

# **MEDIA CRITICISM AND AGENDA FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP: AN APPRAISAL OF NOLLYWOOD PRODUCTIONS**

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## **Abstract**

*Effective leadership has been the very concern of Nigerians, who see development as being slow and not commensurate with the huge human and material resources that abound in the country. To this end, questions arise on how the country can meet up with sustainable development plans that would see her deliver the goods at satisfactory level to all citizens. This contention has been the worry of most Nigerians especially in the advent of democratic governance which encourages collective. The media, which includes theatre, film, radio, television, newspaper, internet, and other traditional forms, known as the voice of the masses are placed in a position to ultimately encourage the people in playing participatory roles in governance; such that contributions on what they want, how they want it and when they want anything can be understood and delivered to them. This paper examines the extent the media such as the Nigerian home videos have played this role especially in the democratic era, to the extent of stimulating the masses' decision on the choice of their leaders based on the knowledge that the media can either twist the people towards positive or negative decision that may affect them and the development of their communities. The paper analyses some media productions such as films and other related media works to justify the role of the media as veritable organs that can stimulate change for achieving good leadership in the country.*

## **Introduction**

The society enjoys from the media some basic and traditional functions like education, information, entertainment, mass mobilization, sensitization, persuasion, clue to popular thoughts and awareness creation. Implicitly, the society is guided by the media in almost every action taken for whatever purpose that is of interest to them or otherwise. It is possible now to see people in both rural and urban areas cling to media sets such as radio, film,

television, newspaper and today's internet to be served by these organs according to their needs. Based on this development, media organizations have been created and established in almost every nook and cranny of the society. It is a fact that a number of private media stations especially in Nigeria are built in the outskirts of urban areas with proximity to the rural areas. The essence is basically to ensure that all the people at all the time can be adequately served with media products.

Good leadership has always been the crux of governance in Nigeria. At a time when the people are coerced to accept a new government in the country such as in coup d'état, and maybe have a feeling that they have elected a credible person to govern the country, it becomes a regrettable situation when in the long run they do not get what they expected from such leadership. Examples are clear in the military juntas of Generals Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha respectively; and in civilian regimes of Olusegun Obasanjo, Goodluck Jonathan and the present Muhammadu Buhari. It is safe to say here that the aftermath of the 2015 general elections is yet to prove to Nigerians the change that was promised in terms of good leadership style and the enjoyment of economic, political and social benefits that accrue from governance. As the fourth estate of the realm, the media are believed to be vital in ensuring that the people are led properly according to the dividends that are to be enjoyed across the country. In this direction, it is the media that ought to show both the leaders and people the way things should be in governance. The 2015 general elections clearly demonstrate the use of media campaign to persuade people and at the same warp the sensibilities of the political leaders and the led in whatever became the outcome of the elections.

Therefore, we can possibly tend to understand effective leadership as that which offers to the citizenry the essential things of life like shelter, healthcare, education, security and food. It can also be seen in the light of being accountable and responsible to the people, in which case the leadership keeps close contact in form of communication with the followers to show proof of transparency, accountability, corruption, respect for rule of law and obedience to due process. This can also be understood in relation to media in a terse form, as stated by Oso:

Communication in all its dimensions is central to politics and governance. The citizen needs to enable him/her participate in political process. Social and political actors need to disseminate information about themselves, their views, ideas and programmes. They need to mobilise groups and the general public for support. They need

publicity and visibility. Government programmes and policies must be communicated and publicized. (2)

Effective leadership, therefore, is in close affinity with democracy, which is the government of participation. The sense is that democracy encourages the contribution of every member in the society to choose their leaders and hold them accountable. Thus, democracy encourages choice of (effective) leadership, and “political leaders through election acquire the mandate of the people to plan and execute on their behalf, and whether or not they have been exercising the mandate satisfactorily is determined by the support given to them at the next election” (Ibanga 188).

Nollywood films, which have become global media products, have played great roles in engaging the minds of Nigerians on democratic issues. At a glance, the use of Nollywood artists and stars by political contestants and their parties during electioneering campaigns proves a point that the film medium is crystal strong to make or mar the chances of politicians as well as those of the people who follow them during elections. This paper also takes into consideration the effort of other media organizations such as African Independent Television (AIT), Channels Television and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) in stimulating good leadership or otherwise for the people and in the leaders themselves.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Since the thrust of this argument is to show that the media are powerful in engaging people’s thoughts and opinions in a way that can bring about effective leadership, it is therefore safe to adopt democratic participant theory and the agenda setting theory to further espouse this position. Democratic participant theory or democratic socialist theory is said to be identified with Picard, who in 1985 identified the need for democratic government to serve the interest of the people (McQuail 172). Going by the date the theory is known to be very new among the normative theories of the media. According to its prescription, this theory also relates to the development media theory and Hasan opines that its main feature “relates to the needs, interests, and aspirations of the actual participant in a political society” (172). By implication, the development participant theory charges the media to get political actors especially the leadership of any country to provide the needs of the people to them as demanded by the constitution.

For agenda setting theory, known with Lippman, the issue is that the media must guide the people to know what they have to do in order to ensure

and sustain development in the society. Furthermore, Littlejohn explains that Donald Shaw, Maxwell McCombs and their colleagues in 1976 popularized agenda setting by stating that:

editors and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day to day task of choosing and displaying news...this impact of the mass media-the ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking-here lie the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about. (341)

The above presupposes that apart from government or public issues, the media also guide the people to know about the society in terms of what the media feel is good for the people and the society. In the light of this, it is safe to agree that in agenda setting theory the media influence and determine what people think about as they read, listen to, and watch media contents, especially on political, economic, social and cultural issues (Sambe 216). In this context, films and other media organs especially in Nigeria have shown high propensity for the promotion of effective leadership through their products by stimulating the people in tune with what ought to be.

### **Media Products and Criticism**

Media products are basically the programmes and features that are shown and projected to audience by media organizations. They include film, documentary, news, interview programmes, editorial and many other programmes as may be considered fit by the organisation. These products need to be valued, appraised and criticised to aid in the promotion and protection of African and Nigerian democratic values and in the long run the people's cultural values. In this work, media criticism will be seen in terms of the ability of the media to guide the society in the direction of achieving effective and good leadership in a democratic Nigeria. In Nollywood, media criticism is necessary to further enhance and promote the popularity of the film industry in the country and African continent as a whole. For this reason, Ayakoroma in his *Trends in Nollywood* opines that Nollywood has captured the African film market through its product, Nigerian films, as well as that of blacks in the Diaspora because Nigerian films are watched all over the West

African Coast, in such a way that the film actors/actresses enjoy the glamour of stardom in many countries (103). Based on this position and in a more specific term, Nigerian films are expected to engage national audience toward the agenda of choosing effective leaders for the country.

*Brothers' War*, a Nollywood production of 2013, which treats family hierarchy, is a typical narrative that cuts across effective leadership and ineffective leadership in the family. The film which features Yul Edochie, Uche Oduputa, Evelyn Esin, Ebube Nwagbo and directed by MacCollins Chidibe, shows how the death of a father, who ensured peace among family members brought instability with the mother and the first son on parallel lines, and the last son in a dilemma of hopelessness. Typical of Nigerian audience, this narrative is capable of twisting their minds to the extent that both mother and son can be despised for the despicable attitude that introduces acrimony into the family. This is clear because leadership role that should have been provided either by mother or first son is not provided and in that respect serious disharmony thrives in the family. That is why the media are potent vehicles for the sustenance of peace in the society just as Ayobolu enthuses about the media as;

the people's parliament, a gatekeeper and the watchdog of the society, it's the duty therefore is to ensure a just and egalitarian society in which no section, tribe or religion is promoted at the expense of another, it is the duty of the press to check, analyse, interpret and ferret out the advantages and otherwise of news items, thereby contributing effectively to the building of a strong and virile society, where bitterness, misgiving and rancour will not thrive. (ngex.com par. 2)

In Tecu Benson's *The Senator*, we are confronted with a picture of dishonest politicians and leaders in the Nigerian society and a campaign against ineffective leadership. The narrative culminates in the law of retribution brought upon a corrupt politician, Larry. This is a clear case that sends warning signals of untoward attitude by politicians. According to Ayakoroma, the film is a call for good politics and leadership:

It is apparent that the film acts as warning to the political class that there are better and more decent approaches to playing politics. Re-inventing the political process means engendering the kind of politics where the people would be highly enlightened to discern those who have the interest of

the masses at heart; where leaders seek political offices to actually serve and that which is based on personal gains; where leaders emerge from credible elections that would be acceptable to all parties, where leaders are truly accountable to the people and are held accountable by the people at every point in time; and where the generality of the people will be happy with the quality of the leadership...(20).

The above subscribes to the fact that films, as media products, are critical sources that tell the reality of things in the society and to a larger extent aids in the acceptability or otherwise of such issues. In development sense, such films like *Brothers' War* and *The Senator* can actually shape the society and guide the people to choose such leaders that can offer them good and clear results of governance that the people desire. Therefore, when films fail to answer or even guide the society on some wrenching problems, it would thus appear very critical that such films have failed to play the expected role in the society. This is further implied as follows:

Nobody needs to be convinced that film has been one of the most influential media...not only can you recall your most exciting or tearful moments at the movies, you can also probably remember moments in ordinary life when you tried to be graceful, as selfless, as tough, or as compassionate as those larger-than life figure on the screen. The way we dress and cut our hair, the way we talk and act, the things we believe or doubt-all these aspects of our lives are shaped by films. Films also provide us with powerful aesthetic experience, insight into diverse cultures, and glimpses of our new ways of thinking. (Thompson and Bordwell 1)

AIT, Channels Television and NTA have presented reasons for criticism of their products at various times. To be specific, these media organizations have received more criticisms since after 2015 general elections than they have had before that period. While the AIT and the NTA were considered as those that promoted the ideology and campaigns of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), Channels Television was seen by others as pro-All Progressives Party (APC). The reason for what they did in television jingles, documentaries, interviews and news can be understood as attempts to set an

agenda for effective leadership. Whatever they did, whether right or wrong, they were able to influence decisions about choice of leaders. The actions may have been in deference to Chatman that media narrative especially film must have two features –description and point of attack, so as to be able to impart on the audience (436). Put briefly, every product-documentary, news, jingle and interviews that were handled by these organisations had these features, and they were perhaps promoted based on the words of Abraham Lincoln, ‘Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe’ (Elumelu, par. 16). It is undoubted that Lincoln was referring to good governance and effective leadership which is the responsibility of every government to give to the citizens of the nations. For the media, it is duty-bound that they ought to and must ensure that the people get this and government is responsible to the people and should be accountable for every failure and success in the governance of the country.

For Akinfeleye, the media remain the “watch-dog, check-on-to uncover and never to cover up corruption and/or wrong doings by the other three estates. They are also to monitor governance and make the other three estates accountable to people at all times” (2). It goes to show that corruption inhibits effective leadership and that countries that face such a situation have a challenge and threat of not enjoying good leadership and governance (Effiong 66). Media products need to be the beam of hope for the people because they are founded on the current situations that happen with and among the people.

## **Discussion**

There is no gainsaying the fact that the media have the strength to muffle the leaders and the led in the society. Depending on the theories of democratic participant and agenda setting, it can safely be agreed that the media owe the society the duty to interrogate, make findings and finally tell the people how effective leadership can be achieved. They have to get the people engaged and get government to be accountable through their programmes such as films. Srinivas affirms that film is founded “on a democratic promise and it develops around the notion of spectatorial rights. I not only have a right to be present in the cinema hall but have the further right to make demands of the narrative, the star, etc. the cinema has to acknowledge my presence and address my expectation” (qtd. in Ayakoroma 7). In the film *Brothers' War*, resolution shows that amends were made between mother and son and by extension the younger son, and this demonstrated the compromise that Ejike, the elder brother, is the head of the family and all respects accruing to that position is sustained in him. We may accept here that the film has given a clue on how to

establish leadership and sustain it peacefully in our society. The example further stresses that under the theories that guide this piece, the media is able to suggest a panacea for ineffective leadership in the society.

As earlier noted, both theories charge the media on ensuring that the people should have a feel and be guided appropriately on what they want and expect from government. However, following the experience of AIT, Channels and NTA during the last general elections, where some media products were rather subjective, it appears the media as the pathfinder, role model and conscience of the nation, have been compromised by avaricious tendencies of some media owners especially in the private sector. When media that is supposed to guide the society according to how things should be suddenly turn around to be led by the society, and told what to do, how to do it, the society then finds itself in trouble. No doubt, the media are now a willing tool in the hands of politicians, proprietors and top editors to blackmail people for money, kill authentic stories and use their positions to solicit for political appointments. It thus further espouses the case of “he who plays the piper dictates the tone”, and to a larger extent kills objectivity.

Notwithstanding, the effort of the media in the same regard was equally able to make the people know the choice that can give them the leadership of their expectations. For Orji, the media have the verve especially when given freedom to guide the people properly. He notes that:

Access to information widens opportunities for people to make choices consistent their needs and priorities. It narrows the gap between the poor and the rich, the weak and strong. Availability of information equally helps in building confidence and trust between the government and the governed (xvi).

The above viewpoint can only be achieved by the media, which in their right element would ensure the promotion of good and effective governance which include respect to rule of law, due process, transparency and accountability.

## **Conclusion**

To achieve effective leadership in the world and Nigeria in particular is dependent on the amount of information that goes round to the people, because it is the people that can value the extent to which any leadership is effective. More so, the people need to know through information who can offer effective leadership to them in terms of provision of all social and



essential amenities that can ease life in the society. All these can only be made possible by the media, because they guarantee information to the people.

In guaranteeing information, they also educate, mobilise as well as persuade the people for what they are guiding the society towards. Therefore, the kind of information carried in films and television programmes ought to lead the people towards making effective leadership. This piece has attempted to demonstrate that the media are criticised based on the information they use to set agenda and draw the people's participation in governance.

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