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Adapting Traditional African Narratives
for Nigerian Video-Film

African Histrionics in Video-Film

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Chapter I

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of traditional African drama, such as Igala traditional drama and its interpretation and adaptation into video film, is a study in the wider and deeper field of cultural studies, especially in the area of popular culture. The study will advance the frontiers of knowledge on the use of the principles and application of adaptation of traditional African drama in the home video, as a veritable tool for cultural exploration, advancement and interpretation. It is also important in the study of the Nigerian video-film as mass culture and popular art. The study should also provide an understanding of the relationship between popular art and mass media, such as the video film, and how the video medium can project popular art.

Furthermore, the study provides for us a case study for the examination of the interdisciplinary relationship between the medium of traditional African drama and the medium of the home video, and how the home video which has become a phenomenon in Nigeria, can tap from the intellectual or philosophical depths of traditional African dramatic images patterns and archetypes, through adaptations and interpretations.

It is an acceptable fact today that the potentials of African drama and histrionics in the film, visual and performing arts of Africa, have recorded immense development, with the cinema and especially video-film in Africa gradually becoming an instrument for the articulation and projection of the dominant beliefs, ideas and values of the African. The interpretation and adaptation of

traditional histrionics to the film medium therefore becomes very imperative as avenue for the maximization of the benefits of traditional African drama and it's application to film.

Structurally, an adaptation involves the transfer of content or material from one source to the other. In this thesis we are looking at the adaptation of traditional African dramatic elements which are inherent in the oral narratives and traditions of Africa, and their application to film. To do this we must examine the links between the oral narrative, the literary adaptation or text and the cinematic interpretation.

It is said that literature and film are like a Siamese twins with each medium increasing its potentials and effects by depending or benefiting from the other. It can also be said that literature has become a sine quanon to filmic adaptations, since virtually every playwright and the film producer will first consider his new perspectives in scripted or literary form either as play or screen play before he interprets or applies it to film.

Talking about the relationship between literature and film in adaptations, in an article titled, **A Good Script is the First Step to a Good Film**, Emeka Nwabueze (2007:41-42) notes that 'adaptations are visual representations of literature'. He however cautions that though they reflect the concerns of the text, they do not necessarily replace the texts as both differ in terms of medium and art. He adds that filmic adaptations will remain viable only as popular culture. He believes also that adaptation of good literature is a way of improving the matter and manner of Nigerian film. The main relationship between film and literature

therefore is that a film is the transformation of the written word into practical reality, an avenue for the transformation of a blue print into a living image.

In his own comments regarding the relationship of literature and filmic adaptation, Femi Shaka (2007:39-40) in an article titled, **In any Good Movie, the Camera should Tell the Story**, states that film has a filial relationship with literature, because most of the stories in a film start off as scripts to screenplays. Because traditional narratives are characteristically oral, the film maker wishing to explore oral traditional narratives or histrionics must first transfer his image patterns and ideas into a literary script or the screen play before it is recorded on film. Shaka also notes that the whole idea of style, characterization, plot which are prominent on films are also features of literature. He however observes that film is different from literature in that the orientation is totally different, because the film is a product of the camera and the film director's point of view. There is a chain of people and personnel involved in the filmic process. Literature however is product of the creative imagination of the writer.

Shaka however notes that in any good movie, the major vehicle for communication is the camera, the camera tells the story, whether you spoke the language of discourse within the film or not, people could follow it. Camera and the dimensions of camera are therefore crucial to film making and film discourse. Shaka also notes that film is a serious area of study and scholarship, therefore people cautions that people will have to be a little bit patient to learn the rules, such as the position of the camera on location and the shooting dimensions or the angles of the camera.

