

## **FILM AS THERAPY FOR NEUROSIS: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL EVALUATION OF KUNLE AFOLAYAN'S *OCTOBER 1***

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### ***Abstract***

*With the preponderance of civil unrest and poor families who are unable to afford three meals per day; high rates of unemployment, kidnapping, banditry, terrorism, Fulani herdsman conflict and also threat of COVID-19; many of the populace have been left in states of depression and corresponding psychological traumas. These events have further aggrandised neurosis in some citizens in Nigeria today. However, film as a storytelling medium, has a great influence on the minds of the general public due to its audio-visual characteristics and potency to hypnotise the minds of the audience. No one would deny today that film is a popular art that shapes the mind-set of the audience and can be used in educating the public to be better citizens of their country. Consequently, the problem of study rests on the common erroneous notion that film is merely a source of entertainment or relaxation. This undermines film's potentiality as a veritable psychoanalytical therapy needed in recent times to treat neurosis in Nigeria. Furthermore, the research, extols film as a functional psychoanalytical therapy that can challenge the audience to re-examine their mental states and compel them to make a positive change for their own good and that of the society at large. The research utilised the Psychoanalytical theory of Sigmund Freud's *The Ego and The Id*, (1923), as theoretical frames for the study while evaluating kunle Afolayan's *October 1* as a case study for ascertaining the therapeutic nature of film suitable for treating neurosis. The content analysis and case*

*study approaches of the qualitative research methodology was adopted for the study. Findings in this research indicated that, film is a gestalt of perception well suited for treating the neurosis in audience members aiding them to gain an in-depth knowledge of their mental wellbeing, and by extension correcting every maladjusted behaviour they exhibit. However, if film must remain therapeutic in this era, basic psychology study should be introduced in the theatre and film practice and filmmakers must gird themselves with those theories, in order to apply them in their films for the immediate benefit of the Nigerian society.*

*Key Words: Film, Psychoanalysis, Therapy, Neurosis, Trauma*

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## **Introduction**

Film gives us more insight into the understanding of our everyday experiences. By extension, it x-rays and gives us more understanding about our personal lives, that of the community and the world we are living in. Film increases our perception about the realities of the society, allowing the audience to see, and gain self-understanding of themselves and the world around them. The potency of film aids the audience to gain self-consciousness of their inner realities and drives, making it a viable psychoanalytical tool for behaviour modification.

However, in Nigerian, civil unrest, violence and aggression have become a common reoccurring issue for a long time which have continuously left the public in various states of depression and traumatic neurosis. Ganagana Peter and Ogboru concur by stating that “we live in a society where things seem no longer in shape. Moral decadence, power drunkenness, religious conflict, tribalism, kidnapping, etc., are almost the expectations of the citizenry at every dawn of the day...crime, oppression, disrespect, distrust, ritual killing, etc., are still on the rise” (27).

The research, thus, extols film as a psychoanalytical therapy that can be used in correcting neurosis in such audience members; challenging them to re-examine their violent behaviours and be compelled to change them for their own good and that of the society at large.

## **Concept and Meaning of Neurosis**

Neurosis is one of the distinct types of partial mental illnesses, amongst the others such as psychosis, mental deficiency, and psychopathic personality etc. Neurosis is a form of maladjustment in which a patient, despite the fact that he is well oriented to the external world, uses complaints or aggression to express psychological needs which arise from conflicts that are hidden from the conscious aspect of his mind. In most cases, to

satisfy the self-protective needs arising from his unconscious conflicts, or as a defense against them. According to Ranjan Kumar; Neurosis refers to a mild mental disorder characterized by physical and mental disturbance. Certain mental and physical disturbances and inner struggles characterize neurosis...Neurosis is a set of mental disorder that involves chronic distress, but they do not include delusions and hallucinations. Neurosis is also known as neurotic disorder or psychoneurosis and is of different types: Hysteria, Impulse control disorder, Obsessive-compulsive disorder, Anxiety, Obsessive compulsive personality disorder. (1)

Kumar, went further to buttress the various symptoms and characteristics of neurosis as follows:

- Neurosis involves sadness, depression, irritability, anxiety, anger confusion, and so on. We can say that neurosis is the inability of a person to change their life pattern and unable to develop a more complex, satisfying personality.
- Neurosis is generally rooted in ego defense strategies, but both are not the same. Defense strategies are common way of maintaining a sense of self. The thoughts that give rise to struggle of difficulties can be referred to, as neurosis.
- A person suffering from neurosis faces an unconscious conflict and emotional distress, which leads to different mental problem. The person might also be neurotic due to some natural disaster that he witnessed and cannot overcome the thoughts leading to emotional instability.
- Neurosis can happen to a person who has been through a traumatic event, and the thoughts of the events make it

difficult for him to forget the incidents and cause anxiety, which is primary symptoms of neurosis ( 1-2 ).

In the same vein, Otto Fenichel elucidates the symptoms of neurosis when he explains that “In all neurotic symptoms something happens which the patient experiences as strange and unintelligible...changes of...an overwhelming and unjustified emotion or mood, as in anxiety spells or depressions; or queer impulses or thoughts, as in compulsions and obsessions” (18). Various psychologists such as Freud, Otto, Adler, etc., have linked neurosis to the pleasure principle called the *id*. Among the most useful classification of the neuroses, *traumatic neurosis*, has been the most pronounced forms in recent times. The term, traumatic neurosis, is reserved for cases where symptoms and complaints arise from the individual’s sense of low esteem. In view of this, Dwight M. Palmer asserts that:

The predisposition to traumatic neurosis is closely related to immaturity, selfishness and a need to be dependent on others...In immature individuals the primary motivation may be that of an unusual need for passive security, a need to attract attention and to be in the limelight, and a need to retaliate and punish others who have caused the patient to suffer pain. Such a person may have a strong need to escape from duties, and occupational responsibilities and dissatisfactions, and to receive unusual personal attention and care... In the area of the traumatic neuroses, we are dealing with needs that are, by definition, unconscious in nature... brought about by the mental stresses attendant upon certain physical injuries, (and especially by some specific kinds of injuries), and also by psychological or sociological stresses (so-called psychic stimuli) in the absence of actual physical injury. (402)

Furthermore, Palmer insists that:

The individual who is forced into a situation against his own desires and wishes, and who is injured while in that situation, is more likely to develop neurosis than if he were operating as a free person. If onlookers, fellow-workers, police, physicians, medical technicians, nurses or hospital aides attach the impression of great seriousness to the injury at the time of its occurrence or soon thereafter, it may constitute an additional psychic trauma. Similarly, if those in medical attendance infer that the patient was injured through his own neglect, or that he is a coward, or if they openly neglect his medical care, it is possible that such events may facilitate the development of a neurosis... All of the actions just described contribute to the development of resentment in the injured person and he then uses self-justification and continued dependent needs to satisfy and cover his resentment. (403)

It appears then that that everyone and anyone can be neurotic or has the capacity for mental breakdown. In some cases, some persons are very highly predisposed to a neurotic breakdown and their life experiences do not need to be very traumatic or frustrating to cause neuroses to appear. While in some other individuals, the neurotic potential begins in childhood and varies in degree from person to person. These predispositions to traumatic neurosis can be closely related to immaturity, selfishness and a lack of accommodation of others.

In psychoanalysis, Freud believed that people could be cured of their neurosis by making conscious their unconscious thoughts, ideas or drives and thus, gain “insight”. This research focuses on the psychotherapeutic processes of film as a suitable cure in treating violent Nigerian youths and maladjusted

minds (partial psycho-disorder) such as neurosis, malignant aggression and necrophilia which are referred to in this study as “*twisted minds*”. Film in this instance becomes a psychoanalytical medium. In order to investigate the potency of film as a psychoanalytical therapy for neurosis, it then becomes important to explain the nature of neurosis.

### **Film as a Social Construct and Psychoanalytical Therapy for Mind Adjustment**

Learning takes place every day and everywhere. Learning results from the many ways we process, connect, and use information for personal and societal growth. Albert Bandura affirms this by stating that “most human behavior is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action” (22). In furtherance he insists that:

Some forms of modeling are so intrinsically rewarding that they hold the attention of people of all ages for extended periods. This is nowhere better illustrated than in televised modeling. The advent of television has greatly expanded the range of models available to children and adults alike...people today can observe and learn diverse styles of conduct within the comfort of their homes through the abundant symbolic modeling provided by the mass media. (25)

This symbolic representations and observational learning process is intricate in the way film reflects, reveals, and plays out realities to the audience. Thus, the therapeutic nature of film draws together great aspects of artistic creation of film and viewership, which tend to move the audience to a new level of awareness, cognitive understanding, emotional arousal, character identification, aesthetic predilection, perception manipulation and behavioural adjustments. Every film leaves something to the human imagination

and memory. Every sound in a film is suggestive; every camera shot in a film is a sentence coaxing us to connect small sequences into a larger frame. The filmic experience is enlarged when the viewer sees themselves in the movie. This makes the imitation process a viable enterprise because the preoccupation of film is the imitation of man's actions and events expressed through their thoughts and characters. In other words, man and his events are the core subjects of film.

Film and psychoanalysis are interrelated especially in their ability to bring the audience into a state of consciousness and self-awareness through the interplay of the film's plot, theme, conflicts, characters and form. The interconnectedness between film and psychoanalysis is lucidly enunciated by Richard Allen when he gives account of McGinn's assertion saying that:

McGinn has explored the film-dream analogy ... plausibly noting the way that our familiarity with dreams tutors our experience of film ... Films, like dreams, are characterized by sensory/affective fusion ... like dreams, they are characterized by spatial discontinuity and by temporal fixation ... are attention dependent ... are often characterized by a heightened sensation of movement that is linked to the solicitation of strong emotion... are characterized by the "saliency" of every element, at once compressing information and amplifying emotional impact... McGinn claims that in films, like dreams, the minds of others seem peculiarly transparent to the spectator. (448-9)

Films tell a great deal of story using cinematic language. This language ranges from camera angle, shots, and camera movement, to editing, music, and special effects. Instead of seeing each actor from head to toe, the audience sees only what the director wants them to see and what the camera allows. After filming is finished, the director will make further artistic decisions

in the editing room about which scenes to keep and which scenes to cut. These nexuses of various images and sounds, creates the overall meaning intrinsic in a film. In line with the above, Meunier Jean-Pierre affirms that:

The succession of images thus creates a new reality, irreducible to the sum of the elements employed. This means that the construction of each shot and the organization of shots into scenes, and of scenes into sequences, creates a complex visual form... What is valid for images is equally valid for sound. The sounds and voices that accompany a film are evidently not presented as a sum of elements more or less independent of one another, but form a sonic ‘gestalt,’ a sonic totality in which the elements draw their signification from their assemblage. In the end, it is still necessary to consider that, inside a film, the visual form and the sonic form are not simply juxtaposed but are composed to form an even more complex ensemble. (70)

The new reality film presents to the audience, provides a chance for a shift in their perceptions about themselves and the world around them, through critical thinking, which Freud affirms by stating that “the ego is especially affected by perception, and that, speaking broadly, perceptions may be said to have the same significance for the ego as instincts have for the id” (54). He expressed further by postulating in another breadth that:

It is easy to see that the ego is that part of the id which has been modified by the direct influence of the external world acting through the perception-consciousness: in a sense it is an extension of the surface-differentiation. Moreover, the ego has the task of bringing the influence of the external world to bear upon the id and its

tendencies, and endeavours to substitute the reality-principle for the pleasure-principles which reigns supreme in the id. In the ego, perception plays the part which in the id revolves upon instinct. The ego represents what we call reason and sanity, in contrast to the id which contains the passions. (29-30)

From Freud's assertion, it cannot be overemphasized that film is a popular medium that appeals to both the visual and aural senses and perception of the audience. This appeals to the audience's perception as a holistic process, that influences man from the senses down to his inner mental life in order to influence his natural or innate instincts. The place of the senses in gaining new perception through thinking (ego-consciousness) makes film a viable medium in shaping perception because film is a sensory based art of expression. It is worth bearing in mind that to have a clear understanding of how filmic components and structures are used for meaning making, it becomes imperative to study film from the perspective of form and contents. What this connotes is that, form and contents interplay to give meaning. Through content, the filmmaker seeks to interpret and portray the world around him as an extension of human life, projecting social meanings, values, aspirations, through the five basic elements of film such as the literary design, visual design, editing, cinematography and sound design.

Therefore, it is worthy to note that film as a medium of theatrical expression can be utilized as a psychoanalytical tool in order to correct distorted perceptions of the audience and inform the audience about the psycho-understanding of man and events.

### **Psychoanalytical Evaluation of Kunle Afolayan's *October 1***

Psychoanalysis is a mental therapeutic method and a set of theories of the structure and workings of the mind that is tailored towards changing the perception and behaviour of the patient. It is

believed that there are essential aspects of film such as the mise-en-scene elements in film which also have some therapeutic values for treating neurosis as psychoanalysis does. Through a film's mise-en-scenes, the perception of neurotic audience is influenced in terms of its ability to convey meaning and provide education for the audience. A film's mise-en-scene includes; the set/settings of the narrative action, the lighting, costume, make-up and character(s), their movement and actions etc. The psychoanalytical therapy in film relies heavily on the visual images and sound perceptions in relation to the intended emotional meaning the director wishes to convey to the audience. The film audience become empathic towards the characters, which then allows the viewer to live the experiences of the character without really having to experience the real-life consequences.

The movie *October 1* is a historical fiction that is set in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1960. The film tells the story of Prince Aderopo, a prince who becomes the nightmare and serial murderer that ravages Akote at twilight. This series of death also evoked strong signs of neurosis in Aderopo and Agbekoya, two young boys from Akote who were chosen among all the students for scholarship to study in Lagos by Rev. Fr. Dawling. Unknown to all, Rev. Dawling sexually abuses Prince Ropo and Agbekoya which leads them to a state of traumatic neurosis. This disorder drives Prince Aderopo and Agbekoya to a repressed anger which causes Agbekoya to reject Western education and all it stands for. Hence, he became a cocoa farmer despite being exposed to Western education. This repressed anger also caused Agbekoya to murder Rev. Dawling as can be seen from the dialogue where Adekoya sorrowfully explains the painful past of the sexual harassment which he and Aderopo suffered in the care of Rev Fr. Dawling at Lagos to Inspector Danladi, in relation to the murder cases in Akote. (Source: '*October 1*' movie produced by Kunle Afolayan)

**ADEKOYA:** I was 14, and Ropo was 12 when we left for Lagos. During the daytime, we attended school, but on Thursday night Father will beckon...

**FR. DAWLING:** (*Flashback*) Koya, it's time for evening prayers...

**ADEKOYA:** The man will do unspeakable things to me in that room... (*Koya sobs*) ...Things I could not understand. Things that destroyed my soul. Afterwards...it will be Ropo's turn.

**FR. DAWLING:** (*Flashback*) Aderopo, it's time for evening prayers. (*12 years old Aderopo pretends to be fast asleep, but Fr. Dawling presses further*). Aderopo, you don't want to annoy Father now. (*Ropo yields and follows Fr. Dawling*)

**ADEKOYA:** That man violated me every Thursday for Five months, I couldn't take it anymore, one day I stole some of his money, caught a bus and I came back to Akote here.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** And you said nothing?

**ADEKOYA:** How could I speak the unspeakable? I only told my Father that education is not meant for me and he accepted.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** What of Prince Aderopo?

**ADEKOYA:** I pleaded with Ropo to come with me but he desired education more than I did. I had Five months of Fr. Dawling, Ropo had Six years.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** How did you feel when you came back?

**ADEKOYA:** I was angry! I was angry at my Father, my Teachers and the entire village.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** But they meant well for you. They never knew that Fr. Dawling was a monster.

**ADEKOYA:** I was a child and they realized me to a stranger to take me away.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** I understand, Darwling passed away, a while ago.

**ADEKOYA:** He did not just pass away. About Four years ago, they wanted to make him a bishop. He visited Akote and was welcomed back a hero. I just wanted to confront and ask him why, why me? Why us?... His death was not investigated, he was old, natural causes, unless you want to arrest me now.

**INSPECTOR DANLADI:** What's done is done. I'm not here to resurrect life, I'm here to find a killer. All the victims were strangled after being raped and a crucifix, carved into their chest.

**ADEKOYA:** I had nothing to do with that. It was Ropo right? Ropo was the one killing the women

In the same vein, it can be seen that the abuse left in Aderopo, a lingering sadness and bitterness towards the opposite sex. Hence, he sets a target for himself: six virgins, each representing one of the six years of abuse. Ropo decides to unleash a sordid vendetta on six Akote virgins, raping and killing them afterwards as a way of getting back at his culture and society which allowed Rev. Fr. Dawling to abuse him for six years. Aderopo enshrines a cross sign on the body of his victims with a pen knife after raping them. This is evident in the portrayal of virgin girls, raped, strangled and killed with a pen knife by Aderopo in Akote community. (*Source: 'October 1'* movie produced by Kunle Afolayan)

**INSPECTOR DANLADIDI:** Two weeks, and we are not near solving the crime or arresting the killer. These bodies cannot be random, something must connect these women.

**CORPORAL OMOLODUN:** They were...they were all virgins sir.

**INSPECTOR DANLADIDI:** Exactly! Purity, essential for sacrifice.

**SERGEANT AFONJA:** No sir, like I said before, no human ritual here in Akote

**INSPECTOR DANLADIDI:** Put your sentiments aside...we saw four dead bodies here. These X carved into the chest, what does it mean?

**CORPORAL OMOLODUN:** X...ehm...it could mean Roman Numerical Ten sir.

**INSPECTOR DANLADIDI:** Ten? Ten what? Ten motives, ten victims, what?

As a matter of fact, "Film... provide certain descriptive cues that improve our understanding of the narrative within the film. We can rely on these cues to boost our emotional response to the visuals on screen and therefore interpret the specific emotions that are being inferred" (Alyssa d'Artenay 10). Joseph Boggs and Dennis Petrie excellently explained the nature of film and how it can evoke diverse emotions, ideas, and experiences to the audience thereby influencing their sensual perception of themselves and the world around them just by viewing the composition of the images accompanied with sound. Hence, they comment:

A film's mood and treatment...can run the gamut of feeling from the most fragile, tender, and beautiful to the most brutal, violent, and repulsive. Of even greater importance than film's unlimited range in subject matter and treatment, however, is the overwhelming sense of reality it can convey. The continuous stream of sight, sound, and motion creates a here-and-now excitement that immerses the viewer in the cinematic experience. Thus, through film, fantasy assumes the shape and emotional impact of reality. (4)

Therefore, when neurotic audience members view films, they experience, perceive and conceive different meanings and ideas through the various signs (form) and the signified (meaning) presented in the film thereby serving as a source of therapy and change in perception.

### **Recommendations**

The researcher therefore recommends that:

1. Film practitioners cum scholars should embark on a more audience related researches before producing movies for the psychological benefits of the Nigerian populace.
2. The government should employ film as a viable psychoanalytical therapy for behaviour modification in the various educational, formational and rehabilitation institutions.

### **Conclusion**

Film is an expression and a pictorial representation of the chronicle of man's conscious and unconscious states. For everything that happens in the society, happens in the last resort to men, through men and for men. This means that film reflects, reveals, and plays out realities of men to other men. As observed in the analysis of the film - October 1, the explorations of the psychoanalytic therapy of film draw together great aspects of artistic creation of film and viewership, which tend to move the audience to a new level of awareness, cognitive understanding, emotional arousal, character identification, aesthetic taste, perception manipulation and behavioural adjustments. Thus, psychology cannot be separated from film. Therefore, film should be employed as a therapeutic process for treating psychologically traumatized victims suffering from neurosis in the Nigerian society.

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