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## Moral Judgement in Paul Apel Papel's *the Caller*

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### Abstract

The influence of Films on societal morals in Nigeria has generated varying debate themes among film critics and fans. While some argue that films have greater destructive effects on the society, others are of the view that it is highly instrumental to positive societal moral change. The study aims at examining the four forms of moral judgement as they are applied in the film *The Caller* with the objective of highlighting their applications and how these forms of moral judgement influenced the decisions of the judge on the offender. The study is hinged on the Ethical Theory of Immanuel Kant which focuses on the moral agent rather than the character of the agent. The researcher uses qualitative research method which entails the analysis of texts, journals and films to explore the application of moral judgement in the film. The study concludes that films contribute positively to the moral growth of individuals in the society. It recommends that film makers should take advantage of the wide coverage acceptability and accessibility of films within almost every strata of the society to inculcate positive morals on their audience.

**Key Words:** Morals, Judgement, Character, Moral Judgement, Justification, inculcate.

## **Introduction**

The introduction of films into the Nigerian social blend was initially geared towards achieving the propagandist objectives of the Colonial masters who employed it to educate the ignorant population of the colonial era of the justification for their colonisation and the ‘good intentions ‘ of Her Royal Majesty, The Queen of England and Wales.

However, as time went on, the communicative and entertainment values of the film medium began to reflect on the lives of the people in many ways beyond the intended objective. The impact of film on every aspect of the human society became visible. As Romanus Ekweazi observed:

Films are unique parts of our every day growing and dynamic medium of communication in as much as they are related and interfaced, each continues to maintain its distinctive characteristics because it transforms, surpasses and sometimes recreates realities (85).

Throughout history, majority of fictional writings have served not only for entertainment but also to instruct, inform and improve on the moral standards of audience. The popular saying that a picture is worth a thousand words is actually verified in film productions since this medium tells stories through pictures presented as motion images. Through these pictures, Communication is expected. Film therefore, is the magic of image movement used for entertainment, information and elevation. The world of motion pictures has become a powerful instrument of communication irrespective of age, race, colour or creed. Films have great range of coverage and appeals to both the young and the old, the rich and

the poor, the literate and the illiterate. It is also appreciated both within the rural and urban environment. Bearing this wide coverage in mind, film makers are expected to use this medium to voice out their opinions pertaining any topical issues in the society. This study therefore examines the various forms of application of moral judgement in the film, *The Caller* directed by Paul Apel Papel. Morals are the driving force of the social and economic runway of every society because it is concerned with the principles guiding what is right or wrong for proper conduct of individuals in a given society. According to Nduka Anayo; “The society that exists by law must realise that even the law needs moral support” (21). While morality looks at human actions that are not acceptable in a society, moral judgement is concerned with manner of implementation of moral decisions in a given situation.

The contemporary society is characterised by breakdown of morals which manifests in a wide spread of negative conducts . The frequency of these negative behaviours has become so alarming that the society unconsciously ignores the causes of such behaviours but quickly go on to pronounce judgement on the assumed offender. According to B.A.C. Obiefuna:

human is a rational being who does not just act by means of instinct but with reason. He/she is therefore a social being who is not content with living in an Island but raises himself/herself in social relationships, socio-political, economical and religious being. These interactions could therefore be good or bad, right or wrong (353).

Morality therefore is a complex, diverse and culturally related issue. Thus what one culture perceives as being moral may be termed immoral in

another's culture and vice versa. In as much as morality has a universal appeal, its mode of application varies from one generation to another and from one communal/ environmental setting to another. Thus Nnebuwa Charles opines that "morality is cultural bound and as such the society serves to a large extent as the main custodian of such moral values" (125). Hence a given moral principle can generate varying moral judgement and choices across varying context and locality of action. Morals/ Morality therefore is the accepted norm within a given community, or a group of individuals. Deviation from such norm attracts a form of judgment from the community. In line with the above, Kehide Obasola stated that "the concept of morality serves as the bedrock upon which the edifice of a truly righteous and egalitarian society rests" (1). Moral judgement according to Hooker are "members of a group of judgment of which some carry commitment to the appropriateness of the reactive guilt, resentment and indignation"(3). Naturally, when morality is judged, actions are usually weighted between right or wrong with little or no room for compromise and in this type of situation, the main objective is to make right judgement because most moral judgements do not only affect the offender but other members of the society as well. This is because moral judgement examines the way and manner moral judgements are applied. Moral judgement is thus defined by Liisa Myyry as the "decision about what one should do in a morally problematic situation"(np). Bertram Hooker added that " most moral theories accept that a judgement that an act was wrong does have implications about appropriate feeling of guilt, resentment or indignation"(111). Jin and Peng observed that there is a growing evidence that individuals are fundamentally motivated to evaluate others on moral

level; people quickly and easily attribute good or bad moral traits to others at an early stage of interaction with limited information (2). This study is anchored on the Ethical Theory of Immanuel Kant. This theory focuses on the actions of the moral agent rather than the character of the agent; thus emphasising the freedom of human action. Kant in this theory, interrogated the place of character and the consequences of action on the character. According to Habib:

As a moral and political agent exercising free will, man is not simply a machine subject to the values of the physical world which is the world of phenomena or things as they appear to us. Man's exercises of moral choice is grounded upon certain assumptions; one of which is his freedom to rise above the phenomenal world governed by sequences of cause and effect and to base his actions on reason, regardless of their material or physical consequences (359).

Canice Nwosu collaborates with this by stating that “the free will of man which nature reposes on him, affords him the ability to act upon his will to achieve his ultimate designs regardless of natural or state laws” (257). The Ethical Theory of Immanuel Kant therefore presupposes that the consequences of human action does not validate the actions, rather it is the action that instigates the consequences. This study therefore highlights how the application of moral judgement in a well scripted and directed film can impact positively on the moral principles of the society.

### **Synopsis of *The Caller***

*The Caller* is a family film with an outstanding storyline. It revolves around two families of Nosa and Pamela Iredia and Duke and Yemisi Best. The Iredias present a peaceful happy home where everything seems

perfect while the Bests, on the other hand present a quarrelsome home that is bereft of peace, love and trust. Nosa Iredia is an Engineer while his wife, Pamela is a Social Counsellor working as a TV presenter of a live counselling programme “Share My Pain”. Duke Best is a self employed business man while his wife is a house wife. The two families are brought together in a rather unusual circumstance Duke Best caught Nosa Iredia in bed with his Yemisi in their home. He tied them up and is ready to kill them but decided put a call on ‘Share My pain’ which happens to be live on TV at the moment. The events that follow reveal the weaknesses of the members of both families which put them in their present dilemma. Duke decides to release his captives and seek psychological help for his nymphomaniac wife while Pamela realises that though she has succeeded professionally, she has failed in her marital duties.

**Moral Judgement In*The Caller*.**

Moral Judgement is believed to appear in four significant forms. The film, *The Caller* presents a narrative of two families that find themselves entangled in a difficult marital situation. In their quest to justify and exonerate themselves and condemn their offending partner, the various forms of moral judgement are employed. While judging morality, values and obligations are usually weighted to ascertain moral requirements and moral virtues. Whether moral judgement is influenced by emotions or reason depends on what is obtainable in the environment. According to Malle, “fast moral evaluation cannot take all morally relevant information into accounts when people witness a prototypical norm-violating behaviour...they may evaluate it as bad but their judgement may change once they process the person’s goal”(4). On catching his wife, Yemisi,

with her lover in their matrimonial bed, barely ten days after the demise of their daughter, whose death is also caused by Yemisi's unfaithfulness, Duke is justified to take any action he believes is fit for the offence. However, he decides to evaluate his actions by calling the TV Presenter to share his pain. Excerpt:

Pamela: Let's not be in a hurry to commit the crime. This man you caught, do you know him?

Duke: I don't know him but I have his ID... He is Engineer Nosa Iredia.

This revelation sends chills down the spines of Pamela because the man in question is her husband. The disappointment and shock is evident in her countenance. She is justified of any decision or judgment but she also decides to evaluate her husband thus the conversation bellow:

Pamela: Nosa Iredia...Why did you do it? Where did I go wrong? Haven't I been a good wife to you and a good mother to our daughter?

Nosa's answers to these questions triggers a moment of reflection and realisation on Pamela. This feeling triggered off by the evaluation of the offender helped both Pamela and Duke to apply their moral judgement of the victims with caution.

Papel also uses the film to highlight the effects of norms on moral judgement. In norm judgement, justification of an action is never considered as all is expected to follow the norms. Malle opines that "norm judgement invoke standards against which evaluations are measured... they typically take intentional actions as the objects" (5).

For many of Pamela's fans, the norm is that the Counsellor should not have any problem as she is a problem solver. Thus they unanimously condemn Nosa's actions without hearing his side of the story. Excerpts:

Passenger1: This is so shocking and embarrassing...the husband  
of a Counsellor caught cheating.

Duke couldn't also believe that a man with someone like Pamela should have the audacity to cheat. Thus he asks:

Duke: How could you cheat on a woman like that?

NosaIredia is judged morally here with norm judgement. His wife is a marriage Counsellor, therefore there should be no reason for him to have such family problem that will make him cheat on his wife. Thus he is condemned out rightly for not following the expected norm of the environment he finds himself.

The film is also a reflection of what Malle referred to as Wrongness Judgement in determining the moral justification of the offenders. He observed that "wrong is perhaps the commonly used word to express moral judgement"(6). He continued by stating that "even though Wrongness may be less sensitive to who performed a given action, they are sensitive to why the agent did it"(6). Many judge others with little or no explanation other than seeing their behaviour as wrong. Duke in the Film sees his wife Yemisi as the worst of all women and deserves to die. He explains:

Duke: My wife is a nymph. But I'm not surprised. But she has insulted me by bringing her shameless act home barely ten days after the demise of our daughter.



Yemisi's action here for Duke is unforgivable and must not go unpunished. Pamela disagrees with him insisting that Yemisi must be heard before being condemned. By hearing Yemisi's side of the story, Duke realises his shortcomings as a husband with a wife that needs psychological adjustment. He then decides to seek psychological help for his wife instead of placing moral judgement on her.

The film, *The Caller* is also used by Papel to demonstrate the use of blame judgement on an offender. Blame judgement is usually based on self justification targeted on reasons and potential justification of what the offender ought to have done differently. Malle in his research thus observed that "people accuse others of wrong doing while deflecting or denying their own wrong doing" (9). Pamela is able to remind Nosa of how good she has been in the home hence he has no moral justification to cheat on her. Nosa is able to establish the fact that he is not the only one that should be blamed for this mistake. Excerpts:

Pamela : ...Haven't I been a good wife to you and a good mother to our daughter Vanessa? Are you such a dog that you can't eat at home alone?

Nosa : Dog!!! You call me a dog? Yes, you have been a good wife and mother. But let me ask you. When was the last time we made love? What happened to our sex life? All you care for is your job. Work! Work!! Work!!!...

Pamela: If you felt like this way, why didn't you say something?

Nosa: I never know I have to counsel a Counsellor.

Pamela's bid to blame Nosa for the predicament he finds himself is thwarted by the response to her questions. Pamela thus, realises that she also has some portion of the blame in their present situation. This

conversation also triggers a moment of reflection for Duke who also realises that his inability to satisfy his wife's sexual needs and his failure to seek for psychological solution for her habits contributed to her flirtatious behaviour.

By allowing themselves to listen to the other side of the story, Pamela and Duke are able to realise their own shortcomings that are contributing negatively to their marital lives. The decision they take in this present situation, allows them to save lives and build their families. The audience reaction also justifies the need to apply moral judgement with caution to avoid making a costly mistake that may hunt one in future.

### **Conclusion**

Papel, in the film, raises serious issues of trust, faithfulness, dedication, negligence and infidelity that plagues the contemporary African marriages. These, he presented through the characters whose desire to overcome the predicament they find themselves; resort to self gratification, which in the long run becomes a threat to peace in their families. Pamela's resolution to apply reason in judging her husband buttresses the Ethical Theory of Immanuel Kant. This enables Pamela to engage in the rigorous dialogue with her husband's capturer so as to justify her decisions. The film is used by Papel to raise a topical moral question and also proffer some useful solutions for the society.

From the analysis of the film by Paul Apel Papel, the study is able to deduce that moral judgement is based on the individual understanding of the offender and justification of action. Therefore reasons and rationality need to be considered in the application of moral judgement. Great responsibility of enormous dimension has been placed on film probably

because of its popularity with every strata of the society. Dominick J.R.H. once stated that “films are relationships between the actor and the audience. Just as a Priest and his congregation, the congregation looks up to the Priest for truth. So also the audience look up to the film for morals” (239). Some human and societal questions are therefore expected to be answered through the film medium. Film makers should always bear in mind that the audience don’t watch films merely for entertainment; rather they learn and imitate some of the actions portrayed. This paper therefore recommends that more topical issues should form the theme of Nollywood Films for social orientation and Reorientation.

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