

Representing Igbo Culture Authentically: Realism in The Cinematic Depiction of *Áfáméfunà*

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1.INTRODUCTION

The focus of this work is on Southeast Nigeria and the Igbo people (Ndi Igbo). We are going to navigate through their innovations and rich cultural heritage and practices as showcased in African cinema. There is a popular saying: *Igbo enweghi Eze* (Igbo people do not have a King). Every Igbo man is a king on his own and he justifies his existence by making every effort to maintain his legacy. [1]

A new born child in an Igbo land is given a name that is associated with a good attribute of his family. A wealthy family will always desire to maintain a wealthy lineage in their generation thereby giving their children names that would be associated with wealth or good attributes. Mensah and Iloh discuss the concept of wealth in Igbo land and include in the discussion, the naming of a new born child and the interpretation of names.[2]. These personal names are meant to initiate a strong foundation for the child and his generation. For example; *Akubundu*- Wealth is life, *Akuabia*- Wealth has arrived, *Akunna*- Father's wealth and *Áháméfunà/ Áfáméfunà*- Let my legacy remain forever. These names depict the rich culture of Igbo land.

The Nigerian movie "*Áfáméfunà: An Nwa Boi Story*," produced by Kayode Kasum, debuted in Theatres on December 1, 2023, and on Netflix on March 29, 2024 . The main character of the film is *Áfáméfunà* (played by Stan Eze), who is taken in for interrogation after his friend Paulo (played by Alex Ekubo) passes away. Paulo's death brings to light the convoluted past of the two friends navigating the realm of Igbo apprenticeship in Nigeria. They were both working under the household business empire of Odogwu (played by Kanayo .O. Kanayo). The movie explored the Igbo apprenticeship system highlighting the system as an enterprise associated with many strategies. *Áfáméfunà* and Paul, with other apprentices, were living under the roof of their master's house. Their master, Odogwu treated all of them as his own children despite their different family backgrounds. The other characters included Atlanta Bridget as Amaka, Segun Arinze as CSP Gidabo , Paul Nnadiokwe as young *Áfáméfunà* and Chuks Joseph as young Paul.

However, *Áfáméfunà* was loved by his master, because of his decent character, while dealing with his master's business empire, and also for assisting his master when he encountered challenges during the importation of his goods. *Áfáméfunà* and Paul were good friends but they turned out to be rivals when *Áfáméfunà* was settled and blessed by their master with a shop, and also rewarded financially to start his own business. Paul claimed that was his own right because

he came into the apprenticeship line before *Áfàméfunà*. The movie ended with a twist; Paul was very greedy and started stealing from *Áfàméfunà*. *Áfàméfunà*, being a considerate individual, played to the tune of Paul who was later caught for his wrong dealings.

This essay will look into how '*Áfàméfunà*' depicts the actual representation of Igbo traditional apprenticeship practices. It will assess how the film depicts the conflicts between Igbo cultural heritage and the importance of names, and what implications this has in comprehending Igbo people's cultural identity. In order to support cultural continuity and transfer to future generations, realism in cultural depiction aids in the preservation of traditional customs and cultural heritage. Alike and Umenze established the fact that the Igbo apprenticeship was an institution guarded by customs, lineage and rituals.[3]. In other words, it is a traditional practice that has been existing for a long time which is also passed from one generation to another. Therefore, to portray more on this aspect of Igbo apprenticeship, we will focus our study based on the idea of realism to study Igbo culture and tradition.

2. CONCEPT OF REALISM

Literature defines the objectivity of the society by representing the activities of people in the society. This particular function of literature serving as a tool for representing society is linked to the definition of realism. Literary works depend on originality and authenticity and this is also a link to the concept of realism. [4].

The idea of adapting realism in presenting a movie encourages audiences to relate to characters and their experiences. It promotes authentic storytelling thereby providing a genuine and honest representation of life. Realism in literature offers a powerful tool for storytelling, enabling creators to capture the complexity and rich cultural backgrounds of different ethnic groups. Realism has also been applied in movies, representing everyday life in the society. This includes cultural, socio- economic, artistic and political representation. For example Italian post-war activities were represented in movies such as "La Strada" (1954) and "Rome, Open City" (1945). These films presented an idea of realism based on aesthetic by emphasizing the lives of common people in the wake of conflict. [5]

There are other movies that have showcased Igbo culture such as *Omugwo* (2017), *'76* (2016) and *Living in Bondage*(1992) produced by Kunle Afolayan, Izu Ojukwu, and Chris Obi Rabu, respectively. These movies painted an accurate picture of Igbo society, representing its cultural and political background, and even traditional ethics.

Realism in literature depicts common places, common people and everyday events as they actually happen. Realist literature typically uses clear, understandable language to portray characters and their experiences. Realism avoids flowery language in favour of reflecting the situation accurately. Literary realism frequently concentrates on middle-class and working-class individuals as well as well-known locations, as in the case of French Literature.[7]

3. PORTRAYAL OF IGBO CULTURE IN *ÁFÀMÉFUNÀ*

Igbo culture is very vast and has many dimensions. We will showcase the different dimensions and their significance as portrayed in the movie *Áfàméfunà*. We will provide in-depth analysis of how Igbo culture is represented in the movie, including cultural practices, traditions, and values. *Áfàméfunà*, as an Igbo movie, presents a complex picture of Igbo culture by highlighting many dimensions of customs, rituals, and beliefs.

Cultural Practices: - The first few scenes in the movie started with traditional Igbo dancing and music, which was actually the commemoration of the death of Áfáméfunà's father. This type of celebration is usually done when the family is wealthy. When Áfáméfunà's father died, his family didn't bury him properly, according to tradition, and they did not fulfil the entire necessary requirement because they were not wealthy. But when Áfáméfunà became wealthy, he chose to bury and celebrate his father properly. The remembrance party emphasizes the importance of commemorating the dead to show them that the living have not forgotten them. It shows how festivals and ceremonies do play a huge part in Igbo spirituality and community. This scene was characterized by other rich colleagues of Áfáméfunà spraying money on him, and also praising him. Though the celebration was interrupted by the police who came to arrest Áfáméfunà because of the death of Paul Obiajulu (Paulo), Áfáméfunà insisted that the event should continue with or without him.

Another cultural practice that can be visualized in the movie is apprenticeship. In Igbo land, apprenticeship is a form of traditional education whereby an unskilled person learns skills from his mentor between a period of time. At the end of the agreed time, the person is settled by his mentor and released so that he could start his own business. This implies that the mentor-addressed as *Master* (commonly called Oga or Madam) - that owns a skill, enterprise or vocation trains another person, the Mentee/ Servant- Nwa-boi/ Igba- Odibo/ Igba –boi/ Imu aka oru. This cultural practice has been in existence for many decades. Though it has its disadvantage, when applied appropriately, it is usually a route to financial freedom. [6]

In Áfáméfunà, Afam lost his dad at a young age, and he was brought to Lagos by his mother to learn skills in the business empire of Odogwu at the age of 17. As an intelligent Igbo boy, he learned the principles of the business under his Oga. Áfáméfunà encountered other boys in Odogwu's empire, was extremely diligent in work, and was rewarded accordingly. He followed his Oga's precepts and had the character of a real and a trusted *nwa-boi*, who didn't follow the bad gangs. Afáméfunà exhibited the spirit of transparency which endeared him to his Oga, Mr Odogwu. Odogwu taught Áfáméfunà how to respect customers and also advised him not to steal. The movie presented the reality of apprenticeship, displaying the business relationships involving the customers, the master and his apprentices.

According to Odogwu, the Igbo apprenticeship is like a chain that revolves. A mentor will train a mentee and settle him with a business, and the mentee now becomes a mentor, and also trains other mentees and the process goes on and on:

A na- agba okiriki o na- aga, business na-ga

Business flows. (our translation)

Odogwu specifically said wherever a person goes to and didn't see an Igbo man, that the person should run away from there. In conclusion of his words to Áfáméfunà, he said "Igbo Amaka" which signifies the riches found in Igbo land cannot be found in another land. In terms of the theory of realism, the movie displayed the real truth behind the Nwa boi story in the sense that it presented the actuality of the Igbo culture been displayed in the business world. Nwa boi, represents an ideal name for an Igbo apprentice whose world is surrounded by business. He works under his *Oga* for a certain period of time in order to be tutored on the principles of entrepreneurship and when that period of time elapses, he gets settled to start his own business

and earn a living for himself. The Igbo people signaled this apprenticeship practice as an evergreen cultural practice which can never die.

Áfáméfunà also teaches us about the reward for respecting elders. This was portrayed when Áfáméfunà was settled before Paul, though Paul was his senior but Odogwu decided to settle Afam before Paul. Though, this action was the beginning of the fracas between Paul and Afam, because Paul became extremely jealous of Afam. This cultural practice of respect to elders showcased the best attitude displayed during apprenticeship that attracts blessings in the end. Overall, Áfáméfunà portrays the Igbo cultural activities and its significance and also it, highlighted its overall complexity and the beauty that emanates from it. The film's thoughtful representation of cultural practices and traditions, presents a valuable contribution to the understanding and appreciation of Igbo culture.

3. IMPACT OF REALISM ON CULTURAL REPRESENTATION

One of the basic features of realism is to produce an accurate and an authentic representation of society and its impact. [8] This act is characterized by objectivity and accuracy. However, the realistic representation of Igbo cultural practices in movies is a subtle way of validating the identities and experiences of the Igbo community.

The name Áfáméfunà (let my legacy remain forever) was well illustrated in the movie. [8]. Authenticity as a term in Realism depicts actuality and genuine representation without duplication.[9] Though, Afam was arrested and questioned because of the death of his deceitful friend, Paul, his name remained true to his actions. The explanation that he gave the Officer, CSP Gidabo to explain his innocence was a truthful story without exaggeration or manipulation. As a newcomer in the Odogwu's business empire, the other boys nick named him JJC, meaning Johnny just come, a beginner, but that didn't change his identity. He was loyal to the end and his boss, Odogwu rewarded him, and even gave him his beautiful daughter to marry.[10] This shows the significance of names, thereby promoting cultural practices. The film intricately weaves the story of the Igbo apprenticeship system, entrepreneurship and the quest for economic rejuvenation through a lens of love, betrayal and redemption[11]

The film also pictured how the system is built from scratch, and showcased Igbo business acumen, and how they flourish and make their ancestors proud.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has examined the portrayal of Igbo culture in the movie Áfáméfunà through the lens of realism. While the movie successfully captures some aspects of Igbo culture, it also perpetuates certain stereotypes. The significance of cultural authenticity, originality, and accuracy cannot be overstated. By applying realism, valuable moral lessons can be derived, beneficial for personal growth and societal development. Realism has the power to shape public perceptions and influence cultural identity. To improve future representations of Igbo culture in movies, it is essential to prioritize Igbo perspectives and voices, ensuring authentic representation. Additionally, providing cultural context and education to audiences would enhance understanding and appreciation of Igbo culture.

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