



Social Cinemas and Praxis in African Films

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Received: 21.02.2026 | Accepted: 10.03.2026 | Published: 29.03.2026

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DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.19652548](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19652548)

Abstract

Original Research Article

African film narratives drive identity. More so the stories told by an outsider have a way of misrepresentation, underrepresentation and misplaced action. This has driven the modern African scholar's voice to interpret a people and their systems for the western mind. Therefore scholars and in particular film scholars must reinvent the African cosmos that has been distorted beyond recognition through centuries of misrepresentation. Film has the mechanism of providing people with an appropriate code for deciphering stories that galvanize action when the principle and processes of presentation and conversion are faulty. Hence it is film rooted in true African stories and not a simple report of poverty, hunger, drought, and underdevelopment that can drive the African myth. But only through film can we realize and present the potentials of employment, wealth, growth inherent in Africa to enhance human capacity development. The stories of western films drive our people to cross deserts and oceans with a picture of freedom in the 'west.' It is therefore a necessity that film scholars reinvent the capacity to grow an indigenous world class identity which depends on how we explore the study of film narratives. Thus the focus of this paper is not a blame game or glamourizing grand theories but to create pictures through stories that have depth and can incline the right response for desired social praxis. This paper locates Karl Marx's perspectives of historical materialism in the analysis of the historical locations of a people that manipulate ideas, identity and the over-play of contradictions that contain social engagement as well as the characteristics of the people.

Keywords: film, African culture, native content, location history, approaches, materialism and praxis.

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Introduction

Film is an art which is concerned with communication of meaning through auditory and visual signs which create action and represents identity. Of which some African films have fulfilled these roles adequately of which Ukadike (2009, 231). Informs that:

In broader ideological terms, in African cinema, there has been a deliberate attempt to use the film medium as a voice, of the people., film practice politically and aesthetically there has

been relentless experimentation with film form aimed at an indigenous film culture distinct from the foreign dominant commercial cinemas. The stories in the film represent the voice of the people.

Film creates pictures and sound that compel action from the audience. The action produced by the film has salient meaning of creating identity. The stories create both manifest and latent meaning. Most of the films generally create manifest action but unconsciously generate latent meaning beyond the observed



phenomenon. According to Turner (1986, p. 33), “film was seen to offer a social meaning in dealing with problems and issues of national importance. At the same time it offered itself as an aesthetic object.” Thus we see ‘that’ film is formed and exists within society, and the themes and statements made are invariably interpreted as emanating from thought processes made in that society coupled with the social perceptions of the individuals in society at large as presented by the filmmaker. In this sense of the enlightening and educating nature of film the stories of western filmmakers paint a dominant picture of poverty of the mind in the midst of abundant wealth in Africa. Western films portray the African mind as crude sand which must be sharpened by the western/mind of which the notion in a sense is the mystical participation in describing traditional cultures presupposed that they believe in propositions that are intrinsically incoherent interlinking categories that are un-reflexive, unsystematic with mixed motives, having low cognitive division of labour and protective attitude to beliefs. However the western approach has been to interpret African culture through film images produced by western filmmakers for commercial purposes geared towards profit maximization. Thus this paper is a call for film scholars to secularize, propagate and promote indigenous content in their narratives.

Thus indigenous content in a sense should be the aegis of development, development based on the native content will produce the right responses towards creating a liberated identity. The native content is the voice of the people and so must be secularized. The western mind does not see any commercial or profit value in the native aesthetics and in this native aesthetics lie the indigenous productive culture of the people so western films condemns it as beyond secularization and articulation. Today China is venturing into Garri production if Garri is mass produced from China it will/mean a loss of the local economy and managerial ability. The colonial conquest in Africa and India was completed in the use of western films to denigrate the local economy. But today African has the second world largest film industry and so should divest from being an entirely

commercial film consumer to a profit oriented producer of indigenous ideology of marketing local content and re-socializing the audience into accepting the African world view.

African patriarchy is not as rapacious as the western type nor the African woman seen as docile or portrayed as docile. Nearly 70% of industry in African societies is provided by women in nature and no attempt has been made by political leaders to drive industry and industrialization through native content development. How long will Africa serve as a raw material base for western industry? The brains from African school must be useful abroad as beggar’s now find meaning or freedom abroad. The relocation history has created new social praxis and complimentary mode of character in African societies, with the difficulty of hunger, unemployment as the mode, code and characteristic mode and code introduced by the western history of location. Thus history can be revisited by film scholars because a story told by an indigene creates depts. Film scholars who are Africans and in Africa can establish the link between history production and material culture. Karl Marx as cited in James Chorán...et-al (1988:17) asserts that “unless material production is understood in its specific historical form. It is impossible to group the characteristics of the intellectual production which corresponds to it.”

Native content and location history

Native content or indigenous aesthetics is currently engaging global attention as it evokes the essence of culture and identity. The issue of indigenous culture has become /and area of inquiry for proper understanding of systems and relations in a globalized world. Globalization stems from the collage of different cultures and identity into a harmonious whole. The beauty of it is the existence of the component parts, the sheer variety of cultures and their unique identities produce a balance world. Krama (2016: 107) maintains that culture involves all the processes and creations of a people that aid their sustenance in a particular environment. It also comprises of the tools, products, inventions, music, science arts etc. the tools and

ideas of one culture may vary from those of other cultures. The variedness does not connote primitiveness, or inferiority as there is science in every culture, which depends on the degree of need or use of that particular culture. The uniqueness of any culture is appreciated in its indigenous content or aesthetics. Every product has an indigenous identity. This is the more reason that product may lose its appeal or appreciation when taken from/its place of origin or nativity. Therefore the concept of indigenous content or aesthetics has two levels of meaning which are equally very important.

The first level of meaning is the uniqueness of the aesthetics that expresses place attachment. While the second level of meaning emphasises on minority people who suffered oppression in the context of political inquest. Indigenous aesthetics deepens the understanding of culture and identity of a people. This is the more reason that Karl Marx cited in James Curran (1982:117) warns unless material production is understood in its specific form, it is impossible to grasp the characteristics of intellectual production which corresponds to it. Indigenous aesthetics brings to bear the experience that developed independently of western traditions. Karl Marx's position gives evidence on the second meaning of indigenous aesthetics earlier stated in this work with emphasis on minority people who suffered oppression in the context of political conquest. During political conquest there are vassals of identity in market economy, culture and whole lot of socio-cultural processes that generate disorganization and new operators as well as praxis. Therefore unless we understand this historical location and processes, we may not understand corresponding crisis that African societies are constantly experiencing.

The cultural processes which evolve the production of material and non-material culture the taproot of indigenous content have been altered. Culture being the ideological identity of the people is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, where each society preserves the best that have been known and thought in the comity of nations as a source of identity. This non static and changing nature of

culture is deciphered in the words of Said in his discuss on culture when he asserted that:

Culture is a ... source of identity and a rather combative one at that, as we see in recent 'returns' to culture and tradition. These returns accompany rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behaviour that are opposed to the primitiveness associated with such relative liberal philosophy as multiculturalism."(xii).

These returns to culture and tradition,, Ikiroma-Owiye (2020), asserts are vividly "reflected in Chinese reversal to a blend of communism and Confucianism and Indian reversal to Hinduism." In these indigenous systems lie the economic productive systems of the people. Therefore what we see is the characteristics of the altered history, cultural voice, the loathing of native content or aesthetics as a characteristics arising from historical locations of western civilization as the bane of knowledge systems. The disarticulation and neglect of traditional knowledge systems will necessarily lead to the dislocation of all socio-cultural processes. Currently the United Nations charter is currently registering ecocide as an article of engagement. This informs the dangers of neglecting natural environment endowments and its attendant consequences. The loathing of indigenous aesthetics and in preference to western indigenous aesthetics has widened the identity crisis, loss of voice and withheld the relevance of local colour's as well as schema that would have served as interventional, advancement in contemporary times. The adoptions of indigenous content aesthetics into scientific ventures would generate stem of benefits. Like the wax system of bronze casting of the Benin's, bone healing, cloth weaving, ethanol distillation from palm wine etc., which have metamorphosed to artisanal refining of petroleum products and the wax system of combustion engine casting. . Most researchers downplay the advance of native aesthetics and see the idea of secularizing native content as a vexed idea of returning to primitive culture. To this end Seralgaldine (1993, p. 15), aptly stated that:

Clarity and cultural identity and its evolving continuity are essential to create and integrated

and integrating cultural framework which is a sine-qua-non for relevant, effective cultural institutions rooted in authenticity and tradition yet open to modernity and change. Cultural identity is essential for self-assurance that societies need for endogenous development, expanding the opportunities for the expression of the people in these rapidly modernizing societies remains the only long range solution to assist their cultural evolution. This space of freedom is linked to issues of empowerment and governance.

Primitive notion emanates from a misconceived notion of the location history and its attendant characteristics. According to Fabian, (1999) western thought see documenting and developing African cultural practices as a threat to the dominance of Europe in academics and scholarship, thus African civilizations contribution to world body of knowledge need to be dismissed. For the sake of emphasis it is important to state that there is no primitive cultures. If then why are the so called primitive art works in the Vatican and European museums? If the location history provides an alternative that does not destroy the relevance of other cultures ... the copious usage or consumption of a product from culture improves the value of the product. In order words the functionality of the object appreciates in the usage value of the object. The natural use of indigenous aesthetics or native content which captures the indigenous knowledge system appear un-appropriated because it is appreciated in a popular culture context that is an alternative and which denies its natural values. The beauty of the global world is the support given to component cultures with distinct usage and value. God did not make a mistake in creating different cultures. therefore to call one culture primitive and regard another culture as advanced is to jettison the idea of local content of which Immanuel Kant cited in Abrams & Harpharm (2009; 4), thus, posits that

Pure aesthetics experience consists of a disinterested contemplation of an object that places its own sake without reference to the external ends of utility or morality. Societies do not just develop on their own without relying on

the needs technology, values of the environment.

Thus the basic idea ensuing from the discussion is that values are aesthetic appeals from the shared feelings of the people. The values, customs, service and local knowledge systems are the aesthetic values of the people which must be synergised and improved in consistence with the present level of the people. For-instance our traditional bone healers, artisanal refiners, iron casters, bronze casters, cloth weaving should be encouraged among children by making knowledge free to all in the communities. Alagoa (2002: 39) corroborates that “we must get rid of the external sources of our condition and proceed to the internal sources which alone are capable of providing our solution to improve. The external sources generated from the location history have created a leap and disconnect from the indigenous life processes of the people in the developing societies of Africa. The indigenous content is the fulcrum of local managerial processes and intervention of which Atemie and Okaba (1997: 30) insists that:

Aesthetics which is foregrounded in the indigenous knowledge system of the people indicates the total body of knowledge, techniques, practices in use whether explicable or not that are based on socio-cultural experiences of the people. They conclude that traditional medicine is an indigenous knowledge practice of the people is founded on personal experience and observation handed down from generation to generation through aeons either verbally or in writing and used for the diagnosis prevention or elimination of imbalances in physical, mental and social-wellbeing of the people. The alternative medicine which forms the traditional health care system can support orthodox medical practices which forms, a synergised indigenous aesthetic system.

The viability of traditional knowledge

Systems may have accounted for the less active status of the coronavirus. In African societies there is a breaking research that alligator pepper

provides relief from Corona virus infections. The scourging effect of malaria that is dreaded in the western world is effectively contained in Africa through indigenous knowledge systems of using native herbs. The pervading sooth in the city of Port Harcourt is begging for a recall to native content influences long before the location history. Indigenous knowledge has been available in the brewing and distilling of gin whether you call it local or not. The palm oil milling industry was thriving with its technology before the colonial culture of alternative. These indigenous technologies are what the unemployed youths have adopted to refine petroleum products through artisanal refining in a country that have no working refinery. The multinationals have been flaring gas with abundant sooth and pollution of the environment yet the state apparatus tells the political power to hold these multinationals responsible. A docile policy on gas flaring has a penalty of 5naira per cubic litre of flared gas. Why flare gas when there is high need of domestic uses.

African films in phases

The colonial films misrepresented and under presented Africans as lacking culture. The western film makers presented Africans as black Africans eroticised submissive workers savages and colonials. This single story of propaganda by the western filmmakers created a history of portraying black Africans as less-humans. The colonial films were egregiously racists and made Africans less humans or less equals. Kenneth Harrow (2013) argues that; “it is hard to imagine any other aspects of culture so controlled by neo-colonial forces as in African film a control as retrogressive in many ways as the outmoded myths which permeate the interpretation of African history and culture. According to Turner film ... was seen to offer a social service in dealing with the problems and issues of national importance. At the same time offered itself as an aesthetic object. (33). Stories told by western filmmakers has persisted and have created untenable identity and further misrepresented the black African. A cursory look at colonial milieu, in the reigns of African

filmmaking was deliberately conditions to deny the true identity of the people.

The Anglophone, francophone and even South African film inclusive has been dismantled by western filmmakers. Ukadike (2013,) maintains that “indeed much, African, film production is scarcely African at all and results from foreign exploitation of African resources, cheap labour and production facilities.” The second phase of African films came during the post-colonial process. This phase is characterised by indigenous filmmakers and diaspora African filmmakers. The post-colonial African filmmakers have deepened the presentation or representation historical experience, cultural identity and national consciousness injustices and choices like Ousmane Sembene’s (*Borom Sarret*, 1963) and Dr Buchman’s (*Freedom*, 1956) etc... The post-colonial films present Africa from African lenses with intrinsic indigenous aesthetics. Thus the focus of African filmmakers has been to counter the dominance of Hollywood and Asian films in the African market. The indigenous filmmakers have been deliberate in using film as a voice of the people. Of which Turner (1993, p.3), says “film was seen to offer a social service in dealing with problems and issues of national importance. At the same time it offers itself as an aesthetic object.” However films produced in some African countries have been mainly for entertainment rather than a tool for education, enlightenment, emancipation and encouraging national development based on indigenous aesthetics.

Some of the post-independence films were plagued with adaptations of western styles and the overriding influence of foreign film channels. As Ekwuazi succinctly puts it various European, missionary groups were quick to capitalize on the acculturation potential of film. This led to political /religious films being brought into the country. They were heavily supplemented with films from the colonial government; such films were of course ... made to condition the audience to civilization (2). The African diaspora film scholars have not helped the matter as their films are entirely for commercial nature. At best what the diaspora

films portray are African language and dress, life style without looking how their films can create a positive side. The themes centre entirely on popular culture. The Hollywood and Bollywood films deepen the cultural side of both countries. These non-indigenous films and products are well packaged to encourage African youths to see prosperity as well as freedom in the west. Hollywood films over the years have succeeded in luring large segments of third world audiences into perceiving the west particularly America as an Eldorado, a land of prosperity and justice . In contrast African films be it Nollywood, Ghallywood, Sallywood should deepen the presentation of African indigenous culture, science and technology in their films.

Conclusion

Film is a reflection of dominant beliefs in culture, this study do not envisage revival in film culture reflecting society as reversal of or abandonment of western culture but a reflection on the arts, science and cultural production system of Africa and synergizing same with western ideology as exemplified in china and India where the values traditional cultural practices are carried on in tandem with western culture. The domineering influence of western culture is as a result of their control of the mass media. İkiroma-Owiye (2020, p. 141), puts it:

Today modern technology has limited time and space in a sense that whatever is happening anywhere in the world can be seen by all. The audio-video technology has created room for sensing the truth on the run, hence the real situation between ...community and environment need not be a mirage any longer.

The only way of combating this trend is investing in media institution of educating the rural people through film investing in institutional film production in tertiary institutions by recognizing the early use of film by the Cuban, Soviet example in educating the rural people on communal production. But when marketers become producers and editors of movies, the interest can only be profit and not national development. Where marketers

determine genre of films, as social cinema which is cost intensive, must be subsidised by government to encourage the use of film in nation building in African countries.

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