

# **ARCHETYPAL INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF NIGERIAN VIDEO-FILM**

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## **Abstract**

This paper takes a look at how Nigerian video-film can convey meanings through cultural images, visuals, symbols and archetypal models. This is significant because images and symbols construct instant messages into the consciousness of man from the unconscious. Therefore signs and images affect the appreciation and understanding of films. The paper believes that cultural parameters are central and crucial to filmic interpretation and perception. The paper notes that there is a strong need to evolve cultural viewing models that can ensure that we as Nigerians view our films in a way that they can make meaning to us, not to watch Nigerian movies with Euro-Asian or Euro-American cultural biases or paradigms in which case we lose meanings and essence. Archetypal analysis and interpretation of Nigerian cultural idioms, signs, images and patterns is without doubt an effective strategy to understanding Nigerian video-film.

## **Introduction**

Interpretation is vital to communication, be it oral, scripted or visual as in film and video. In filmic adaptation especially, interpretation is crucial to meaning and perception, because of its unique use of visual symbols and compositions.

This paper therefore takes a look at how Nigerian video-film can convey meanings through visual images, symbols and archetypal models. The question of cultural parameters is no doubt an important one in film interpretation and perception. It is Mabel Ewrierhoma (2006) who notes that as a cultural 1001 the video should construct identities, using mono-cultures, cogent identities towards total change. She advocates cultural viewing models that can ensure that we view our films in a way that they can make meaning to us, not to watch Nigerian movies with Euro-Asian or Euro-American cultural biases or paradigms in which case we lose meanings and essences. She notes that viewership disorientations and mal-presentations of symbols signs and materials, for example wrong use of costume can create a disconnection among audiences who have no basic understanding of African material and color connotations.

## **Archetypal Interpretation and Analysis.**

Archetypal Interpretation is without doubt an effective strategy to understanding Nigerian video-film. The most notable proponent of the archetypal theory is CG lung. CG lung (1966) postulates that man's unconscious mind, plays a crucial role in determining purpose, meaning and perception, he believes that, the language of the mind is symbolic. Images and symbols construct instant messages into the consciousness of man from the unconscious. Jung believes that whilst tile personal unconscious is specific to the individual, the collective unconscious is manifest in all of humanity. He states that the universal embodiment of the collective subconscious is innate in every human, but which nonetheless has no content of its own. According to lung (1966)' all archetypal symbols are ultimately intra psychic', that is within the psyche. To him, the collective unconscious shows no tendency to become conscious

under normal conditions, nor can it be brought back to recollection by any analytic technique since it was never repressed or forgotten. The collective unconscious is not to be thought of as a self-subsistent entity, it is no more than a potentiality handed down to us from pre-modal times in the specific form of mnemonic images or inherited in the anatomical structure of the man. He believes that there are no inborn ideas, -but there are inborn possibilities of ideas-the existence of which cannot be ascertained except from their effects, and that they appear only in the shaped material of art as the regulative principles that shape it, that is to say it is only by inferences drawn from the finished work that we can reconstruct the age-old or the original of the primordial image.

The images referred to above by Jung include mask and masquerades and other artistic or archeological materials. Jung believes that because we all share the same basic bodies and the same basic life experiences, we have common psychological impulses as responses to these situations, Jung's thesis of the collective unconscious is based on his conclusion that there are similarities in the myths of ancient civilization, either African or European.

### **Myth and Mythology.**

An important and crucial source of archetypal interpretation is myth and mythology, including religious rituals and symbols, also dreams and all other consciousness that emanates from the inner psychic source of our subconscious as universals, that is symbols that represent the various emotions and aspirations of human kind's ancestral psychological heritage. This collective heritage for instance, can make the creative artist be he an actor or a performer to unconsciously invoke the images of night and sunrise and the reader or the audience may unconsciously respond. Jung believes there exist a myriad of ancestral memories that associate night with fear and death and the unknown, the sunrise with relief, joy and life and rebirth. Jung agrees with the German Romantics that a true symbol is exhaustible in its associations.

The archetypal method is also called myth or mythic criticism because the elements in archetypal figures and processes are evident in human kind's myth and ritual. The archetypal method indicates that the psyche is influenced by unconscious patterns. And archetypal symbols like kings and queens which are universal symbols, symbolize authority, morality and leadership. The mythical method believes that dreams were symbolic and specific to the dreamer, and that dreams offer clues to unconscious conflicts, that is why this method is increasingly incorporated into the treatment of mental illnesses. It is called the psycho-analysis approach. The theory is used to treat patients with mental conditions using their subconscious backgrounds.

The mythical theory establishes that religions are universal and common in terms of their mythology, especially about the regenerative properties of the priest or sacred king, or of sacrifice and worship, that the king dies and reincarnates just as harvest and spring.

### **Archetypal interpretation in Nigerian Home Video**

Charles Igwe (2008) believes that the Nigerian home video has created an opportunity for Nigerians to create our own images and capture our own stories, it has given us a voice and power to change perceptions of ourselves, of our surroundings, of our nation, both locally and internationally.

Timothy Asobele (2003) states that of all the media of mass communication, the motion picture has the most universal appeal and impact. It can rise above the limitations imposed by language and cultural barriers through its unique power of images, sound effects and commentary.

Films perform the cultural function of transmitting social heritage from one generation to the next, and in the absence of other cultural activities, film becomes our sole cultural institution, and consequently, our object of cultural concern. Mass media i.e including film are responsible for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an image of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other group and classes, providing a selective construction of social knowledge, social imagery, through which we perceive the worlds, the lived realities of others, and imaginarily construct theirs and ours into intelligible world.

It is Femi Shaka (2007) who stated that that film transfers the dream world or imaginary world into a world of the living, he believes that the imaginary world also is populated by human beings in flesh and blood, their dreams and aspiration are put there before you and you see them. He says that 'very often you get tied to them and they begin to mold you.'

Film can therefore be used for an effective acculturation of the people, it has been approved to influence the behavior and thinking of the audience across the world. Many viewers form strong identification with television or motion characters, films assist the individual in structuring their worlds rightly or wrongly, effectively or ineffectively, it also creates a psychological accord between audience and screen characters, it emphasizes their relevance to cultural development

As stated earlier, myth and mysticism, is a strong element of traditional African drama and many African film makers will do well to adopt them in their works. Archetypal symbols are evident in the myths, religious visuals and ancestral worship of the African; they are intrinsic in the masquerades and other symbols and accouterments of traditional African drama.

Among the Igala, the presence of a task instantly reflects the consciousness and essence of the gods or the ancestral. It also spells awe, deference or fear, in the same way that royalty indicates divinity. Among the Igala and many tribes of Africa the kings are regarded as a representation of the gods among the living. In the same way that cocks invoke the image of sacrifice and an impression of the subjective relationship between the living, who must always make sacrifices to the superior dead.

Many African scholars like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and Femi Osofisan have also written plays based on African myths to convey universal messages and leanings. Some of these plays have been adapted to film but many more can still be adapted. Hammed Olotoba (2005) notes that Yoruba traditional philosophy is Soyinka's playground, noting that Soyinka, explores characterization through language, laced with proverbs, imageries, and symbols which unravel the hidden facts about the Yoruba world view of the unborn, the living, and the dead.

Many of Tunde Kelani's films such as *Oluwa Ni* (1993), *Ole ku* (1997), *Kosegbe* (1995), *Sawoide* (1999) and others are infact adaptations of traditional Yoruba myth and history and a reflection of the Yoruba world view.. Eze (1995) notes that in Africa images and icons are reflections of the society and that traditional image symbols best exemplify nature and society. Also commenting on the essence of symbolic teaching in African art, Best Ochingo (2002) article. A critical review on the use of African symbols in the paintings of contemporary African artist notes that the symbolic motifs of the Igbo in

Nigeria are centered on the traditional artistic ideas of happening of the spirit world in the land of the dead, and notes that they are basically conceptual and symbolic. Skuder Boghosian a Sudanese artist is well known for his use of motifs derived from the ritual symbols of Coptic Islamic calligraphic strokes, ancestral masks and sculptural images. Warren Seelig (1994) states that art materials suggest ideas because of their inherent physical properties and more importantly, because of the way they seem to contain or absorb unique information, he believes that materials actually contain clues that allows us to discover our own personal reality through a subconscious process .an intuitive, creative journey of which material is an active partner.

In this light Buckland believes that films have the tendency to give more vent and expression to cultural studies in a way not achievable by literary text that is through the exploration of signs and symbols. Toby Miller (1992:4) believes that "Film is not even the final target of inquiry" but part of a wider argument about representation. To him, the social process of making Images, sounds, signs stand for something. Andrew cited in Miller (1992:4) states that, meaning, significance and value are never thought to be discovered, intuited or otherwise attained naturally, everything results from a mechanic of works, language designed to bring psyche and society into coincidence and the work of technology enabling the language so to speak.

In his own contribution, Collin Counsell (2002) states that in reality culture materials, such as, murals, collage, sculpture, statues, portraits, bronze casting, ornaments, headgears, casting, ornaments, archeological excavations and objects form part of our interior and external environment. Buckland (1998) believes that, symptomatic interpretation is based on a language depth of hidden meanings of attempts to covertly perpetuate ideology through unknowing subjects. Within this perspective according to him, films are seen as necessarily bearing the traces of their socio-historical context. It seeks to reveal and make visible that which is concealed and invisible, in order that we learn something about the wider lessons available from unlocking the powerful forces that determine cultural and social practice but which are customarily unavailable for inspection, critique and reform, through an imbrication of textual and social analysis.

Kaplan cited in Charles Nwadiuwe (2004) notes that signification and meaning are derivable from images rather than with language and narration. Also agreeing Joy Boyum (1989; p.3) states that,

*Words and pictures make for very different currency. Better still words which are arbitrary signs or symbols are meaningless in themselves, they signify only by conventional agreement. On the other hand, pictures are an iconic representation because they are natural signs that represent things on the basis of some of inherent resemblance for them.*

Archetypes generally derive from symbols, and the video as a visual symbol has its power and influence inherently derivable to the visual impacts and influence that it can have on its viewers. Steve Ogunyuyi (2001) states that, African film should source the technique in traditional African forms that can grant

filmic images, the power to grasp the attention and emotion of an audience. The filmmaker according to him strives to convey and identify the external realities of folklore that are cognitive, expressive and social, mythical or quasi-mythical. Also Emeka Nwabueze (2003) citing Adedeji notes that in traditional African drama, the visual elements are emphasized at the expense of what he describes as systemic dialogue, the visual symbols are evident in costumes, colors and other visual materials. Emeka Nwabueze (2003; p.45) states that,

*The most striking aspect of the costume, is its diversity, as well as its ability to reveal interest and wishes through colors of the costumes or their combinations. The personal idiosyncrasies or yearnings of the performer are clearly portrayed through them.*

Commenting on the use of color symbols among the Zulu of Southern Africa, he states that, (p.46)

*White beads stand for all that is good (love, spiritual, purity, happiness, truth), black beads stand for evil, misfortune, sorrow. Red stands for strong emotion, longing and passion of the heart. Dappled yellow either indicates emotional withering away or it stands for pumpkin, home and garden, as symbolic of household. Green stands for virginity and young age. Blue stands for and signifies fidelity and faithfulness*

In her contribution on the subject of the visual import of color, Deborah Allison (2004, 16) states that,

*Colors have been found to differently alter both physiological and emotional states. Color is also believed to produce a direct effect on the endocrine system via the pituitary gland. Its action is to increase behavior under long wave red-light and reduce it under short wave blue violet light.*

It is Johnson (2006) in a paper titled, **The unexploited power of film**, who stressed the role of imaginative imaging when he notes that, the pictures and sounds and silences in motion are worked out completely by the individual's imagination, meaning that as individuals, the tendency is to conjure different images because we are different people, and also because our imaginative faculties are involved. Johnson notes that though we may conjure different images in spite of our differences, we may choose to interpret them differently. He further states that, the pictures we get in fiction depend on our level of understanding, first of the meanings of the words in use, and second, on their understanding of other elements that form them, these could be culture, history, geology and even the religion of the creator of the work.

The strongest advantage perhaps of visual symbolism in film is in its ability to stretch to an elastic and infinite manner, leanings adduced or attributable to that which it might ordinarily be said it is conveying. It is my firm conviction that Nigerian narratives are replete with visual symbolisms which carry meanings of depth. The narratives are derived from the daily ritualization of the view, which are epitomized in world songs, dances, masquerades and images, symbols or motifs. It can without doubt help in the

interpretation and dissemination of ideas and messages. African writers, directors and other producers will do well to explore them in their works.

Interpretation and adaptation of traditional histrionics into video is a sure veritable way to chart a qualitative and intellectual thrust for the video film in Nigeria. Through its exploitation of traditional themes and subjects, and the exploration of traditional world views, the adaptations, can indeed ameliorate the problems of intellectual bankruptcy and lack of ideological or philosophical focus. Traditional African histrionics contain themes that are of universal application and essence.

Traditional histrionics are popular as people's culture, and they serve effectively in the shaping of ideology, philosophy, perception and identity, using the highly effective technology of the video.

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