

Semiotic Analysis of a Film: October 1

Damilare Oyeyebi

Lecturer in the Department of General Studies

The Redeemed Christian Bible College, Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

On October 1, 2014, the *October 1* film written by Tunde Babalola and directed by Kunle Afolayan was premiered in various cinemas around the nation. The film *October 1* is an exceptional work of cinematographic expertise and creativity that is unlikely to be found among typical (conventional) Nollywood cineastes.

This paper is a semiotic analysis of techniques used in the film such as signs, high/low contrast lighting, props, the use of shadows, close-ups, and other camera shots, as well as an awareness of the film's relationship to other texts and social-historical context. Thus, this paper will aid the understanding of the audience hidden nature and the general significance of the film.

INTRODUCTION

A film, also called a movie, motion picture, theatrical film or photoplay, is a series of still images which, when shown on a screen, creates the illusion of moving images due to the phi phenomenon. This optical illusion causes the audience to perceive continuous motion between separate objects viewed rapidly in succession.

The process of filmmaking is both an art and an industry. A film is created by photographing actual scenes with a motion picture camera; by photographing drawings or miniature models using traditional animation techniques; by means of CGI and computer animation; or by a combination of some or all of these techniques and other visual effects.

The word "cinema", short for cinematography, is often used to refer to the industry of films and filmmaking or to the art of filmmaking itself. The contemporary definition of cinema is the art of simulating experiences to communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty or atmosphere by the means of recorded or programmed moving images along with other sensory stimulations.

Films are cultural artifacts created by specific cultures. They reflect those cultures, and, in turn, affect them. Film is considered to be an important art form, a source of popular entertainment, and a powerful medium for educating or indoctrinating citizens. The visual basis of film gives it a universal power of communication.

Based on this backdrop, film as a medium of mass communication is open to different analytical approaches considering the various elements employed in the production of a film.

Several analysis such as iconic analysis, shot by shot analysis, semiotic analysis and psychoanalytical approach could be adopted in analyzing a film.

Bearing in mind the crux of this paper, semiotic analysis is therefore preferred. Semiotics also called semiology was first defined by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as 'the science of signs' (Sibhan Chappman, Christopher Routledge 2009). Semiology as a science is related to the word semiosis which is a term used in semiotics to designate the production and interpretation of a sign' (Hadumod Busmann 2006).

Additionally, Roland Barthes proclaimed that semiology 'aims to take in any system of signs whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects' (Roland Barthes 1968) these signs constitute a system of significance. Although Saussure postulated semiology as a general science of signs of which linguistics would form only one part, Roland Barthes proclaimed that semiology is a mere subset of linguistics.

Within the rise of linguistics, semiotics became an important field that studies the life of signs within society. Roland Barthes analyzed the signs within two main semiotic concepts: the signified and the signifier from the Saussurean perspective.

The nature of the signifier: the signifier has a material nature whether sounds, objects, or images.

The nature of the signified: signified on the other hand is not a thing but the mental representation of things and the outside world, it has a psychological and abstract nature that is given through denotation.

What constitute signs in film include music, sound effects, camera shots, dialogue, lighting and other film components. The meaning the film audience would attribute to these signs is heavily hinged on a number of factors. Curtin (2000, p.51) points out these factors:

“the significance of images or objects is not understood as a one-way process from image or object to the individual but the result of complex inter-relationships between the individual, the image or object and other factors such as culture and society.”

Intertextuality - History and the Film

October 1 is a 2014 Nigerian dark psychological thriller film written by Tunde Babalola, produced and directed by Kunle Afolayan. The film, which is set in Colonial Nigeria, narrates the story of a police officer from Northern Nigeria who is posted to a remote town in Western Nigeria to investigate the frequent female murder cases in the community, and have the mystery solved before the Nigerian flag is raised on October 1, Nigeria's Independence Day.

The film was met with positive critical reception, mostly praised for its production design, cinematography and its exploration of themes including tribalism, western imperialism, paedophilia, homosexuality, Nigeria's unification, and also establishing a strong connection between western culture and the cause of present-day Boko Haram insurgency.

The film since its release has been positively received by film critics. Toni Kan of ThisDay praised its cinematography, story and casting, concluding that: "October 1 provokes a lot of questions and provides few answers but what is unequivocal is that at the end of the movie when the picture of the Queen is taken down, Kunle Afolayan, son of Ade Love, is crowned King".

Onyeka Nwelue of The Trent, praised the artistic nature of the film, its subtle messages, and concluded: "Mr. Afolayan incorporates facts into fiction to create an everlasting joy in this work. He is not one who is scared of exploring, and he does so beautifully. He takes his time to create. He takes his time to understand the people he is making films for.

No matter how intellectually stimulating October 1 is, it can be enjoyed by anybody. At the end, one can easily say, Mr. Afolayan's October 1 is for everyone who loves great films".

Sodas and Popcorn, praised its production design, the performances from the actors, use of costumes, and also described the cinematography as "the best work of art in Nigerian cinematic history". It commended the film for its attention to detail and concluded: "Afolayan obviously had clear vision of what he set out to achieve and pushed his cast to give the best possible performance you could expect from them. The glory of the film, however, is in the fact that the story is not afraid to go there: explore the timeless themes of religion, ethnic rifts, corruption, abuse, pain and privilege. The film plays for 2 hours but there is enough suspense and laugh-till-your-sides-hurt humour to keep you at the edge of your seat".

Efeturi Doghudje of 360Nobs commended the character development, praised the performance of Demola Adedoyin, and the costume design. She rated the film 9 out of 10, and concluded: "Script writer Tunde Babalola, was incredible, as October 1, was much more than just an entertaining feature, it was deep, intense and had that suspense that got us in the hall talking. Asides attention to detail, Babalola paid as much attention to the script trying to relive the experience of the 1960s and tying it perfectly to the British way of governing us, our tribal issues and our eventual independence.

Amarachukwu Iwuala of Pulse NG praised the subtle themes in the film, while noting Kayode Olayi as the highlight performance, and concluded that although "October 1 is not fast-paced, the action nonetheless unravels at a rate that keeps everyone in suspense.

The film aptly integrates several interesting subplots; smartly employing subtext and irony. This 140-minute picture is another feat for Nollywood".

Augustine Ogwo of News Wire comments: "October 1 is brilliant, thought-provoking and timeless. October 1 preaches the truth and it does so from an artistic point of view. Kudos must be given to Tunde Babalola for writing such an amazing script and also to the producer/director of this movie for breathing life into the story. October 1 is such a good movie that it has the power to plunge every well meaning Nigerian into a reflective mood and possibly positive action".

Isabella Akinseye of Nolly Silver Screen gave a mixed review; while praising the cinematography and generally the production, she talked down on the plot and scripting. She rated the film 3.4 out of 5 stars and commented: "As a film that attempts to teach Nigeria's history through entertainment, Kunle Afolayan's October 1 gets a pass. Brand Nigeria is depicted in the language, props and footage, but the problem with the film is that it tries to do too many things".

However, the focus of this paper is not how well the film was delivered for audience consumption alone, rather the purpose here, is to 'read' the movie as an independent 'text' and identify semiotic elements therein.

STYLE AND FORM

FILM SYNOPSIS

October 1 is set at the threshold of Nigerian independence. Inspector Danladi Waziri is summoned by the District Officer Robert Winterbottom and saddled with the task of unraveling the mystery behind the murder of two women in Akote Town in Ibadan, before Independence Day.

The inspector and his assistant, Sergeant Sunday Afonja, reach a lot of dead ends. As the murder plague rises and five people turn up dead, it dawns on them that they are dealing with a hardened serial killer. In the course of the events that follow, other innocent lives are lost. A British-bound Corporal Omolodun is killed when faced with the killer. A Hausa traveler (a suspect) who finds himself in the middle of the quagmire is wrongly targeted.

The murderer gives himself away, however, when unlikely clues point to an unsuspected person: Prince Aderopo, Oba Akote's only son. In an attempt to rape and kill his last victim,

Miss Bisi Tawa (a schoolteacher and former classmate), the killer leaves tracks that reveal his potential hideout.

In the process of attempting to escape and trying to kill Koya (a farmer and childhood friend), he is finally shot by the inspector as he refuses to surrender.

THE CAST AND CHARACTERS

According to Afolayan, care had to be taken during casting as it is one of the key areas that could make or break a film like October 1. The audition for the film which took place on 6 June 2013 at Golden Effects Studios in Ikeja recorded over 1000 people in attendance.

The lead character of Dan Waziri posed a challenge; a Northerner is needed to play the role, and Afolayan stated that there is a particular "look" that has been associated with people of the sixties. He also pointed out that he needed an actor who could not only speak Hausa, but would represent the ethnic group as well. No one seemed to tick these essential boxes, until Sadiq Daba came to mind.

The character of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti is also a key aspect of the casting; according to Afolayan, he had to research on the Kutis for some time in order to learn about some dominant physical features that might be common with the family. He also announced it on Twitter that he was looking for an actress with close resemblance to the late Funmilayo Kuti, but to no avail.

When the director met designer, Deola Sagoe for the costume design of the film, he would always "see this round face like the Kutis" and he eventually asked her out on the role

Kunle Afolayan like in his previous films featured in October 1 as a farmer with the name Agbekoya. For his role, he had to leave his hair for sometime in order to let it just grow and got a temporary tribal mark. He also stated in an interview with Toni Kan and Peju Akande on Africa Magic that some other actors were also asked to leave their hair and beard for about a year for the film.

It might also be helpful underscore that in order to provide a more realistic presentation, the producers and directors went all length to make sure that the pronunciations and accents of the characters are compatible with the era portrayed.

Major characters: Sadiq Daba as Inspector Danladi Waziri, Kayode Aderupoko as Inspector Sunday Afonja, Demola Adedoyin as Prince Aderopo, Kehinde Bankole as Miss Tawa, Kunle Afolayan as Agbekoya, Fabian Adeoye Lojede as Corporal Omolodun.

SETTING

Shot in Lagos State and Ilara-Mokin, a small village in Ondo State. Interestingly, the film presents an accurate portrayal of the era of its narrative: the 1960s. It is revealed that some shots take place at Federal College of Agriculture, Akure and few neighboring villages around Akure. Lagos and Akure have the perfect locations that portray the intended information such as the cocoa farm. This is symbolic because Nigeria's cocoa export in the 1960s came from the western region of the country, particularly Akure in Ondo State.

The film was shot using RED cameras. Modern inventions captured during principal photography were all digitally removed during post-production. Principal photography

ended in September 2013 after 42 days of shoot. Their sets were amazing. They were so realistic, with details like we were in the 60s. It might also give more information to the younger generation what the 60s looked like.

Likewise, the archetypical market, men and women buying and selling, women dressed in Adire and several Yoruba attire, display of adire fabric, and the voice of a town crier heard in the market are easily associated with the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. Thus, these distinct elements are converged as a signifier, to 'construct' a Yoruba location in the mind of the audience.

LIGHTING

According to Cathrine Kellison, Dustin Morrow & Kacey Morrow, lighting is an essential tool for enhancing the video image. The subtle use of light creates atmosphere and mood, dimension, and texture. It can help to convey a plot line, enhance key elements such as set color or skin tone, and signals the difference between comedy and drama, reality and fantasy.

The chosen section of the film mostly portrayed the darkness of Prince Aderopo, against his famous white suit. Additionally, lighting was perfectly used to portray every scene in the film, right from the opening scene to the last scene of the film.

It emphasizes on the vast and intricate dangerous area, full of evils. Dim lights, pale gleams and numerous techniques of eye catching features gives the preferred reading that this is full of suspense, fear, thrill, magic, excitement, adventure and emotions.

PROPS

The era of the film's narrative ostensibly informed the props that are used. Cars seen in the movie the antiquated model of Volkswagen for example rightly reflect the type of automobile that plied Nigerian roads in the 1960s. That all the antiquated cars shown are right-hand drive attest to the filmmaker's attention to details.

The history was so rich adding footage of the Queen's visit to Nigeria, the Independence Day speeches from Obafemi Awolowo and Tafawa Balewa, the pictures of the Queen, Flag of Great Britain, Nigerian Flag, Old and New Nigerian Anthem, the President of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe further raised the bar for this production.

Costumes were on point, with Deola Sagoe the international acclaimed fashion designer taking the reign for the dexterity and art that went into it and second only to Half of a Yellow Sun. The props were extremely good for a Nigerian production, from the use of the old model cars (although they were left wheel as against right wheel which we used during that era), to the buses, trains, bicycles, bush lamps, touch lights and the alarm clock that didn't seem to go past 10:10 (whether am or pm).

Other props in the movie which lend credibility to the era portrayed include: transistor radios, gramophone, land telephones, typewriter, paraffin lanterns, Yoruba delicacies, crucifix, Hymn, whistle and guns.

Meanwhile, spectacles or glasses, beyond being a pair of lenses worn to correct eye-vision defects, aroused connotatively in the movie. Not many characters used glasses; Deola Sagoe as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Colin David Reese as Reverend Dowling had their glasses

on at different points in the movie. By this, glasses take a symbolic form to signify intellectualism.

FRAMING, PERSPECTIVE, CAMERA MOVEMENTS AND EDITING

All the above cinematography goes hand in hand to make the audience feel like the fellowship of the scenes. The dramatic increase in tempo, super close-ups, medium close-ups, fading, Zooming, tracking, panning and hand-held images are cleverly manipulated.

Camera shots such as close-ups, medium shots and long shots are varied in the movie to convey dramatic actions and influence the audience interpretation of those actions. Close-up shots are used in particular scenes to exhibit intimacy between the characters in focus.

For instance, close-up shots in the film capture familial relationships: scenes where Prince Aderopo and Miss Tawa were mingling on the field; whenever Inspector Waziri and Sergeant Afoja are having a conversation; where the Chief Priest was warning the King and his chiefs.

Close-up shots also perform the function of capturing the facial reactions or expressions of characters in the movie. In the opening scene, as Prince Aderopo was sexually assaulting the young lady, there is a close-up on her to reveal the pain and tears flowing down. This shot helps the audience deduce that a lot of pain and sorrow goes with rape as a sexual assault.

Long shots in the movie are used to define the setting or location- such as market, church and the cocoa farm in focus. This camera shot is also used to show the effect of the Independence Day celebration in the scene as people were dancing and jubilating.

Music plays a part in depicting the era the movie is set. The local music and tunes heard in the movie are basically highlife music which gained popularity during the 1960s, while the foreign tunes and music used are also reflective of that era.

SOUND AND MUSIC

The sound effects and music, simply put, had my jaws hanging open from beginning to end. Examples are a great noise, feet sounds, cries.

Musical tunes convey the mood of certain scenes in the movie. For example, "*The Hymn*", which was Prince Aderopo's signature, is heard in the scene where he was about to perpetrate his evil act and the hymn also assisted the inspector to identify the killer. The tune gives a melancholy mood to the scene and would easily draw the sympathy of a viewer to the scene.

Sound is also used as an omen for impending tragedy or mishap. For instance, the sound effect opening the scene where Prince Aderopo sexually assaulted the young lady. Through this sound, the minds of the audience are fore-braced for the eventuality the scene would bring forth.

From the evidence of some scenes, the director employs sound as an indexical sign. In two separate scenes, the young is shown momentarily on the floor helplessly while the panting sound of Aderopo is heard and the cry of the young lady. The panting sound suggests force and anger rather than pleasure, while the crying sound of the lady suggest pain rather than pleasure.

Though seen, the audience can deduce further, the experience attached to the act of rape.

Other musical tunes used were: "Sunny Sunny Day" Yvonne Denobis, "Mama E" Victor Abimbola Olaiya, "Ba Ko Daya" Victor Abimbola Olaiya.

COSTUMES AND MAKE-UP

All forms of realism are made possible through these artistic creativities, which are appropriate for the time and characters intended. The profile of characters in the movie is substantiated through the appropriate use of costumes and make-up. Also made apparent through costumes and make-up is the social class of characters.

One could tell from the initial scenes that Mrs Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and Prince Aderopo belong to the affluent class of the Nigerian society by their dresses, jewelry, hairdos and face make-up. Some of the actors had to wear tribal marks, their cultural attire and keep their hair or have it barbed in a manner that portrays their characters.

SIGNS: SIGNIFIERS AND SIGNIFIED IN SELECTED SCENES

According to Saussure, a sign consists of a signifier (the form which the sign takes) and the signified (the concept or values it represents). In the selected scene, a variety of signs have been employed to construct the preferred meaning.

These signs include audio signs (dialogue, music and sound effects), facial expression, gestures, colour, lighting, editing (length of shots and slow-motion), camera angles,

movement and distance and symbolism. For the purpose of organization and convenience, only important signifiers are chosen for discussion.

“Danny Boy” as a signifier

In the scenes where Inspector Waziri is called Danny Boy by the colonial masters at any point of their interaction, bring that to our contemporary society, the word boy is often used to either signify the individual’s low level and suggesting the superiority of the caller.

In other words, the Inspector was portrayed like a puppet, tool, inferior and a call boy to the colonial masters.

Sound and Music as signs

The background music represents triumph and victory as they celebrate the Independence Day in the scene. In the opening scene where the young lady was chased by the Prince Aderopo, there are sound effects of hurrying feet, underscoring the tension that prevails. Sounds of gunshots further signify the burial of Corporal Omolodun as a police officer. Hymns from the church also played significantly.

Symbolic Signs

Due to its arbitrary nature, the meanings to symbolic signs are learned. In the movie, the red, blue and white flag is associated to Great Britain, likewise green and white flag to Nigeria as

a country. The portrait of Queen of England also symbolizes her dominance over the territory and towards the end of the film, during the Independence Day the portrait of Queen of England was removed and replaced with that of the President of Nigeria Nnamdi Azikiwe. This further symbolizes change of power from the colonial masters to the indigenous governance.

Interestingly, it is ubiquitously known among Nigerians that certain tribal marks are associated to the Yoruba ethnic group, while the crucifix also represents the Christian religious group.

Evidently, the film pays particular attention to the use of symbols to depict and pass necessary information to the audience, for instance certain signs found on the victims gave the Inspector major clue and idea of who the killer is and the connection between the victims.

Iconic Signs

These are the literal signs and codes: a police means a police. They are meant to appear like the thing itself. However, they always represent *more* than just the thing itself. Archived footage of Obafemi Awolowo and Tafawa Balewa speeches and news footages before and during the Independence Day are all shown to create cinematic timelines in the movie. These footages stamp some impression of realism on the film.

Indexical Signs

Nuances of indexical signs are revealed in different scenes of the movie, but the film's beginning and climax is most prominent in this regard. The search for Prince Aderopo and

Miss Tawa by the Inspector Waziri's team revealed a lot. For instance Prince Aderopo point to the hut with lantern outside it. The lantern indicate that there is someone inside as understand by the Headmaster. Likewise, while the Inspector and others are in the farm for the search, the use of lantern and torchlight inform the audience that they are searching for something.

CONCLUSION

The success of a film in conveying the desired message depends on the carefully selected signs as opposed to other signs within the same paradigm, as well as the meaningful combination of those signs to build a comprehensive whole. This requires creativity and sensitivity from the part of the filmmaker.

It is also evident from the above discussion that certain signs are shared by many media texts and some are unique to a specific medium such as tracking shot (the movement of the camera).

In sum, the signs employed by filmmaker Kunle Afolayan in constructing his media text can be categorized into the following:

Social codes

Dress, make-up, gestures and language of characters inform us of the characters' social class or importance.

Technical codes

Camera angles, lightings, sounds and music lead to the strong expectations of the film and signify the genre of the programme; here the film is not a documentary or sitcom. They also affect our mood.

Representational codes

The dialogs and the narrative structure are different from other forms of genres. They make us feel what the director wants us to feel. Televisual codes constitute a kind of 'language' and we all learn how to interpret signs and symbols in order to put meaning to what we see. This process takes place orally and visually, and does not differ from what we do in perceiving reality in everyday life which makes the task of analyzing a film a challenging yet an insightful experience.

REFERENCES

Ferdinand de Saussure 1915, course in general linguistics, 2ND ed, New York, Hill Book

Company.

Harry Jamieson 2007. Visual communication.1st ed. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

John Fisk .1990. Introduction to communication Studies .2nd ed. New York: Routledge.

Joseph Turow 2009, Media Today , 3rd ed , UK , Routledge .Hadumod Busmann 1996.

J.A Cuddon 1998, the penguin Dictionary of literary Terms and literary Theory, 4th ed. London: Penguin books.

Klaus Bruhn Jensen 2002, A handbook of media and communication research, 1st ed. London, Routledge.

Oxford advanced learner's dictionary .2000. 6th ed .Oxford: Oxford University Press1

Roland Barthes 1968. Elements of semiology.1st ed. New York: Hill and Wang.4

Routledge dictionary of language and linguistics 1st ed. New York. Routledge.

Sibhan Chapman, Christopher Routledge 2009.Key Ideas in Linguistics and Philosophy of Language. Edinburg. Edinburg University Press

Tolson, A. (1996). Mediation: Text and Discourse in Media Studies. London: Arnold.