whatever seen and stored could play a part one day in the career as an actor so long as the actor adopt an exercise approach to it. The act is like drawing an intravenous action into your memory system.

Neither stage nor film has seen substantial works on the Nigerian civil war. Chukwuma Okoye’s *We the Beast* (2002) and John Iwuh *Birthright* (2011) do not make a significant number. This is still a broad area to explore by the Nigerian movie industry. No country ignores her story of fratricidal conflict experience in the pursuit of nationhood. Nollywood needs to encourage writers to research in that area. There should be less of fictional expose of the diabolic prowess of native medicine men for desperate, envious, covetous lots in our society like *Across the Bridge* (2005), *Golden Moon*, *Women’s Cult*, and Afam Okereke’s *Billonaires Club* (2003), and *Occult Kingdom* (2005) etc.

It is common that the script of a number of these films lack the thematic strength for a thirty minute sketch but many of end up

as a 3 hour film in two parts. It is sad to know that only a few of our movies have scripts in the real sense of a film script. There is need for Nollywood practitioners to know how to relate film art to life; creating a good plot, developing characters, dialogue (language), suspense and climax. Our scriptwriters and directors know the concept behind *The Myth Of The Hero*, (1979) says “he is the answer to our prayers and will do those things which we are completely incapable of doing ourselves” (5). That just might be the starting point in giving a story some direction. Every character in a film cannot be the *star* or *hero* of a film that he is not meant to be, no matter his reputation, popularity or experience. Until the director realises that the playwright according to Eric Bentley (1967), is a “*thinker*” with serious responsibility to the society, while his cameraman understands the general magic of “film language” our films can never rise above the level of *Tales By Moonlight*<sup>5</sup>.

According Bernard Grebanier:

I must confess that it is vexing to find an authentically poetic work permitted to emerge feebly constructed when it could easily have been a great play had the author known something about dramaturgy; or to discover an extremely gifted author utterly ruining an otherwise brilliantly written play with an inadequate last scene (vi-vii)

Great films do not just fly like an airplane from JF Kennedy to Heathrow airports because it has an engine to make the movement; there has to be a good pilot. Technically and philosophically, Edison’s lab started the miracle of moving images in camera known as film, while the White brothers did the same for aircraft even though they were bicycle repairers. These were painstaking scientific efforts. Likewise, a great film takes great artistic efforts!

There is a reason why *The Exorcist* is a great film. Its greatness began with the script. William Blatty wrote his fiction *The Exorcist* from a non-fiction; “real life events reported in the Washington Post on August 20, 1949” (ix). He combined it with other reported cases like that involving a 48 year old woman in Earling, Iowa, 1928, Frank Sheed’s *Satan*, Traugott Oestrerreich’s *Possession*, Aldous Huxley’s *The Devil Of Laudun*, as well as Carl Jung’s Essay “On The Psychology and Pathology of the So-called Occult Phenomenon” (ix). So a writer reads loads of other great works relevant to a story he intends to create. Blatty was fascinated by such stories in transcendences, occultism, spiritual possession, exorcism and psychic manipulation and so he did his research. And because he was educated, not a school dropout, turned desperate trader, then opportunist film producer, he was able to write, expressing himself in a manner worthy of the film art.

A good film requires fund, time, patience, energy and expertise (Powell 350-351). The Exorcist took almost one and half years to film, and it was the biggest box office hit of the 70s with ten Academy nominations (x). Ugboma believes that one or two Nigerian films should have hit international mark if only the right attitude and funding was applied. Expressing his regret about *My Idol*:

I am very particular about this film because it is an example of the Nigerian/African cinema. We can easily identify Indian film American film, and Chinese film, so let use films like *Ijele*, *My Idol* etc. to establish the Nigerian film. (25).

But that will only come about when certain symbols that speak volume of our traditional institution are infused to strengthen these films structurally and aesthetically.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

Nothing can be more dangerous to art than for non-artists to engage in it; they lack the precepts for its integrity, and hold no vision for it other than financial gains and self-glory. The

bandwagon effect that exists in the home video movies is so obvious that perhaps, only three films are required to analyze the rest. People think they can wake up and infuse Nigerian names into a story, rush into any bush like a colony of madmen to record some incoherent childish fantasy as their little understanding can carry in the name of an epic or traditional film. According to Eddie Ugboma, the result is “mediocrity”. His review of *My Idol* in *The Sun newspaper* has enough lessons for the Nigerian home video Olympic. They are in the areas of funding, technical, direction, and most importantly refusal to seek professional advice.

Given the present quality of our films, a Nollywood actor wishing for an acting career abroad except for Ghana needs a serious rethink. If we are to critically look at the series of albatrosses, the mirage called directors, and marketers including woeful publicity harangue need a rebirth. One approach to evolve a new film making culture is to abandon all these current narrators, and humbly invite some wonderful talents who have shown great promise from our local television serials. Other genuine talents abound through standard auditions. To do so, a synergy of new producers should abandon their self-delusion, abandon the Idumota kingpins and engage professional or gifted directors to chart a new direction for Nigerian film industry. The degree of investment determines the degree of return; every serious investor wants security for that investment. So no serious corporate body can support an unserious product.

Foreign television serials like *Second Chance*, *Prison Break*, *Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*, *24*, *4400* and many others made it because they had good scripts from committed professionals and backed by experienced film makers, not a clique infested cult that brand themselves with meaningless acronyms. There is need to win the confidence of corporate bodies to assist local television stations in engaging professional script writers to devise television serials like the ones mentioned above. The talents abound in to create serials unique to Nigerian environment, and by extension the film industry.

### Notes

1. Ugboma, Eddie. "Much Ado About My Idol". *Straight Talk*. Daily Sun Newspaper. Friday, July 25, 2008. P.25.
2. Cole, Toby and Chinoy, Helen Kriech (eds). "Passion, Speech and Gesture". *Actors on Acting*. NY: Crown Publishers, 1970. P. 11.
3. A point to be clarified is the opinion held at various quarters that the standard of education has fallen. In other words, it is possible that someone who claims to be a theatre graduate may not be a good actor; acting may not be his strong point in theatre discipline. Besides, you cannot cite the case of an unserious, over-indulged dunce who does not have the required IQ for university education, but happens to be there for obvious reasons as parameter to judge the standard of education.
4. This reference is to Vsevolod Pudovskin's "From Film Technique: On Editing" in Gerald Mast et.al (1992), pp 115-124.
5. A popular television serial for children created by Victoria Ezeokoli. It was a popular kiddies slot of the Nigerian Television Authority in 1980s.

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*The Sun Newspaper*. Friday, July 25, 2008.

“I will take my Chances” (2012).

<http://www.nijaura.com/thestyle/2011/05/movie-sneakpreview>

“Figurine” (2011). <http://m.imdb.com/title/1542960/plotsummary>

“The Mirror Boy” (2011). <http://aw-roadcast.tv/?p=669en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

## Notes