

The Art of MAN MUST WACK

Akin Adesokan

LAGOS—Wednesday, December 15, 1996: 11:00 am. In the cramped sitting area of Murphis Jazz on Adeniran Ogunsanya Street at Surulere, the scene is set for the preview of a four-hour home movie, *Owo Blow*. It is the quintessential Lagos story: Femi, whose social-crusader father has been thrown in jail because of his egalitarian views and outspokenness, and whose equally forthright mother battles every sort of domestic upheaval, drifts aimlessly in the cruel metropolis. From motor park to drug joint to red light district, he ambles along with life, and ends up becoming the leader of a tough robbery gang, except that he possesses a soul, and this complicates his trial when he finally runs short of the law. *Owo Blow* is produced by Wale Fanu and directed by Tade Ogidan, for many years a producer with the Nigerian Television Authority, (NTA). Fanu who runs Cinekraft, was the cameraman for the popular television soap opera, *Mirror in the Sun*, while



**Video
marketers
on the brood.**
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Review

Tunde Kelani, the current head of Mainframe Productions, another motion pictures outfit, was the cinematographer. That teledrama was produced and directed by Lola Fani-Kayode in the mid-1980s. The screening at Surulere goes on for so long I cannot wait to determine who the tail-credit lists as scriptwriter; but the presence at the venue of Reverend M.A. Aderinkomi, author of the Yoruba drama *Gbéwiri* (another story of a streetboy who becomes a pickpocket in the 1970 Lagos), signposts a continuing narration of city lives.

Forging A Tradition

To attempt a four-hour screen narration suggests more than an artistic integrity that would rival Satyajit Ray's or Akira Kurosawa's; it also awakens the viewer to the prevalent reality in the film industry which, in the real sense of the term, existed only in name. There was actual demand for the kind of unmitigated pathos that *Owo Blow* served its audience, and if it didn't create an extraordinary rave, it was due less to an

intrinsic flaw in the product than to the fact that just about every corner in Lagos or Onitsha was the location for a new home movie with a similar ambition, only differently marketed. In 1996, the motion picture in Nigeria (largely in the southern part of it) was in dubious bloom, the sort that, in part fueled the epic ambition of *Fanu's* movie.

Of course, the country was in the grip of the Sani Abacha terror, and the economy, crippled since who-knows-when, now lay supine or prostrate. The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), "had done its worse," as Lagosians would say. Moral codes having long broken into gleaming smithereens, or having failed to take roots once Nigeria did, rulers and the ruled were involved in just any scam that could secure the next day. The saga of advance fee frauds, called 419 after the relevant section in the penal code, had put Nigeria's name on the map of the world of iniquities; it was the time of *Gbájùè* ('browbeat any idle face'), of *Mugun* (the fall guy) and 'the Guy,' (the



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smart-aleck.) In passing, it should be noted that a movie entitled *Gbájùè* came out at this time, and was screened at the National Theatre where viewers discovered that the story had nothing to do with that title! Abacha and his family and friends were stealing public funds on what we can now confirm was an hourly basis; citizens sold 'pure' water inside traffic jams—anything, just anything to beat the devil of hunger and intractable want.

In the midst of all this, a curious practice that began surreptitiously in 1986 when a once-upon-a-time cartoonist, Muyideen Aromire, unsuccessfully submitted the video cassette of his drama, *Ekùn* (Tiger), to the National Film Censors Board for vetting had captured the street imagination. Since the cost of making a film in the regular 16mm celluloid gauge had precluded filmmaking as the books and Hollywood stipulate, adventurous or enterprising filmmakers now resorted to recording their stories in video cassettes and selling them as mass products. That was the format in which *Ekùn* was recorded. The late Hubert Ogunde, then a member of the censor's board, reportedly said that such a video would pass as film over his dead body. Ogunde died in April 1990; from 1991, when Nek Videos Limited released the video *Àjé Niyá Mi* (My Mother Is A Witch), the march of video movies to the Jerusalem of filmdom became unstoppable. The most telling success of this turbulent revolution resides in the transformation of the name of the censor's board: it is now known as the National Film and Video Censors Board. Is the general public taking note?

That was the impetus for Fanu's commendable extravaganza. In fact, by then, the arbiters of tele-visual tastes at the NTA, who would insist on sponsorship from Lever Brothers or Patterson Zocchonis before a soap opera could get on the air in the age of commercialisation, were manning the last ramparts against the video onslaught. A few days after that screening at Murphis Jazz, Adeyemi Afolayan (Ade Love) died. He was one of Nigeria's foremost filmmakers, having started his craft in the early 1970s with Ola Balogun. One of his colleagues attributed his demise to a heartbreak over

the displacement of celluloid films by the videos. The 1990s were the decade of the video movie. In two works—*Ti Olúwa Ni Ilè* (Tunde Kelani, 1994) and *Violated* (Amaka Igwe, 1996), the Yoruba traveling theater and the university-based departments of theatre arts, the two dominant traditions in the home video phenomenon, came together. This alignment signaled the initiation of the standards by which what now passes as filmmaking will be measured. I will explain this in due course.

Traditions have a way of creeping onto the throne. The entrenchment of a tradition, like a historic moment, does not always require drama and heraldry. The video movie, in spite of the socio-economic conditions surrounding its emergence as a clearly second-rate form, is actually a plausible moment in a long, dynamic, self-reversing history of visual culture production in Nigeria. When Ogunde swore to suppress the bug, he was delivering a moral duty to the film a form that had secured his career and those of others. But he was not alert, as people working through history scarcely are, to the irony of his situation. The film medium in Nigeria, at least as it showcased the works of Ogunde, Isola Ogunsola, Adeyemi Afolayan, Lere Paimo, Moses Olaiya Adejumo (Baba Sala), Oyin Adejobi and others in the Yoruba film group, was itself an overlapping movement in stages. There was the movement from the stage to the tube, to the radio, to the recording disc, and on to the photoplay series (*Atoka*). The nature of work in the 1970s through the 1980s was frenetic. This pulsating energy was reflected in the assortment of media in which work was done. For example, Baba Sala's comedies came in all manner of styles and formats: the *Alawada* magazine series or the NTV comedy half-hour on Wednesday evenings. Such was the pace that these practitioners thought that it was natural, that all snakes were edible.

These, after all, were exponents and inheritors of the proud legacy of the Yoruba Traveling Theater, a sixteenth-century tradition of itinerant performers that, in spite of the diligence of the



missionaries in the early twentieth-century, came back with vigor when Ogunde established his Folk Opera Party in 1944. From the 1940s through the 1960s, this practice witnessed a real golden age due, at once, to sustained urbanization in Yorubaland and the enthusiasm of the cultural anthropologists to undo the demolition work of colonialism and Christian evangelism. Under the direction of the Great Troika—Hubert Ogunde, Kola Ogunmola and Duro Ladipo—the Yoruba dramatic art became a tradition. It had institutional support from the largely urbanized clientele whose experience it dramatized. There was prosperity in the postwar 1970s, and even in the 1980s. Before the advent of SAP, it was still possible to attempt to take the rushes to a studio in London and hope to recoup the expenses by showing the film round theaters in Lagos, Ìbàdàn, Òsogbo, and a few other places.

The economic situation conspired with three structural problems to show what weak foundation the emergent film industry stood on. First, the brilliant idea of a National Film Corporation, established by a decree in the dying days of the first military incursion, did not get better than a bureaucracy: a joke. With its promise of establishing a film institute, a laboratory and a fund for filmmakers, it was the first official attempt to really support the industry beyond the old

colonial preoccupation with mere ordinances. But nothing major happened: under the controversial chairmanship of the filmmaker, Eddie Ugbomah, the corporation funded a number of films, but these were mainly the chairman's own products. It took many years to build the film laboratory in Jos; equipping it has taken many more. These days, under the direction of Dr Hyginus Ekwuazi, himself a film scholar, the Nigerian Film Institute has taken over the duty of coordinating the industry as a government parastatal. In short, the films of this period, from Francis Oladele (*Bullfrog in the Sun*) through Ogunde (*Àròpín n'fènià*) to Afolabi Adesanya (*Osé Sàngó*), were mainly products of personal toil. The various cinemas dotting the Lagos metropolis—Pen Cinema at Agége, Jèbàkó and Ìdèrà at Mushin, Metro at Onípàànù, King's at Obáléndé, Casino at Yaba, Roxy at Apápá—did no better than feature the steady stream of Indian melodramas distributed by Lebanese and Nigerian merchants since the early 1950s. The situation in Ibadan, with Odeon at Òkè-Àdó and Scala at Adámásingbà, is not substantially different.

The Alarinjo Factor

One other structural problem was the character of the dominant Yorùbá

theaters. From the *Eégún Alárinjò* phase, each company was run on the principle of the Renaissance Italian *commedia dell'arte* whereby the head of the acting company was also the lead actor, the director, producer, manager and the chief accounting officer. He married his female actors, or his wives became part of the actors; visiting friends were also drafted into rehearsals. While this practice was good for cohesion and a sense of solidarity in an industry still open to social stigma, it was not so good for business. The experience of Moses Olaiya, whose rushes (or finished product) were stolen in transit, was very dramatic and catalytic in an unfunny way. He later made out of the ordeal a film (*Mosebólátán*) celebrating human assertion, but most industry watchers agree that Baba Sala's loss over *Òrun Móoru* dealt a major blow to the career of that most accomplished performer. (He's trying to return through a weekly slot on MITV sponsored by the makers of Ajinomoto seasoning, but this is no longer the Baba Sala of the "Selling Heavily!" phase.)

The third problem is somehow related to the preceding one. As Kelani pointed out in a recent article on the uses of the visual arts for the motion picture industry, this generation of filmmakers, mainly transiting from the stage, only extended "their stage traditions to the screen, oblivious of the fact that [the] motion picture is a totally different form." They entered the wilderness of the film, still largely uncharted despite the works of Oladele, Ugbomah and Balogun, with the same set of ideas they had found useful on the radio or on stage. There is little doubt that this confusion over form incapacitated the filmmakers in their attempts at adapting to the new medium, reaching beyond their cultural base and broadening the appeal of the medium. Much of the aesthetic shortcoming of the current home videos by Yorùbá professionals—particularly the perpetuation of tradition even at the level of theme and treatment—is rooted in these problems. In part, it is responsible for what Onookome Okome, writing about the video phenomenon (*Loud in Lagos*), has critiqued as 'close identification [with] a

particular ethnic group'.

Yet, while it lasted, from the 1971 production of Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* produced by Oladele to early 1990 when the last celluloid films were commercially screened at the National Theater, Iganmu, film as a form had a good run. So much so that Ogunde's personal projects in the last decade of his life were carried out on the screen. This was the basis for his confident dismissal of the video format, the orphan form. Part of Ogunde's (and the other filmmakers') concern was the video's susceptibility to piracy, and the difficulty of arresting it—problems that have continued to dog the industry ever since. In spite of this, however, or even as a result, the video became the accepted format early in the '90s. It is also responsible for the emergence of a new product: the Igbo language video movie. Prior to this time, there were no feature films in Igbo language. But the field was overloaded with heartbreaking and excruciatingly poor products. Hand-held cameras, hole-in-the-wall studios, primary-school-end-of-the-year story lines: these were the prevalent artisanal methods of film production that damaged the talents of otherwise astounding performers. Aromire (Alade on the screen), whose dubiously historic first product was birthed from these tools, was notorious for taking a set of actors to a location (usually some rich man's sitting room—no exterior shots!), and recording between two and three videos without so much as a change of costumes. This state of affairs has persisted, to a great extent; the Igbo-language home movie was caught in it upon arrival, and a clearly clueless video like *Living in Bondage* (Nek Videos, 1992) was enthusiastically received largely because it spoke to a community with no artistic anchor for its contemporary experience.

The involvement of Kelani and Igwe changed the industry in very unimaginable ways. This is how it happened. Kelani, an experienced cinematographer who worked closely with Fani-Kayode on the soap *Mirror* in the Sun and the film *Ìwà* (an adaptation of Adebayo Faleti's *Ìdààmú Pààdì Míkàilù*),



Video
distribution
district,
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Review

collaborated with Alhaji Karimu Adepoju (who as Baba Wande in Oyin Adejobi's television series, *Kóòtù Asípa* had an established career of acting) to write and produce a three-part story, *Ti Oluwa Ni Ile*. The story dramatizes land-grabbing and official corruption, and does this with an expert medley of Yoruba film actors and university-trained ones. In that film, Adepoju acts opposite Golda John who had studied drama in Ibadan. There was Ombo Gogo Ombo of Chuck Mike's Performance Studio Workshop, there was (now Oba) Wole Amele, Councillor Balogun of the Village Headmaster fame. There was Dele Odule, Ayo Mogaji, Bature

Eleso, Iya Ngba Life, Jide Kosoko, Lekinson, Oga Bello, Olofa-Ina, and Aderupoko, all brand names among the Yoruba video patrons who knew the actors only by their stage/screen names, and trooped out whenever one happened to be passing by their neighborhood. The result, mediated in admirable cinematography and fine directing, was a story that led somewhere and appealed to anyone who understood Yoruba or could read English subtitles. It launched Kelani's career big-time, one of the most forceful in the industry at the moment. He has followed this with the two-part *Ayò Ni Mo Fé*, *Kòsèégbé* (an adaptation

of a Yoruba play by Akinwumi Isola), *Ó Le Kú* (another adaptation of Isola's novel of the same title), Saworoide and, most recently, *Thunderbolt*, 'a cross-over' video that cuts across ethnic and cultural lines.

With Igwe, the story is somewhat different. A graduate of Theatre Arts from the University of Calabar, she was a scriptwriter who in the early 1990s produced and directed the popular soap, *Checkmate*, which shared the airwaves with mushy Mexican soaps like *The Rich Also Cry* and *Wild Rose*. English-language teledrama has had a very strong presence in Nigeria, beginning with the old WNBC-WNTV's broadcast of Wole Soyinka's play, *My Father's Burden*, in 1960. It went through a period of real activity, with a formidable list of successful middle-class series and serials: *Village Headmaster* (old and new), *Cockcrow at Dawn*, *Sura de Tailor*, *Winds Against My Soul*, *New Masquerade*, *For Better for Worse*, *Icheoku*, and from the 80s, *Mirror in the Sun*, *Victims*, *Basi & Company*, *Samanja*. The list is longer.

Checkmate worked: it privileged middle-class values and the worlds of corporate intrigues and supple romance in the 1990s, a period when General Babangida's SAP had washed the country in new bogus banks with implausible interest rates, dangerously flashy cars, and out-of-this-world architectural designs. With Zeb Ejiro's *Ripples* coming a few months after *Checkmate* and also airing on prime time television, the multitude of stage actors trained in the universities' departments of drama and theater could now find regular acting jobs. Hitherto, they had constituted an enthusiastic group growing out of the explosion of live theater spawned by Fred Agbeyegbe's *Ajofest '86*. But with the general recession of the late 1980s, their dreams of professionalism went into limbo. The new soaps simply came to the rescue. There was, of course, the termite called home video, steadily eating its way into reckoning. Igwe produced a story called *Rattlesnake* in 1995, then the two-part *Violated* in the following year, and became one of the most serious-minded video movie makers in the country. *Violated* combines the glamor of television with the realism of Nigerian life to tell the

story a young woman raped and abandoned by a rich man who continues to harass her in public. Her attempt to settle into normal life is resisted by the rich and powerful mother of her boyfriend but in the end love triumphs, or does it?

Videography: The Enemies Within

Between 1994 and 1996, scores of video cassettes, ostensibly made for home viewing, flooded the market with unexampled variety and aggressiveness. And with them came a generation of director-producers: Amaka Igwe, Fidelis Duker, Zeb Ejiro, Jaiye Ojo, Zachee Orji, Tunde Alabi-Hundeyin (Dudu), Bayo Salami (Oga Bello), Jide Kosoko, Chico Ejiro, Bimpe Adekola (Ireti), Opa Williams, Taiwo Hassan (Ogogo), Ameze Imarhiagbe, Kenneth Nnebue, Bayo Adewusi. In May 1996, the courtyards of Lloyd Weaver's Swift Studio on Oba Akran Avenue in Ikeja crawled with actors angling for a role in a supposedly big budget "video film" to be called *Omen of Love*. According to rumors then, Ambassador Olusegun Olusola, one of the brains behind the original *Village Headmaster*, was a supporter of this project. The following year, Femi Lasode's Even-Ezra Studio released *Sàngó*, a dramatization of the Yoruba myth of the thunder god, and even screened it at the Pan African — Film Festival in Los Angeles in February 1999. If you heard any announcement on the television in Lagos ending with "Eight Ebinpejo Lane, Idumota, Lagos," or "Number Fourteen Edidi Lane, Idumota, Lagos," or "Nine Iweka Road, Onitsha", you knew at once that this was a commercial for a new video. Until the glut, there was no company called Infinity Merchants. But there is one now, and it is a marketer of video movies. You'll also hear of Contech Ventures, Bayowa Movie Promotions, Nek Videos Limited, beside old names like Mut-Muksons Limited. During this period, phone-in programs having become fashionable on the television, a rash of immensely popular shows broke out: *L'Agbo Video*, *Abéré Orin*, *Bayowa Half-Hour*, *Àràmbádá*, *Video Half-Hour*, and many more. They were the Nigerian equivalents of Actors'

Studio, where professionals were brought to answer informal telephone calls from their fans. Some of these sessions got to be as popular as a feature movie.

The video movie is also the impetus for the establishment of the Nigerian Actors' Guild, and has kept the Nigerian Copyright Council, NCC, extremely busy. The council now pays attention to more than the question of collecting rights for musicians; it feels constantly called upon to reflect on the question of piracy, and other general copyright issues. Moreover, there is a tremendous change in the design of syllabuses in the old departments of theater arts in the universities with more courses focusing on writing and producing and acting for the electronic media. This may be a response to the privatization of broadcasting, but it is also a way of keeping in step with the video market. The Nigerian film has been reborn, the aristocratic offspring of a lowly orphan.

"The piracy people are our biggest enemies. When we make a film, we pray to break even, and in fact we always manage to make our money from each production. But we can do much better if there's a way that we and the government can control the activities of the pirates and protect our profession." In words to this effect did Salami reflect on the problems of piracy, a phenomenon which, with poor technical quality, poses some of the greatest challenges to the motion picture industry. He was speaking at the videotaped launch of the video movie, *Imule Ife* (Bonded Lovers), written and produced by Ms. Adekola, and the ceremony doubled as the "freedom" of the actor-producer from the tutelage of Yinka Quadri, also an actor and producer of Corporate Pictures. (The recording featuring this view on piracy served as preamble for the film proper, while the hall filled up.) As the audience sat to watch the movie at its premiere at Satellite One cinema at Shitta, a few blocks away from Murphis Jazz where *Owo Blow* would later have its press screening, the enemies that Oga Bello spoke about had not gone to work. Usually, they study a particular video movie's market prospects, and once it has had the run of the theater, they set to work. Often, if the video is popular, as the works of Igwe usually are, pirated copies begin

to appear in the market as soon as the posters make their appearance on the city walls. The bug is harder to trace in the Igbo and the English language movies which lack a tradition of public screening. In the same week in 1994 that *Owuro I'Ojo*, written and produced by Bunmi Oyinsan, began selling as a video cassette, I was on Ebinpejo Lane to interview some marketers as an aspect of a story on the video phenomenon. I was astounded to see copies of the new movie being carted away by fast-moving bootleggers. Three years later, in a small town in Austria, I watched the two-part story with some Nigerian friends, and the quality of the production was such that it could only have been the pirated version. Later I asked Oyinsan if she knew about this, and her expression was a mixture of 'Search me' and 'It goes on'.

The question of piracy is a touchy one in this industry and, as the experience of the NCC has shown even with music piracy, it is not an easy one to deal with. The idea of rating the products by the NFVCB is one regular option; if a cassette carries the board's rating approval tag, the buyer is guided in her choice of product. But, like everything else, even rating tags can be faked, as they indeed are. Moviemakers, through their associations (Conference of Motion Pictures Producers is one), have devised several means, the better known being the control of rentals by video stores. But policing this measure has prove difficult in an industry riven with competition and uneven quality. Another effective device is the idea of instituting a raffle draw with tickets built into the cassette case, the reasoning being that, with the added value of competing in the draws, a buyer might be tempted to opt for the original cassette. Kelani has long taken the precaution of giving the case a seal to authenticate his own products. Zachee Orji ran a popular competition with *True Confessions* in December 1995, and when *Violated* came out the following year, Amaka Igwe gave the distribution rights to Texaco filling stations across the country.

Piracy in the industry is a somewhat paradoxical development. The idea of the home video itself in 1986 amounted to

a certain class of fakery in an industry suddenly caught in the wild economic and social storms of the age. To use an analogy that should resonate in the Nigerian context, the railing against piracy is like the case of a group of soldiers who shoot their way to power and promptly outlaw any attempt to take power by force of the gun. The case against piracy is not even entirely watertight. The norm in the sector being mediocrity, it is often difficult for the discerning buyer to tell a fake product from the original. Both are characterized by poor cinematography, sloppy images and outright disregard for quality. In fact, it can be argued that the general predilection toward cheap production makes counterfeiting such an attractive option for those who engage in it. Not to mention the practice by video makers of re-titling videos rejected by the board, then, re-submitting them in a zonal office of the same censor's board, a device which came to light sometime in October 2000. Yet, the challenge ought to be embraced. While it is possible that movie makers continue to self-correct and improve the quality of their products, for critical as well as commercial reasons, the same cannot be said for the pirates whose operation is marked by an attitudinal distrust of excellence.

On the Road

Because this is art we are dealing with, the ultimate solution will be technical, but not necessarily in the sense of the word, as the elemental process of technology. As Ismael Kadaré says of creativity in a totalitarian state, the real enemy of art is not so much censorship as mediocrity. Aside from piracy, the medium's obsession with pseudo-modernity and cheap mysticism has boxed the video movie into a dead-end and ensnared it in its own contradictions. Whether in the mainstream Yoruba genre, or in the emergent Igbo category, which is now somewhat indistinguishable from the "English language video," an inability to structure the dialectics of audience expectation and social morality is what frames the impasse. This opens the professionals to charges of social

irresponsibility in their manner of handling supernatural themes in an atmosphere charged by the zealotry of the Pentecostal churches. No questions: the riotous, excessive exhibitionism of the posters of these home videos, with the monotony of primary colors, is visually fascinating at the first glance, and becomes repelling with frequent encounters. Their lack of decorum about the human body, and the simultaneous display of magic and 'unhealthy' fantasy, may be a parable for a society where ritual killing is rife, and the human body is really not respected. But the real movie, as art, does not necessarily amount to a serious critique of these social dislocations. If you manage to sit through the standard two-and-a-half hours of melodrama, you'll have forgotten what you are meant to do with the experience by the time it is over. There have been very trenchant condemnations of the ancillary drama of advertising the products, in which creating a sense of urgency takes the form of psychological warfare. The driving force behind the explosion is commercial, and its exceeding popularity, thus, calls for critical attention before the zealotry of the religiously minded confuses the matter beyond recognition.

Kelani's charge to visual artists to see their talent as crucial to the motion picture industry is only one kind of challenge to be posed on behalf of the video movie. The need for script writers, directors, designers, graphic artists is equally crucial. The motion picture industry is, or ought to be, an art. In September 1996, I saw *Ipade Ayo* by Lere Paimo at the National Theater, and in July 2000, I sat inside the auditorium of the Lagos State Broadcasting Corporation at Alausa to see the premiere of Jide Kosoko's *Aye N'reti Eleya*. In those four years, despite challenges by the emergence of other directors and other kinds of movie making, I saw nothing in the two videos to convince me of any real advance in the Yoruba language motion picture. There is the same story whose logic has collapsed before the end of ninety minutes. You will find the predictable recourse to the *babaláwo* who is more negative than not. There is the same potentially enriching but oversimplified

attempt to incorporate contemporary reality/execution by hanging in Paimo, and the AIDS upheaval in Kosoko, the same Manichean division of all experience into good and evil — all reminiscent of Kola Ogunmola of the *Atóka* phase. The Igbo-English video is as sloppy and unambitious: acting is standard here. What happens is that most people who get in front of the camera see the experience as, first and foremost, modeling. The glamor of the television is imported wholesale, and with it the slow, infra-kinetic pace of the medium. In every movie you are bound to see Tony One-Week and Saint Obi and Peter Edochie and Hilda Dokubo. A scriptwriter, Ebereonwu, told me in July, 2000: "Edochie is one of the reasons most of us are doing ethnic cross-over now, because people are tired of seeing him in every movie." The stories are equally unvarying: the village is evil and backward, the city is glittering and full of opportunities, but

there is no real attempt to go further. The mother-in-law remains mean, because the daughter-in-law is still infertile. With this kind of staple, why bother to appreciate something as incidental as the make-up?

It seems a hardly realistic thing to say but it has to be said: for the motion picture to make money and be what its practitioners want it to be, it has to become less interested in making money and stop being what they want it to be, which is, to use a Lagos parlance, a multi-billion naira industry. It hurts Nigerian video-makers to be kept repeatedly at the door of the bi-annual FESPACO in Ouagadougou. But do they think that video format aside, their products are really world-class? Not yet: before they can become it, the "filmmakers" have to understand their work as art, first, and business, second.

Is anyone still waiting on the government? GR

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