

PROBLEM OF SCRIPT WRITING AND SCENE DESIGN IN KANNYWOOD MOVIE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

There are insufficient professional script writers and scene designers in the northern movie industry popularly known as Kannywood. The industry pays little or no attention to the employment of professional script writers and scene designers. The effect of this is shallow movies with little or no aesthetic quality. This has led to continuous lack of interest by some viewers. Descriptive, documentary survey and qualitative content analysis methods are employed for this research. The study strongly recommends that professional script writers and scene designers should be employed so that the industry can grow and strongly compete with other film industries outside Nigeria like Hollywood and Bollywood. The audience should be taken into consideration as they remain the reasons why movies are produced after all.

Keywords: Professional Script Writers, Scene Design, Kannywood Movie Industry, Northern Nigeria

Introduction

Kannywood contributes to about 30 percent of the total number of movies produced in the Nigerian movie industry. (Dailymail.com.ng). The industry originates in the 1990s when Sanusi Shehu of *Tauraruwa* Magazine reference the term but it came to stand in 1999. Kannywood is seen as a cinematic synthesis of Indian and Hausa culture with its first movie *Turmin Daya* (The Draw) written by Aminu Hassan Yakasai in 1991. By 2012, over 2000 film companies were registered with the Kano State Filmmakers Association. Today actors and actresses like Ali Nuhu, Ibrahim Maishunku, Adam A Zango, Nafisa Abdullahi, Sadia Sani Sadiq, Hadiza Aliyu, Yakubu Mohammed and Jamila Umar remain popular in the industry with successful movies like *Gimbiya Fatima* and *Kiyarda Da Ni* (Dailymail.com.ng) It is however disturbing to realise that since the inception of the industry twenty seven years ago and its contribution to employment creation and income generation, the industry battles with the problem of professional script writers and scene designers. Movie making to the stake holders in the industry is seen as a venture where the culture, norms and values of the northern people is show cased to the world, but the craftsmanship in the industry is lacking. Scriptwriting is seen as an art as well as a craft, but some producers in the industry cut corners on scripting and pay little attention to scene designing. This has given rise to shallow movies been produced with the audience not properly entertained. Some years back, Nollywood industry had serious problems with script writing scene designing but recently there is an improvement in scripting and scene designing in the industry. Most times producers of some Kannywood movies pick a camera, go to any location they feel it is comfortable for them and start shooting. The nitty gritty of film making is not ideally taken into consideration.

This study therefore seeks to investigate why the Kannywood industry still battles with the problem of script writing and scene designing and how the industry can improve for effectiveness. Also, film making is a job that involves all crew members and script writing and scene designing are fundamental aspects of film making that cannot be jettisoned.

Script writing

Writing a script requires an element and these elements are story plot, characterization, theme, language, conflict, and setting. The story plot is the sequential arrangements of events in the story. The word sequential is very important so that the story does not become confusing to the viewers. In some Kannywood films, the story plot are not properly arranged as the viewer's struggle to understand what led to a reaction in a scene. In a movie, where the plot structure is sequentially arranged, there is a problem of shallow plots structure and the problem of filmic shooting. Shallow plot structure means a plot not well analysed, and actors and actresses do not seem to have good grasp of the story in the scene. This leads to many unnecessary plots, and the scenes become too long and boring to the viewers. Iglesias (2017) states that reading a drama script generates a kind of feeling which the script writer can use to disseminate a strong message to the viewers. These feelings are interest and wow. Each plot in a movie should strive to achieve this. The viewer's interest should be captured from the beginning of the movie.

Another problem in some of Kannywood movie industry is characterization. Aside from the popular artists of Ali Nuhu, Adam A Zango, Nafisa Abdullahi, some producers do not seem to care about characterisation. There is an issue of under acting or over acting. In filming, exaggeration or over acting is a problem. Here, the camera movements become an issue. In an industry where technical design and use of quality camera is lacking, overacting mars the aesthetic quality of a movie. Also, rehearsals do not seem to be properly conducted in some Kannywood films. An actor or actress is picked up to perform a role without proper rehearsal. There are different types of rehearsals which are body forms rehearsals and voice rehearsals. There are scholars who have different theories of the fact that should acting be in born (natural actors) or taught in class. Going by the progress which the Nollywood film industry has achieved characterization is at a better stage compared to Kannywood film industry.

Another important aspect of script writing is the theme. The theme is the central message in a story. In a story it is the underlying message or idea. Script writers or producers in the Nigerian producers tends to dictate the content of the story to the script writer. Themes in movies should be educative as well as entertaining. The story writer or script writer wants to portray is conveyed in writing. If the script writer beliefs on certain values which will be useful to the viewers, he or she reflects these views in his/her writings.

Themes in most Kannywood films are polygamy, love, jealousy, extra marital affairs, and voodooist. Even if it is true that some of these things exist in the northern environment, the presentation and representation

of these vices in Kannywood movies gives the northern culture a bad image. There are major issues contending the northern society which are illiteracy and poverty, and they remain major cause of the insurgency currently experiencing in the north.

If movie makers in Kannywood will channel their resources in terms of getting a good script which will tackle these major problems, the society will be better. The viewers can then learn something positive about their environment and how they can contribute to the development of the society. Language is the medium of communication. The problem in the industry is not that of language, it is the translation of the language so that non-Hausa speakers can understand the story. In some movies, the translation is not properly written or it is not sequentially written so that no message is at loss. Conflict can be defined as the sole of drama. It is the problem in its first instance. The challenge which the hero wants to conquer is the story. May be he or she will conquer it or not becomes the suspense, if he or she wins or not leads to the genre of the movie, whether it is comedy, tragedy, melodrama, or farce.

Scene Design in Kannywood

Design, in line with its technical concept, should be suitably considered and carefully applied in movie making. In examining the use of technical concepts in ‘design and technical concepts in Nigeria theatre practice’, Adegbite (2003) states that: ‘As an integral tool, the designer uses design and technical knowledge in the theatre to project the playwright’s direction and director’s artistic expression, communication, and all types of structuring and arrangement’. In doing this, however, his design should take cognizance of the fundamental elements and principles of design. The use of signs and symbols with careful organization distinguishes a scene designer. Therefore, scene design in film production should involve imagination and creativity. Professional scene designers always have close interaction with the script writer. This is the first important aspect of scene designing. Script writing and scene designing go hand in hand. Scene designing is seen as a sister to script writing. The scene designer collects the script from the script writer or the producer studies it and begins to plan the realization of the script. He brings his professional skills to bear and puts up beautiful and communicating scenery. Scene design should communicate with the audience even without spoken words. However, this is not seen in some movies in the Kannywood movie industry. Also for movies that dwell on contemporary setting, movement of actors and actress is also a problem. The industry has not also done much to improve the quality of her historical movies. Most movies in the industry dwell mainly on contemporary setting where no props are built. Despite that, the contemporary setting movies do not still have good scenic background.

The research problem here is that the Kannywood industry does not go through proper research as to the qualities of a good scene designer. A beautiful house shown in a movie does not mean that the setting for the movie is well realised but how the house corroborates with the scene. Scene designing should corroborate with the story. It was gathered that the Kannywood movie industry is dominated by non-

professionals. Scene designers believe that artists are made and not born. This is to say that skill in designing as well as training is paramount. Film making in the 21st century is competitive and new forms of designing should emerge in the industry. Nwadike (2005) opines ‘designing for the theatre entails not only a sound knowledge of the theatrical process but also a firm grasp of performing art technologies’. Professionalism aid whatever skills one has acquired.

Synopsis of *Ibro Dogari*

Ibro Dogari is a movie produced by Ilyasu Abdulmumin. It is a video with a linear plot structure divided into twenty one scenes. The story centres on two wealthy men in quest for power. They employ the use of bodyguards to achieve superiority claim over one another. The men are Alhaji Salisu and Baba Chinedu. However, a bodyguard is employed by Alhaji Salisu to see to the wellbeing of his daughter, Aisha. The bodyguard later becomes a pain and harasses both Alhaji Salisu’s household and Aisha’s friend. Aisha decides to poison the bodyguard so that she can have her freedom but unknown to her, her father’s friend Aba has a plan with the other party to kidnap and kill her. Along the line, bodyguard already aware of Aisha’s plan decides not to drink the poisoned juice, he trails her movement and finds out she has been kidnapped at a place where she meets with her boyfriend. The bodyguard meets with them on the way, challenges them and fights with the kidnappers. Aba later had his way as he maneuvers through and eventually delivers the girl to her father’s enemy, Baba Chinedu. Policemen arrive at the scene and arrest the culprits and the members of Aisha’s household appreciate the bodyguard. He is given the offer to marry Aisha but he declines saying his mission has been accomplished.

Scripting and Scene Design in *Ibro Dogari*

The first scene in *Ibro Dogari* portrays conflict and conflict is known as the soul of drama. Various flashy convoy of cars can be seen moving at a high speed, other convoy of cars from another route are seen. They arrived at a field and men dressed in black suits open one of the finest cars and a man in a white attire comes out of the vehicle. The other convoy cars appear in same field and a short man dressed in Igbo attire comes out of the car. The man in white attire challenges the other short man and they exchange words, based on power struggle and show of superiority against each other. Relating this to Nigerian politics, the politicians quarrel due to one thing or the other majorly for political gains. Armer (2002) states that, a film should have a clearly defined conflict. Here it is established that both parties are involved in a dispute but the cause of the quarrel is not established. The cause of the fight should be established so that the viewers can understand what the dispute is about. On a second observation, it can be hidden due to suspense as this will make the viewers to stay glued to the movie from the beginning to the end. Whichever dimension the script writer decides to take, conflict and suspense should be carefully woven. Also the consequent scenes in the movie appear too long, boring with comic display of characters which keeps one wondering whether the movie is a comedy or tragedy going by the start of the movie with tension and fight.

2nd Scene

Alhaji Salisu speaks angrily of the fight between Baban Chinedu and himself. He calls seven of his bodyguards, and challenges them to be up and doing. He explains to them to demonstrate skills of professionalism so that his opponent does not defeat him. As he shows rage, the bodyguards behaved funny by hitting themselves and not too serious as expected of them as bodyguards. It is a scene that demands seriousness and comic relief is not expected, therefore a fault in the scripting of the scene. For scene design, it is portrayed that Alhaji Salisu is a wealthy man but the surrounding of his compound does not portray the affluence established in the script, a mismatch between the script and the scene design.

In the fifth scene

Aisha, daughter of Alhaji Salisu and the bodyguard drive to the house, a young boy suddenly appears trying to cross the main road, the car nearly hits the boy. Aisha's car nearly hit the boy just then the car suddenly comes to a sudden halt. Aisha comes down immediately and slaps the boy, unexpectedly the boy slaps her back angrily. She is furious with her bodyguard who instead should come to her rescue, cowardly retreats back and starts hitting themselves. This is amusing but again the genre of the play is still unclear to the viewers may be it is a comedy or satire or tragedy due to constant display of comic relief. The scene here is contemporary so nothing new is added to give the scene a resounding spectacle.

In Sixth Scene

Aisha at home, reports to her father about the happening in school and how the bodyguard fails her. She tells him that she wants a change of bodyguard. She cries and he tells her not to worry. In this scene, one will think that the right thing is for Aisha's father to be angry, scold the bodyguard and eventually sack since there is an enemy that he is dealing with but instead, he is seen eating some grains. This mars the content of the movie to the characterization as the viewer's struggle to understand what the script writer or producer wants to achieve. Botsford (2003) opines 'that the unusual action by the character makes the viewers to be basically in tune with the story and makes them wonder and ponder on what will be the outcome of a character. Even as asserted by Botsford, flipping characterization reduces viewer's interest especially when the story starts to become unreal like the beating of Aisha by a young boy without the boy holding a superior weapon, at least the bodyguard should have been seen chasing the boy and is he escapes, that would have been better.

In Seventh Scene

Alhaji Salisu speaks to his friend about the urgent need to change his bodyguards since his daughter is no longer safe in the hands of the so called bodyguard. He tells his friend to help him secure an efficient bodyguard and the friend promises to help, as his friend, Aba says this, he (Aba) twists his mouth over and

over to look like a deformity but this was not properly done by the character as the viewer's find it difficult to understand what he was saying. Also, the twisting of mouth looks very fake and unnecessary.

In Eighth Scene

The new bodyguard is seen. He dresses up, opens his gun, and fills it with bullets. This takes a long time, this activity drags and indeed boring. In a good movie with proper scripting, Botsford (2003) asserts''

A good script takes note of literal and symbolic meaning''. The viewers are mostly considered. The unusual action taken by the character makes the viewers to be basically in tune with the story. Even if an unusual action needs to take place, it should be the one that will be interesting and the viewers will appreciate at the long run. The beating of people by the new bodyguard is uncalled for as it is not symbolic because at the end of the movie, the rationale behind that is not established. Also, the beating of innocent people is no show of strength. The scene remains the regular, contemporary setting.

In Scene Ten

The bodyguard calls the workers in the house and asks them of their job description. He scares them with his gun and harasses them. He slaps the gateman who in turn misbehaves to the bodyguard. The directing given to the scene is improper. Alhaji Salisu is the owner of the house and should rather introduce the workers and their duties.

Scripting and Scene Designing of Phone Swap

Phone Swap is a movie produced by Kunle Afolayan in 2011. The reason why this movie is chosen as a basis of analysis and a comparison with *Ibro Dogari* is that both films fall into the genre of satire and comedy.

Synopsis of *Phone Swap*

Akin Cole, a marketing manager with Mindows Conglomerates, is given a huge responsibility of overhauling the member of staff in the department for efficiency. If he succeeds in putting the right person in the right position and edge out unnecessary staff, he will be made the chief executive officer that is if the proposal is accepted. He has to present the proposal at their head office in Abuja. On the other hand, there is a young lady named Mary. She is a good fashion designer and she has a boss named Alexis whom she calls Alex. Mary's father calls her to tell her about her sister's unruly behaviour towards her husband. Her father instructs her to come to Owerri to help reconcile the family. She has to take permission from her saucy boss. The boss cannot imagine leaving Mary to travel because of her competence at work. She eventually agrees and books a flight for her on the condition that she will fix a customer's cloth in Owerri. She has been instructed by her saucy boss to return the cloth immediately it is fixed, giving her two days ultimatum. Coincidentally, Mary and Akin's flight is booked at the same time but Akin to Abuja and Mary to Owerri. When Akin is at the airport, the lady (Mary) runs into him, they both fell and drop their phones, they accidentally pick each other's phones. Akin receives a text 'Hope you are fine, enjoy Owerri'. This

message makes him rush to book for another ticket to Owerri immediately. On the other hand Mary who has not been to an airport before, enters the flight going to Abuja thinking it is for Owerri. She feels good that she is boarding a flight and decides to send a message to her boss thanking her for the unique opportunity, then she immediately receives a message reading “You are welcome Sir, give them hell”. She hurriedly realises that she is in the wrong plane. A phone rings and Akin is instructed to put the phone off, he disagrees with the attendants because the ringing tone he hears is strange to him although the same Blackberry. Then he quickly remembers that the phone is not his as he has exchanged phone with the lady he bumped into, and there is no how they can both get out of flying plane.

Akin and Mary get to their destination, they have no option than to communicate with each other and assign their duties to each other. Akin asks Mary to get the memory disc on his phone and gives it to his chairman lying that he has been detained Mary on the other hand tells him to see her sister ; Cynthia (a police inspector) and visits her family. She pleads with Akin to make peace between Cynthia and her husband. Cynthia is happy seeing Akin and tells her father that Akin is Mary’s boyfriend. Akin on the other hand have been having frictions with his mother, he does not like speaking with her, however, with the events of things he is forced to call his mother to accommodate Mary. His mother seeing Mary is happy because she also thinks Mary is her son’s girlfriend. Akin manages Mary’s family house because it does not suit his class, Mary too has to pretend she lives a classy lifestyle. She delivers the disc to Akin’s boss not knowing the boss is even Akin’s mother. Although on the day she is to deliver the disc, Akin’s girlfriend fights with Mary and Mary’s boyfriend who is even married and lied to Mary also travels to Owerri to fight Akin because when he puts up a call to Mary it was a male that picks it likewise Akin’s girlfriend. Eventually the two meet and like two love birds the rest is history.

Scripting and Scene Design of *Phone Swap*

From the first scene, the scene design is captivating and mind boggling. Classical and educative books can be seen placed on the shelf, neatly arranged. A fashion dress is shown at the same time. Alarm rings waking Akin. A young lady is seen lying down on the bed. Another alarm rings signifying another scene, Mary wakes up hurriedly and goes downstairs to get water. Akin does some press ups and goes to brush. His girlfriend tries to talk to him but he ignores her. Mary fetches water, a customer admires her work and teases her to bring her husband home, the scene looks very real, some school children are seen passing by, another woman is seen helping someone with water to her head. It signifies a class of low socio economic status. With the first scene shown, there is a commanding visual appeal and splendour. It is not mechanical.

In the second scene, Mary is seen rushing, she arranges her bag, her boss calls her to bring a customer’s cloth, she rushes as she is on her way, her father’s call enters, she unknowingly calls the caller Hussaina and her father says no, it is me your father. Script writing should portray real life experiences as the

viewer's start imagining themselves in the character's position. Mary goes to shop and as she tries to get a motorcycle, her father calls and tells her that her sister (Cynthia) has fought with her husband and Mary is the 'soothing balm' to the problem.

Third scene, Mary tells her boss, she needs to travel because she has family issues to settle. The front of the shop is beautifully painted and reads 'Alexis'. The boss frowns and later agrees. King (2000) states that a good script contains very rich dramatic events per script while a bad script contains unidirectional and shallow moments. Akin on the other hand is seen at the office. A well-established office is shown. He queries his messenger on his mother's call, suddenly his boss enters. She challenges Akin about his plan to get to the top and above her. She threatens Akin that the venue for the retreat is closed to him. The conversation is brief and straight to the point. Akin tells his messenger Alex, to find the venue for the retreat. Alex finds out and book a flight for Abuja for his boss.

In the fifth scene, Akin and Mary get to the airport; they unknowingly bump into each other. They both fell, mistakenly swapping phones. This scene also is made so real. Akin carries Mary's phone and Mary, Akin's. The interior of the plane looks very real and it is surprising when the making is watched and the producer, Kunle Afolayan explains that the scene in the plane was not actually shot in the plane, the set was constructed by the set designer, Pat Nebo. This is the problem which some Kannywood movies are facing. The industry does not take cognizance of scene designing, at least for the purpose of creativity. The industry in terms of scene designing is very backward. The use of creative scene designers by Kunle Afolayan help sell our scene designers to the outside world. Various scene designers were involved in realising the plane scenes. Afolayan's films are thought provoking and insightful. Adeoti and Abdullahi Lawal (2010) state that:

Experiments such as the ones executed...in Afolayan's films are inevitable if the industry must grow. Apart from facilitating the realization of moviemaker's goal of wider access to their works, they also hold notable prospects for reinforcing national unity while mediating ethno-cultural and language differences. (Pp. 210-211).

Afolayan in his words

...*Phone Swap* is more of an Igbo/English film. I want to be seen as an African filmmaker, not just a Yoruba filmmaker. I often say in festivals that I am a filmmaker from Nigeria but my films represent Africa. I want to tell stories from different societies in Africa, but they must depict culture and identity; that is, stories about these regions and territories; what makes us who we are. (Pp. 357-358).

In portraying the culture of a region which Kannywood tries to portray, creativity should not be jettisoned. In the movie, the scene designer is not known unlike Nollywood movies where the name of the scene designer or technical designer is written. Also, in international films, the scene designer's names are

mentioned. Kannywood movie industry do not see the importance of professionals in scene designing as most movies in the industry do not include names of the technical designer or scene design.

Conclusion

Film making in Kannywood is growing but be as it is, the script writing and scene designing do not reflect present happenings in the northern society. It is true that the entertainment value of a movie helps sell the movie, but the educative aspect of film making should not be relegated. Viewers should always have something to learn from as the movie finishes. Kunle Afolayan is an accomplished film maker who goes extra miles to make his film and this has fetched him quite a number of awards. He is a film maker that discharges the responsibilities of film making to the best; putting square pegs in square holes. He employs the likes of Kemi Adesoye to the scripting being a professional in script writing, film makers in Kannywood can also take a queue from this. Scene designers like Pat Nebo, Yinka Edwards are also part of the team who has helped in bringing Kunle's film to world stage. The Kannywood movie industry needs to do more collaboration with the Nollywood industry so that viewers can also show interest in their movies even when they do not understand the language, just like Bollywood (India) film industry.

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