

**Film and Distortions in the Communication of Tiv Folklore in
Benue State, Nigeria.**

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to authenticate the perception of distortions in the communication of Tiv folklores in movies produced in Benue State. The paper assumes that film has the capacity to communicate societal beliefs but certain distortions can challenge the effective communication of such cultural values. The paper adopts a qualitative method using oral interviews to elicit information from ten participants including five (5) movie producers in the Benue movie industry. Folklore and mythically based movies produced in Tiv are also identified and analyzed based on the opinions of various. This paper concludes that a significant number of folklore-based movies produced in the Benue movie industry are distorted versions of Tiv folklores by most movie producers who do not undertake adequate research from reliable sources and who garnish the folklore stories to make the movies more entertaining and attractive. As tools of cultural preservation and communication in the society, this paper recommends that indigenous film producers should undertake adequate research from reliable primary and secondary sources before scripting and production and should communicate folklores for the purpose of information and education of the young Tiv generation instead of the purpose of entertainment.

Key words: Communication, Film Production, Regional, Tiv, Folklores

Introduction

The evolvement of regional movies such as Kannywood (movies produced in Kano State and its environs), Igbowood (movies produced in Igbo language), Yoruba movies and Akwa-Cross movies from Nollywood in Nigeria was intended to cater to the cultural, educational, informational and entertainment needs of the indigenous people of the respective Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern regions of the country. The development of regionalization gave birth to another middle belt regional industry Beniwood (movies produced in Benue State), equally and primarily to help address the problem of inadequate information on cultural practices of the people.

Consequently, the evolvement of Beniwood has given birth to movies produced in Tiv, such as *Ifyan I Ngo* (A mother's curse), *Orfetarga* (Nobody can interpret the world) and *Adanwade Kohoga* (Adan Wade did not meet; A classical Tiv myth about a man who travelled on a long journey, returning only to find his wife dead). Others include *Ugande* (Above the Law), *Tyom Ibo* (Dangerous Mission) and *Anchovul* (Orphan) which was produced in 2002 by late Chris Ioryisa as the first Beniwood movie (McCain online). In reality, the Tiv people of Benue State, who are said to have originated from Congo, have a rich cultural history regarding births, marriages and deaths. While limited literature exists on their cultural history, most folklores and myths which are preserved in oral forms are fast fading with the gradual erosion of the older generation.

Channels of communication such as books have not appealed expectedly to the literacy needs of the people especially the rural dwellers. Television and film are also guilty of transmitting knowledge that favours the promotion of foreign cultures from Europe, America and Asia, given gigantic advancements in technological innovations. Given this global order, the diversification of movie production appears to be the panacea to cultural preservation in a number of developing nations. The striking point about Beniwood movies as reflected in their titles is their tendencies to reflect cultural myths, legends and beliefs of the Tiv people.

Research Problem

Most of the culturally influenced regional movies are performed based on existing folklores or ancient stories and myths of the people, however the communication of Tiv folklores in most movies produced in Benue State is challenged by some internal and external

factors within and outside the movie industry. Some of the internal factors may include lack of research by film producers and practices by amateurs while some of the external factors may include lack of sources of funding and loss of audiences' interests in the produced movies. Film as a tool for cultural preservation should conserve and transmit accurate information on vital cultural beliefs barring any challenge.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this paper include:

- i. To authenticate the existence of distortions in the effective communication of Tiv folklores in movies produced in Benue State.
- ii. To proffer possible solutions to the effective communication of Tiv folklores in movies produced in Benue State.

Hypotheses

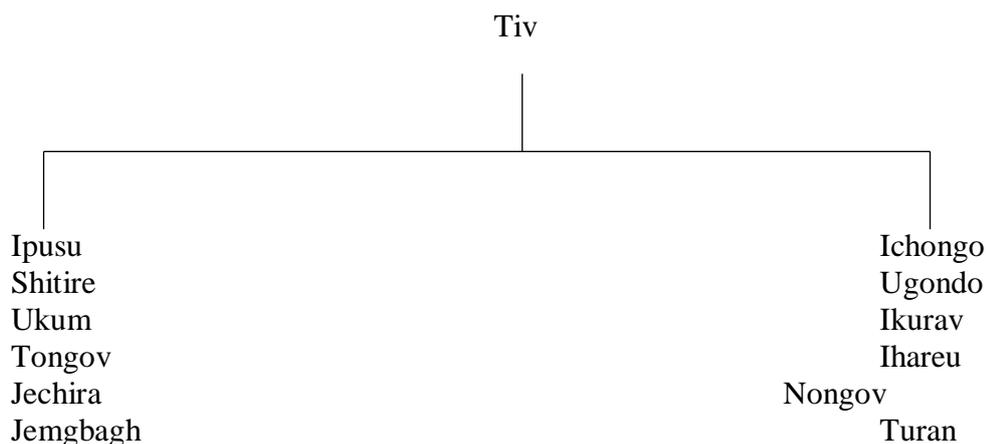
- i. There exist some distortions in the communication of the Tiv folklores in movies produced in Benue State.
- ii. There are possible solutions to production of distortion-free movies in the effective communication of the Tiv folklores in movies produced in Benue State.

Investigating the accuracy or otherwise of representations of Tiv folklores from selected movies produced in the Benue movies become necessary for the documentation of the realities of Tiv cultures. Generally, distortions in script interpretations and directorial process have infiltrated and marred the process of documenting adequate information about the traditional beliefs, legends and myths of any people in film. The dearth of information on the culture of the Tiv people of Benue State and the possible misrepresentations of cultural histories, myths and values are the issues that this study proposes to address.

The significance of this lies in the fact that documents of Tiv cultural practices are lagging from the libraries of history and cultural faculties in academic institutions in Nigeria and abroad and the need to investigate emerging documents such as movies produced from Benue State movie industry has become pivotal in this study. These movies are emblems of cultural preservations. The information gap existing between the younger and older generation of the Tiv people who are endowed with reach cultural history can possibly be bridged while academics in the related disciplines of history and cultural studies will have additional documents on Tiv cultural history to their existing literature.

A Historical Brief of the Tiv People

Doki (2006: 13 – 14) declares that there are several versions concerning the origin of the Tiv people. The ‘Anyamazenga’ and the Aondo traditions of origin seem to have gained some recognition. The Anyamazenga tradition of origin held that at the beginning, Anyiamazenga married an unnamed Aliwe and had a son named Tiv. Tiv is said to have had two sons who today account for the major blocs around which the political maneuvers of Tiv revolve. They are ‘Ipusu’ (uncircumcised) and Ichongu (circumcised). All clans fall under these two lineages and can be diagrammatically presented as follows:



The second source of origin, according to Yina (2003: 49) as cited by Doki (2006: 14) reveals that Aondo, the son of Shion was the father of Takuruku, who in turn, was the father of Tiv. One version claims that the Tiv originated from East Africa around the Abyssinian Mountains. It is said that they once lived somewhere in Kenya where they occupied some caves collectively known in Tiv language as “swem” in central Africa. Dzurgba (2007:28) corroborates that when the Tiv population grew and became too large for the swem settlement, the Tiv had to move down to look for an agrarian land. The Tiv people therefore migrated from Swem and finally settled in the Benue valley of central Nigeria. In the course of migration to their present abode, the Tiv people engaged in minor ethnic battles with the Jukun, Etulo, Abakwa, Chamba, Idoma, Igede, Udam and other tribes but overcame them to settle where they are today.

Today, the Tiv as an ethnic group occupy the Savannah region, popularly referred to as the middle Belt of Nigeria. the people of Tiv extraction from the middle belt region of Nigeria, west Africa, can be found along latitude 6 degrees, 30 minutes to 8 degrees north and longitude 8 degree to 10 degree East of the equator, occupying a total land mass of about

22,0004 square kilometres, they are bound to the neighbouring states of Nassarawa, and Taraba in the north and north east respectively and out to the Republic of Cameroon and Enugu and Cross River States, in the South. They are predominantly agrarian, but traditional weaving, sculpturing and carving are other important cottage industries among the Tiv people.

Tsaaio (2009: 93) describes the Tiv people as the most ethnically homogenous group in Nigeria with a monolithic language devoid of any dialectical differences; renowned internationally for their arts and culture, especially the puppetry and masquerade theatre, the Kwagh-Hir, their zebra-striped traditional costume (The Anger) various continents of the world. The Tiv are also remarkable story tellers with a rich cultural heritage which serves as a marker of their distinct identity.

Folklore and African Movies

Oladije (2010: 202) defines folklore as a collection of clients, mnemonics, incantation, songs, music and stories derived from lullabies legends myths, proverbs, taboos and totems. Folklore is an integral part of any culture. Folktales are stores derived from the daily experiences of ordinary people. Tiv folklores have always been deployed as narrative surrogates for fashioning wise sayings and morals for coexistence in the society. Tiv folklores are traditions, beliefs and cultural practices enshrined in folktales, myths, legends or proverbs as conveyors of warnings, culture or anticipated behaviour.

Regionalization is the process of dividing an area into smaller segments. In a nation, a country that is regionalized is divided into states or provinces and the reason is to make sure that certain needs peculiar to the region or area are met. Contel (2015) identifies natural factors, history factors, polarization, communication and administration as some factors that necessitate regional formations. In film, regionalization is the decentralization of the movie industry into geographical segments. The regionalization is possibly made along some ethnic lines. Such regional movies are characteristically defined by cultural needs such as the need to preserve cultural information and transmit cultural data to the people of the region using the most compatible medium of communication.

Semali and Asino (2013) observe significantly that filmic representations found in global media objectify cultural heritage in layered messages, ideologies, biases and stereotypes, embedded in specific visual narratives about indigenous people of Africa. This

implies that some African histories and cultures are narrated by most foreigners. Euphemia et al (2015) posit that the influx of foreign cultural values into Nigerian local film production affects the nation's cultural heritage. The act of borrowing themes and plots from foreign films has done much harm than good to the preservation of the indigenous culture. Corrigan (2005) asserts that 'movies are part of cultural life that we generally take for granted'. The entire study on movies as a bridge of folklores and cultural gaps is guided by the social construction theory, propounded by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in 1966, which, according to Ike (2005), holds that cultures construct and maintain their realities using signs and symbols while people learn to behave in their social world through interaction with it.

There are existing views on African cultures, folklores and African movies. Akinyemi (2015) relishes that oral tradition or folklore is a vast field of knowledge through which cultural information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another; a means of recalling the past. Oladije (2010) considers folklore and cultures as essential ingredient for revitalizing literacy for national development. Joshua et al (2013) corroborates that folktales in movie production has been a material resource in depicting and transmitting culture, educating and counseling the people, promoting morality, good governance, resolving conflicts and cautioning against anti-social behaviours in the society.

Tiv Folklore in Emergent Benue Movies

Most Benue movies are anchored on some folklore even though few are mere entertainment platforms. Like Nollywood movies, regional movies, including Beniwood movies have received criticism from viewers. Tsaaior (2009) captures the criticism of Nollywood and Beniwood movies as thus:

No doubt, some of these films have received critical declamation from informed connoisseurs based on what has been characterized as some of the drawbacks of the industry. These include: lack of depth and profundity, predictable, uncomplicated plots or strong lives, insufficient handling and development of rounded characterization, incision of primitive, unreflective cultural practices and thereby unwittingly encouraging these practices as well as the insufficient time apportioned to production and post-production matters.

The above excerpt is a clear indication that movie production everywhere could be marred by similar challenges. The implication of challenges in movie production is the

effects such challenges will have on the contents. The absence of experience actors who are well versed with the demands of a script and the dearth of editing equipment can be problematic. However, the producer or script writer's dearth of knowledge about the cultures and folklores of a people and the subsequent misrepresentation of the folklores in movies can only be devastating to cultural preservation efforts than mere entertainment. There is a tendency that the representation of Tiv folklores in Beniwood movies may be a misrepresentation. Artistic misrepresentation of cultures on platforms such as movies and television is a distortion of cultural truths which every movie producer should guard against. Movie producers may deliberately act as architects of distortion by tilting strong lines to favour their views.

One of the folklores that have been represented by Beniwood movies is the story of *Adan Wade* in which the lead character is the symbol of the Tivs, while his wife who died signifies the death of Tiv culture after the people's contact with colonial rule. The story is all about the culture, beliefs, agonies and values of the Tivs in the face of British colonial rule. In another development, one of the myths in Tiv land holds that a mother's blessing or curse on her child, no matter how old, must be followed by some rewards or misfortunes respectively irrespective of the child's age. Some of the folklores in Tiv culture are anchored on existing life's issues such as:

- Ifyan (Curse)
- Imbough I Vongu (a deity for wealth)
- Kor (a drink for justice)
- Avindir (mysterious signs)
- Dzough zwa (conspiracy and/or cooperation)
- Tsav (witchcraft)
- Kwagh U Bua (Cow issues)
- Kwagh U Igo (Pig issues)
- Kwagh Alom (folktales concerning the antics of the hare),
- the story of Adan-Wade (Tiv legend)

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research approach due to the nature of the research topic. A study of regional film production and folklores demands inputs from movie producers and

people from that region. Consequently, this study uses a structural interview as a tool to elicit information from ten (10) participants including five (5) movie producers in the Benue movie industry. The interviews are conducted online using the mobile phone conversation. Basic questions were: To what extent do you think Beniwood movies carry distorted facts? What, in your own opinion, are the reasons behind the production of distorted facts in Beniwood movie? What is the way forward for the production of more effective Beniwood movies based on Tiv folklores?

Data Presentation and Analyses

Five film producers and actors in the Benue movie industry were interviewed. The first question sought to ascertain the extent to which the movies produced based on Tiv folklores were true. The basis for understanding the reality of the folklore in the movies was the source of the story. Edward Denen Gondo (Ph.D) is a film producer, an actor, a playwright, a dancer and a choreographer in the Benue movie industry. He opines that Bennywood movies based on folklores are far from being based on folktales from oral sources. He blames the plurality of oral sources in Tiv land and holds the opinion that the adaptation of folktales to film in Bennywood is handled by producers haphazardly without the necessary depth even when storylines are derived from reliable sources. Again the poetic license has warranted most Bennywood movie directors and producers to infuse attractive elements that will attract patronage of the movies thereby distorting the near-reality of the folklores. He believes that movies can be produced with little or no form of distortion if the required human and material resources are at the disposal of the movie producers. Citing one of the Bennywood movies, 'Haakaa', which is a Tiv resistance to suppression and brutality in 1929 against the British colonial government, Edward Denen Gondo (Ph.D) recounts that the movie was a representation of a true life story derived from historical or documentary sources and presented without much directorial interference?

Mr. Williams Atambe, a movie producer and distributor in the Bennywood movie industry confirms that he produced *Ikyav Mbi Samugyenkwe*, a movie that seeks to address the questions of multiple tragic deaths within a Tiv family as consequence of age long tradition rooted in human sacrifice, whose solution is found in the emergent fires of Christianity. Mr. William Atambe corroborates that storylines of Bennywood movies based on folklores are researched and derived from reliable oral and few documented sources, but their representations are impeded significantly by factors such as the craze to impress the

target audience by introducing additional and irrelevant elements. Mr Atambe also decried the inexperience of Bennywood movie directors in effectively representing Tiv folktales in movies.

Mr Luga Saaondo is also a producer, an actor and a film distributor in the Bennywood industry. He appreciates the efforts of Anjila Solomon Nyiekaa, the producer of *Adan-wade Kohol Ga*, a four part of Bennywood movie on a popular Tiv folktale about Wade, whose kinsmen envied because of his wealth made possible by the power of ‘Imbough Vongu’, a popular Tiv deity responsible for making people wealthy. Wade’s kinsmen conspire and kill him and shared his inheritance out among them, leaving Wade’s unborn son (Adan) with a calf. Wade’s wife dies because of her refusal to surrender the ‘ImboughVongu’ to the kinsmen of her late husband who had instructed her to safe-guard it until Adan, who was born by then, was mature to handle the deity. Adan grew up, experienced a lot of alienation from his step brothers and his maternal kinsmen. He returned to his village and later fell in love with Shidoo. Adan-Wade travelled to Kuza, a mining city of no return to secure a job, but his increasing love for Shidoo pushed him to trek hundreds of miles to his village. He did not meet Shidoo alive because she was bitten to death by a snake.

Mr Luga lauds the interesting part of the folktale as anchored on a documented source by Suemo Chia but decries the inadequacy of details in the plot to reflect the full reality of the folktale. He shares the experience that as a film producer and distributor without film or theatrical background he is a born actor and feels producers should research their storylines, represent the folktales, adequately before distribution. Mr Luga discloses that because of the inadequacy of details in the ‘Adan-Wade Kohol Ga’ movie and the availability of directorial interference, another Bennywood producer, Dr Gondo Aluor is contemplating a re-shoot of a movie along the same story line.

‘Ifyan I Ngo’ is another folklore based Tiv movie in Benue State. It is a movie that represents the Tiv belief that a mother’s curse follows any disrespectful child. Meeme, never knew his mum, but subjects her to mockery that attracted her mother’s curse. Death is the prize. But another old Tiv belief that the dead can be raised and brought back to life manifests as Meeme’s mother was the only woman among her husband’s wives could bring his sons life back. The producer of the movie, Evelyn Huabo says the movie is not based on any specific experience but rather on folktales and beliefs and the representations are mostly the producer’s discretion. Like Saaondu Luga’s ‘Injo Ibuya’ (cow debt), the presentation of issues surrounding killing and consumption of a cow by family members breed hatred, envy and

death among family members in severe cases, and the movie is the entire idea of the producer.

Common challenges in the production of folklore based Tiv movies in Bennywood industry as identified by the producers include significant directorial interferences in the production of the movies, absence of indepth research of story lines and low patronage of the movies by the target audience. Other factors inferred from the interviews include the dearth of government and private support and sponsorship of folklore based movies in Tiv land as found in Delta and Rivers States in Nigeria and limited channels and poor means of distribution of the movies after production. Other challenges include inadequacy of advanced cameras and dearth of advanced lighting and sound recording equipment for quality pictures.

Findings

Findings from the above discourse indicate that:

- A significant number of the sources of folklore based Benue movies lack the required depth in research.
- Most of the Benue movies based on folklore communications have significant level of distorted facts about the stories due to amateur film producers' exercise of poetic license in the production of movies and perhaps low budgets.
- Most of the movie producers in Benue State garnish the Tiv folklores in the process of communicating the stories in order to attract more patronage during the distribution of the films rather than to teach some lessons or even educate.
- Most of the folklores are communicated on home video films with poor video and audio output.
- There is a very low patronage of the movies on Tiv folklores because most of the Tiv film audiences who are becoming more educated prefer to patronize the existing and some very attractive and popular English movies.
- The absence of Benue State Government and some anticipated private support and sponsorship of Tiv folklore based movies has challenged the smooth sustenance of Tiv folklore communication through film production as the cost of quality production of movies is known to be too costly for single individuals to bear.

- A significant number of Tiv folklores are consequently going into extinction due to challenges of quality movie production procedures and most producers' craze to make quick money.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Representation is a core attribute of any work of art. Any form of misrepresentation can alter the artist's achievement of any kind. In movies, ideas, cultural values and behaviours are well represented. However, the representation of folklores; stories (folktales), traditional proverbs, traditional songs, beliefs, legends, customs and loves, in any movie, is done not only for the entertainment of the target audience, but most importantly for infotainment – a post modern coinage for information and entertainment. The representation of folklores in many existing movies is therefore a deliberate strategy for re-positioning film as a cultural bridge between two generations and as a tool for cultural preservation, not only for educating the younger generation of a given tribe, but also exposing the rationale for certain cultural practices to aliens.

The Tiv people of Benue Region are rich in folklores. They have a rich cultural heritage embedded in folktales, proverbial sayings and legends. The Tiv folklores are almost in extinction. Tiv legends would have died with the custodians of the Tiv cultures such as the Tor Tiv (the king of the Tiv nation, other traditional rulers and elders in Tiv lands. The famous 'kwaghir', a folklore demonstrated through traditional puppetry is almost losing its popularity. The 'swange' dances lack the generation in Tiv land; the young Tiv boys and girls almost have no cultural value to rely on.

The advent of the movie industry in Nigeria and specifically the geometrical evolvement of regional movie industries such as the Igbowood, Kannywood, the Yoruba and the Akwa-Cross movies industries gave rise to Bennywood; the Benue movie industry, comprising Tiv and Idoma movies (the two dominant tribes in Benue State). Bennywood has therefore accommodated movies produced along folklores and other entertainment and educational content. The examination of the Tiv movies based on Tiv folklores leads to a conclusion that:

- i. The sources of folklores, from where stories are derived for movie production in Bennywood movies are quite reliable.
- ii. The representation of Tiv folklores in Bennywood is done with a significant level of personal and directorial infusions borne out of inexperience of the director, lack of

adequate research for detail information concerning some folklores and the craze to make quick money in the box office.

- iii. The production of Bennywood movies is challenged by lack of patronage by the target audience and individuals in government's unwillingness to sponsor movies based on folklores regarding their relevance to younger generations. Other reasons include dearth of funds to acquire, hire and use more befitting audio, video and lighting equipment that can add quality to the movies and movie distribution challenges.

This study therefore recommends that:

- i. The indigenous film producers should undertake adequate research from reliable primary and secondary sources before scripting and producing their folklore based movies. This will help them to acquire undistorted facts from reliable sources for the scripting of the movie.
- ii. The indigenous film producers should communicate folklores for the purpose of information and education of the young Tiv generation instead of the purpose of entertainment. This will help young viewers to understand certain unadulterated cultural histories and practices.
- iii. The Benue State Government should therefore invest in development of the Benue movie industry and encourage movie producers, directors and actors in the industry by empowering them financially to ease the financial burden of documenting, preserving and communicating folklores and cultural values in Tiv land.
- iv. The Benue State government and reputable sons of Tiv should encourage movie productions by film makers from their senatorial districts who approach them for assistance. Industries such as the Benue Breweries and institutions such as the Benue State University, College of Education Kastina Ala and College of Education, Oju, should encourage more research in Benue Folklores for use by movie producers in Bennywood.

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