

## **Ideology in Nigerian Cinema: Theory and Praxis**

**By**

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### ***Abstract***

*Ideology in the study of film and media, offers intellectual explanation of the society and its politics geared towards bringing a political action for change using cultural texts and practices. Thus, the interrelationship between ideology and film as cultural product cannot be over emphasized. This essay examines the ideology, culture and hegemony debates as praxis for the exploration of texts and practices of popular culture and mass media. It is not repetitive of moribund ideas dominating current discourse on ideology; rather, it reviews literature on ideology from Althusser to Gramsci and links ideology to the Nigerian cinema. This paper aims at providing a methodological frame for the analysis, survey and ideological criticism of film and media in Nigeria. It is found that the audiences of Nigerian video films interpret ideologies differently based on their individual perceptions because they are hyphenated and so, cannot organise a convocation to discuss, agree and implement an identity or ideology.*

**Keywords:** *Ideology, Marxism, Althusser, Gramsci, Film, Nollywood, Popular Culture.*

### **Introduction**

Ideology is an important conceptual category in the exploration of films' meaning productions. Every film is argued to have an ideological project,

be it social, economic, religious or political agenda. "Ideology first appeared in English in 1796, as a direct translation of the new French word *ideologic* which had been proposed in that year by the rationalist philosopher Destutt de Tracy" (Williams, 1983, pp. 153-154). Tracy while reading a paper chose 'ideology' as a word for 'the philosophy of the mind' and defined ideology as the 'science of the formation of ideas.' The term 'ideology' later came to be principally associated with the broad tradition of Marxism. A 1986 survey by McLellan posits that ideology is the most elusive concept in the whole of social sciences and the humanities, vis-à-vis its contestation.

In *A Dictionary of Cultural and Critical Theory*, Payne and Barbera provide four drastically oversimplifying conceptions of ideology, whether in the Marxist or Non-Marxist tradition. These exclusive parameters, although broad in nuance, are essential for the understanding of the concept of ideology and the critical debate it generates:

- (i) the epistemologically *negative* – ideology as a type of distorted, false thought (for example, the "consciousness" of human subjects in capitalist society);
- (ii) the socially *relative* – ideology as any set of opinions, beliefs, attitudes (for example, the "world view" of a social group or class);
- (iii) the *restricted* – "theoretical ideology" (a more or less conscious system of ideas);
- (iv) the *expanded* – "practical ideology" (the more or less unconscious medium of habitual behaviour) (2010, p. 340).

The first has to do with the accounts offered by Marx and Engels; the second is the innovation after Marx, and which features in Lukacs's Hegelian Marxism and in Mannheim's critique of the *parti pris* of historical *materialism*; the third encompass the previous two, and existed in philosophico-political controversies up to the 1960s whereas; the fourth is the inspiration from Marx as developed by Gramsci, and elaborated by Althusser.

The predominant aim of Marxism is to bring about a classless society. By this approach, Marx (1963, p. 93) argued that “the ideas of the ruling class are, in every age, the ruling ideas: i.e. the class, which is the dominant material force in society, is at the same time its dominant intellectual force.” The possibility of this lies in the argument that “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production.” So, “the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are, in general, subject to” the ruling ideas, while “the individuals composing the ruling class...rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age. Consequently their ideas are the ruling ideas of the age” (as cited in Strinati, 2004, p. 120).

Where other philosophers try to understand and interpret the world, Marxists seek to change it through a revolutionary theory of Marxism. The simplest Marxist model of the society is based on certain assumptions about the relationship between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure.’ Base basically denotes the material means of production, distribution and exchange, while the superstructure consists of institutions, be they cultural, political, legal, educational, religious, et cetera, and the definite forms of social consciousness generated by these institutions. “What Marx is suggesting is that the way a society organizes the means of its economic production will have a determining effect on the type of culture that society produces or makes possible” (Storey, 2009, p. 3). The result is the ideology of the cultural products of this so-called base/superstructure relationship which implicitly or explicitly uphold the interests of dominant groups who, socially, politically, economically and culturally, benefit from this imbalanced economic classification of society. “On the one hand, the superstructure both expresses and legitimates the base. On the other, the base is said to ‘condition’ or ‘determine’ the content and form of the superstructure” (Storey, 2009, p. 60).

It is on this relationship that the Marxist notion of ‘culture’ as *economic determinism* is centred. By this, “Marxist literary criticism

maintains that a writer's social class, and its prevailing 'ideology' (outlook, values, tacit assumptions, half-realised allegiances, etc.) have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class" (Barry, 2002, p. 107). In other words, this mechanical relationship of some sort of cause and effect produces a 'reflective theory' of culture "in which the politics of a text or practice are read off from, or reduced to, the economic conditions of its production" (Storey, 2009, p. 60). Hence, instead of viewing the author as *auteur* (autonomously 'inspired' individual whose 'genius' and creative imagination enables him/her to bring forth original and timeless works of art), the Marxist sees the text as a product of the author's social contexts, even in ways the author would usually not admit.

The notion of ideology and culture seem universal, national and natural but are actually historically specific models used to legitimate a given social order. Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, Vol. 5 of the *Collected Works* conceive ideology as a "system of illusory beliefs, arising out of the economic infrastructure, which generates, in the brain, an understanding of the world that is an inversion of reality" (as cited in Kellner, 1981, p. 84). Marxists tend to follow the "classical" Marx-Engels view that ideology functions to maintain the hegemony of the ruling class by legitimating the dominant mode of production, institutions and values. Kellner argues that:

Althusserians wish to formulate a "scientific" concept of ideology, whereas Lukacs, Gramsci, the Frankfurt School and others criticize ideologies of scientism and positivism. Reich Gabel and some of the Althusserians discussed by *Summer* attempt to develop the psychological aspects of the concepts of ideology, while Poulantzas and Laclau develop concepts of political ideology from positions close to Althusser. Marcuse, Kosik and others... develop theories of ideology and culture" (1981, p. 85).

## Thoughts on Ideology: From Althusser to Gramsci

The concept of ideology is variedly defined to suit different cultural studies and Marxist approaches. What follows is a summary of seven random and interrelated definitions of ideology especially in relation to film.

1. Firstly, and as argued by John Storey, ideology refers to “a systematic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people.” For instance, when one speaks of ‘professional ideology,’ it could refer to the ideas which inform the practices of particular professional groups like the medical profession. Similarly, the “ideology of the Labour Party would be referring to the collection of political, economic and social ideas that inform the aspirations and activities of the Party” (2009, p. 2).
2. A second definition of ideology “refers to the ways in which individuals within a particular class make sense of, manage, and represent the social relations of production and class struggle to themselves; dominant ideologies are those formed by the ruling class and can be coercive and repressive in nature” (Ryan, 2011, p. 73).
3. A third definition of ideology is developed by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser in the 1970s and early 1980s. Althusser’s focal argument is “to see ideology not simply as a body of ideas, but as a material practice. What he means by this is that ideology is encountered in the practices of everyday life and not simply in certain ideas about everyday life” (Storey, 2009, pp. 4-5).
4. Ideology, for Lukács, “is a form of false consciousness that arises whenever the subjective consciousness of a specific class (typically, the ruling class) is taken to be the objective consciousness of society at large” (as cited in, Castle, 2007, p. 110). As we shall see, the Italian Neo-Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci refined this view and rather proposed a two-tier structure of the dominant and subordinate groups.
5. A fifth definition of ideology relates the term to ‘ideological forms.’ This approach is “intended to draw attention to the way in which

texts (television fiction, pop songs, novels, feature films, etc.) always present a particular image of the world." This description depends on a "notion of society as conflictual rather than consensual, structured around inequality, exploitation and oppression. Texts are said to take sides, consciously or unconsciously, in this conflict." By this, all texts are deemed 'political' by the manner in which they offer "competing ideological significations of the way the world is or should be" (Storey, 2009, p. 4).

6. Closely linked with the fourth and fifth definitions, Raymond Williams a key voice in cultural studies explains ideology in diverse ways; (i) as the "general process of the production of meanings and ideas" and (ii) as "a complex and multivalent phenomenon". He argues that ideology can refer not only to (iii) "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group" but also to "a system of illusory beliefs" (Lukács called this "false consciousness") in contrast with "true or scientific reality," the discovery of which is the function of MATERIALIST criticism. By this, ideology is used to indicate a certain masking, distortion or concealment of reality by some texts and practices to produce a sort of 'false consciousness.' Williams adds that in spite of the difficulties in formulating a singular definition of ideology, it is necessary to arrive at a general term (iv) "to describe not only the products but the processes of signification, including the signification of values." He concludes by reemphasizing that (v) ideology is "the dimension of social experience in which meanings and values are produced" (as cited in, Castle, 2007, p. 111).
7. A seventh definition of ideology is one associated with the early work of the French cultural theorist Roland Barthes. Barthes argues that ideology (or 'myth' as Barthes himself calls it) operates mainly at the level of connotations which can be identified. Ideology is the hidden, often unconscious meanings that texts and practices carry, or can be made to carry. "His theory of ideology seems more in tune

with crude Marxist versions of the concept in that the myths of film are viewed as serving the interests of a bourgeois class" (Strinati, 2004, pp. 107-108).

In relation to the study of the ideological nature of the cinema, the influence of the Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser (1918-1990) is very important in French Marxism, and on the course of cultural theory. The general purport of his approach is to offer a more subtle view of how the society works than the method proposed by Karl Marx and Engels. "Hence, the attraction of Althusser to recent Marxist critics is that he offers ways of by-passing the crude base/superstructure model without giving up the Marxist perspective altogether" (Barry, 2002, p. 111).

As a result of his 'revisionist Marxism' which is more flexible, his theories soon reigned supreme in the political interpretation of the cinema on international journals like *Cahiers du Cinema*, *Cinethique* and *Positif* (all three are French journals), as well as *Movie*, *Screen*, *Sight and Sound* (for the English). Most theories of film aimed at evaluating the concepts of ideology and culture and their relation to the cinema, have been framed basically on the ideological notions of Louis Althusser and meshing them with psychoanalysis, semiology or both. Many of these have over time turned to be "eclectic, superficial and furthermore, even misunderstand the basic argument proffered by Althusser" (Tomaselli, 1983, p.1).

In all of these, the interrelationship between ideology and film as cultural product cannot be over emphasized. "Ideology remains the single most important conceptual category in cultural studies – even if it remains one of the most contested" (Turner, 2003, p. 167). Althusser himself used culture and ideology interchangeable in his 1970 work, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." Whereas Althusser's essay has influenced several other scholars during and after his time such as Jean Louis Baudry, he too borrowed freely from the works and influence of world celebrated scholars such as Marx, Engels, Freud, Lacan, and Gramsci to name a few.

Althusser's efforts to build upon the theory of ideology on the basis of what could be termed a structuralist interpretation of Marxism, earned

him his critical reputation. At their simplest, Althusser's objectives are to establish Marxism as a science and to rid it of economic determinism. By trying to resolve theoretical problems Marx, in particular, left unresolved, Althusser develops a theory of ideology "by building on Marx's concept of the reproduction of the social relations of production" (Strinati, 2004, p.137). Some important points can be taken from Althusser's essay on ideology and these points are equally essential to the understanding of subsequent theses of Louis Baudry and Christian Metz.

Firstly, and as argued by Tomaselli, the pre-eminent question for Althusser was the way in which class societies reproduce themselves (1983, p.3). For Althusser, ideological state apparatuses differ from repressive state apparatuses even though each functions with the other. Repressive state apparatuses are those institutions of government which ensure there is smooth running of public services like the military, the prison, the courts, social and child welfare agencies. In addition to the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs), Althusser postulated additional state mechanisms: the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), such as churches, public and private schools, the institutions of the family, political parties, trade unions, the mass media as well as cultural institutions (Althusser, 2006, p.336). Althusser argues further that it is immaterial whether these ISAs juridically belonged to the state or to private enterprise, since what matters is how they function; private institutions can perfectly well function as ideological state apparatuses. It is ideology that makes these apparatuses function to reproduce submission to the rules of the established order, "to give currency to the world view of the ruling classes and to make the dominant ideology the 'common sense' of all the classes within the social formation" (Tomaselli, 1983, p.3).

Althusser goes further to provide abstract accounts of ideology which, for our concerns here, involve three related points: that "ideology is a representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence"; that it is a material force in societies and that it "interpellates" individuals as subjects within particular ideologies. The first



formulation which “concerns the object which is represented in the imaginary form of ideology,” overlaps in some way with the second which “concerns the materiality of ideology” (Althusser, 2006, p. 338). The first is more complex and “most difficult to grasp” (Strinati, 2004, p. 140). For Althusser, what people represent to themselves in ideology is not their real world as such but their relationship to the real world. “There are real conditions and there are the ways we represent these conditions to ourselves and to others” (Storey, 2009, pp. 71-72).

According to Althusser, reality is concealed such that an individual sees that reality as if through an imaginary filter. By imaginary, not only in the illusory sense, but also as a pre-linguistic order dominated by images; Althusser draws inspiration from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of the “mirror stage” and weaves ideology into it. Jacques Lacan in his essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function and as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” argues that at ages six (6) and eighteen (18) months, a child develops a sense of his/her individual self as different from his/her “other” image in the mirror. The body, in the mirror, is of course an imaginary one which is split from the body’s real condition of existence.

Following Althusser’s new concept, ideology sets in place an imaginary relation to the real condition of existence. Althusser’s second formulation suggests that “ideology has a material existence” (Althusser, 2006, p. 340). He opposes those who posit that ideology exists merely as an idea or set of ideas in people’s minds, and “is thus less real than society’s material base and its associated class power and alienation” (Strinati, 2004, p. 141). It is this particular definition of ideology that has had a significant impact on cultural studies and popular culture.

According to Storey, “Althusser uses the analogy of a police officer hailing an individual: ‘Hey, you there!’ When the individual hailed turns in response, he or she has been interpellated, has become a subject of the police officer’s discourse.” In this approach, “ideology is a material practice that creates subjects who are in turn subjected to its specific patterns of thought and modes of behaviour” (2009, p. 78). The imaginary relation is a material

relation/practice carried out by groups and institutions. Theorists such as Judith Williamson have argued that popular cinema is an ideological material practice, in that it represents an imaginary relationship to our real conditions of existence. An example is advertising which is ideological both in the way it functions and the effect it produces on the viewer. For a more detailed analysis of the ideological nature of advertising, see Storey (2009).

The third is Althusser's main point which argues that "ideology interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser, 2006, p. 343). For Althusser, people can hardly control this process of interpellation, and so, have no chance of avoiding it. To easily grasp this concept, Strinati alludes to instances of "what sociologists call socialization; the process by which individuals gradually learn to think and behave in ways common to the society in which they are brought up" (2004, p. 142). The subject is the principal mark of all ideology, and all ideologies work by taking individuals and placing them, that is, interpellating them as subjects within the framework of ideology. For instance, popular culture in modern societies "might be argued to function by taking individuals and placing them as consumers, their subject status being defined by their consumption patterns" (Strinati, 2004, p. 142).

In Althusser's view, to counter ideology is to reveal the manner in which the working classes are exploited by the bourgeoisie, and the task of doing this is through a 'scientific discourse.' In film for example, continuity editing, and the cast are to cover up the real relations of the conditions underlying production process. And to expose these, Althusser puts forward science as key. Science here means not physical sciences like chemistry and physics, but Marxism, psychoanalysis, philosophy and structuralism whose role is to uncover the real relations of the production process.

By this, some sort of a symptomatic reading (double reading from the manifest text to the absences) of the hidden meaning of the text should be performed with the aim of exposing the text's *problematic*—i.e. assumptions, underlying ideas, motivations, et cetera. Every text is

structured by the absent (what is left unsaid) as well as that which is present. So, Althusser proposes that for consumers to be aware of the full meaning of a text, they have to “be aware of not only what is in a text but also the assumptions which inform it (and which may not appear in the text itself in any straightforward way but exist only in the text’s problematic)” (as cited in Storey, 2009, p. 72).

Such symptomatic analysis of any filmic text for example, explores the formal and stylistic elements of the film in such a way as to create ideological stance, whether explicitly expressed or tacit. Understanding a film’s ideology, according to Bordwell and Thompson (2010), “typically involves analysing how form and style create meaning” (p. 437), and the meaning of a film can be conveyed in four different ways: *referential, explicit, implicit, and symptomatic*. Whichever way, many meanings of films are inherently ideological because they are social phenomena and structures of specific cultural beliefs about the universe. In this approach, **ideology** is *the explicit or tacit expression of a particular set of values (social, economic, religious, political, cultural etc.) in order to gain universal or mass recognition and acceptance*. Ideology therefore is a system of ideals and ideas, especially one which forms the basis of economic, social or political theory and policy. It is a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group or culture.

Pierre Macherey (1978), who has undeniably taken the most sustained attempt at applying the technique of the Althusserian symptomatic reading to cultural texts, argues in this same line that the text contains more meaning in what is left unsaid, pointing that “what is important in the work is what it does not say” (p. 87). Storey (2009) summarizes Machereyan critical practice thus:

All narratives contain an ideological project: that is, they promise to tell the ‘truth’ about something. Information is initially withheld on the promise that it will be revealed. Narrative constitutes a movement towards disclosure. It begins with a truth promised

and ends with a truth revealed. To be rather schematic, Macherey divides the text into three instances: the ideological project (the 'truth' promised), the realization (the 'truth' revealed), and the unconscious of the text (produced by an act of symptomatic reading): the return of the repressed historical 'truth'. 'Science', he claims, 'does away with ideology, obliterates it; literature challenges ideology by using it. If ideology is thought of as a non-systematic ensemble of significations, the work proposes a *reading* of these significations, by combining them as signs. Criticism teaches us to read these signs' (p. 76).

Admittedly, Marxist film criticism might well be immediately accepted as self-evidently true, especially in the tenet that the nature of cinema is influenced by the economic circumstances in which it is produced. However, the question according to Peter Barry (2002) lies entirely in;

Deciding how close the influence is. Are you going to adopt a 'determinist' position, and argue that literature is the passive product of socio-economic forces, or do you take a more 'liberal' line and see the socio-economic influence as much more distant and subtle? Your main difficulty will be to show the operation of these economic forces (no matter whether you take the 'strong' or the 'weak' model) in a given literary work. What exactly do directly operating, or indirectly operating socio-economic forces look like in a literary work? (p. 112).

Jean Louis Baudry advances Althusser's theory of ideology to the cinema. For Baudry, the Hollywood cinema is resolutely ideological. He explains in his 1970 essay "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" that although "the camera records a series of static and

fragmented images, the projection of these images on a screen restores the illusion of continuous movement and linear succession" (Corrigan, White & Mazaj, 2011, p. 34). Baudry's argument is that one overriding reason to conceive of the cinematographic apparatus as being ideological is that it is geared towards denying differences in favour of unity (Baudry, 1992, p. 38). The illusion of unity is created by concealing how different segments of the film are coupled together. For him, the apparatus achieves this in 3 ways: through the screen mirror; through movement, continuity and unity and; through perspective and monocular vision.

Apparatus theory, which is largely borrowed from Marxism, psychoanalysis and semiotics, avers that the cinematographic apparatuses of representation such as the camera, editing, and projection that capture and record optical imageries are ideological devices. The cinema with its spectator connectivity within the perspective of the composition is also ideological. These apparatuses claim to present before the eyes and ears realistic images and sounds, whereas the technology of production masks how that reality has been coupled together frame by frame.

The true nature of film, the way the spectator is configured, and the technicalities of the actual process of film production are all a process leading to transformation. According to Jean-Louis Baudry (1992), "the question becomes: is the work made evident, does consumption of the product bring about a 'knowledge effect,' or is the work concealed? If the latter, consumption of the product will obviously be accompanied by ideological surplus value" (p. 303). Apparatus theory explicitly states that within the text's perspective, the central position of the viewer is ideological. This effect is ideological because it is a concealed reality and not a factual reality as such.

The apparatus theory argues that "between objective reality and the camera, site of inscription, and between the inscription and the projection are situated certain operations, a *work* which has as its result a finished product" (Baudry, 1992, p. 303; italics in original). The finished product is such that the viewer does not realize a rigorous amount of work was done,

and that the product (film) is a fabrication and not reality per se. This is the point ideology comes into this theory as the passive Nollywood audience for instance, cannot make a clear cut distinction between the world of cinema and the real world. These mass of viewers relate with the happenings on screen so strongly that they become susceptible to ideological positioning.

In Jean-Louis Baudry's theory of the apparatus in the "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," he likens the movie-goer to someone in a dream. According to him, "projection and reflection take place in a closed space, and those who remain there, whether they know it or not (but they do not), find themselves chained, captured, or captivated" (1992, p. 309). By this, he relates the similarities of being in a darkened room, having someone else control your actions/what you do, and the inactivity and passivity of the two activities. He argues further that because movie-goers are not distracted by external factors like outside light, noise, etc., due to the closed nature of the cinema, they are able to experience the film closely as if it were reality and they were participating in the events themselves. He relates the cinema viewing experience of a striking mise-en-scene reproduction to Plato's *allegory of the cave*.

Plato in "The Allegory of the Cave" (2011) demonstrates the effects of being in a darkened cave for a long time and how exposure to light becomes offensive and impossible to comprehend. "Though it was conceived centuries before the advent of film technology, Plato's philosophy has influenced the way many twentieth-century film scholars understand and interpret the movie image" (Corrigan, White & Mazaj, 2011, p. 5). Plato in this dialogue between Socrates and Glaucon which he (Plato) referred to as the allegory of the cave, argues a fundamentally idealist perspective that what we see in the world are mere projections, shadows and images of reality, and not reality of the world per se. Baudry used this as an analogy of the physical and psychological perspective spectators view movies.

Film theorists such as “Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry see in ‘The Allegory of the Cave’ an early philosophical model that helps explain a visual dynamics that blurs distinctions between reality and images, and allows films to distort the truth of our lives” (Corrigan, White & Mazaj, 2011, p. 6). For film scholars like Jean-Louis Baudry whose major interests lie in the areas of film spectatorship, psychoanalysis and ideological issues of film, Plato’s allegory of the cave provides a starting point for theorizing the position of the viewer in the cinema. Ideology is not imposed on cinema, but is part of its nature and it shapes the way the spectator reacts (Baudry, 1992, p. 312). Apparatus theory argues that cinema maintains the dominant ideology of the culture within the viewer as seen in Marxism. The resonant images of Nigerian video films continue to mediate mythic cultural values and thus evoke primitive responses in the mass audience. The audiences of Nigerian video films are heterogamous, rather than homogenous, and are drawn from all walks of life thereby transcending all forms of social, economic, religious and political strata. And since they are hyphenated (in Ajibade’s sense of the word), rather than monolithic, they are interpellated as subjects of the medium by the apparatuses of production, distribution and consumption.

The overall thought of Baudry’s essay is that there are basic apparatuses of the cinema that are idealized and used to drive home ideas of the ruling class to the masses. They are the camera, the screen, and projection. They constitute the subject as a “transcendental subject” who cannot make a clear distinction between themselves as free moralizing agents and the imaginary screen presented through projection. These are products of ideology.

Scholars are in agreement that Althusser’s theory encounters critical problems which limit its application to the study of popular culture (Barry, 2002; Kellner, 1981; Noel, 1992; Tomaselli, 1983; Story, 2009 & Strinati, 2004). Strinati sums these problems to include its “abstractness, its functionalism, its determinism and its neglect of conflict (2004, p. 148). According to Tomaselli, “the difficulties in applying Althusser’s theory lies in his level of

abstraction, while clarifying some theoretical issues, has the oft-noted effect of obscuring the concrete connections between the level of the ideological and the level of the economic" (1983, pp. 20-21). One of the preeminent problems with Althusser's model of ideology, and its application in cultural theory, according to Storey (2009),

Is that it seems to work too well. Men and women are always successfully reproduced with all the necessary ideological habits required by the capitalist mode of production; there is no sense of failure, let alone any notion of conflict, struggle or resistance. In terms of popular culture, do advertisements, for example, always successfully interpellate us as consuming subjects? Moreover, even if interpellation works, previous interpellations may get in the way (contradict and prevent from working) of current interpellations. Put simply, if I know that racism is wrong, a racist joke will fail to interpellate me. It was against this background of concerns that many working within the field of cultural studies turned to the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (p. 79).

Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) who was a vocal essayist and a leading political activist in the Italian Socialist Party, has been read as a channel for overcoming some of these problems, and has become more influential in the study of ideology and its direct application to film criticism. Gramsci's development of his most influential theme of hegemony, and his influence, define a peculiar approach to the study of popular culture which successfully deviates from the orthodox class-based formulations of Marxism and orthodox ideology. By this approach of hegemony theory, texts and practices of popular cinema are conflicting points of values, competing interests and fluctuating balances. According to Bennett (1986),



Where Gramsci departed from the earlier Marxist tradition was in arguing that the cultural and ideological relations between ruling and subordinate classes in capitalist societies consist less in the *domination* of the latter by the former than in the struggle for *hegemony* – that is, for moral, cultural, intellectual and, thereby, political leadership over the whole of the society – between the ruling class and, as the principal subordinate class, the working class (as cited in Turner, 2003, p. 178; italics in original).

Thus, for Gramsci, popular culture and the mass media are places where hegemony is produced, reproduced and transformed; “they are institutions of civil society which involve cultural production and consumption . . . . These institutions include education, the family, the church, the mass media, popular culture” (Strinati, 2004, pp. 156-157). Gramsci views hegemony as the site where dominant groups in society seek to win the consent of subordinate groups through a process of intellectual and moral leadership. “A class is dominant in two ways, i.e. ‘leading’ and ‘dominant’. It leads the classes which are its allies, and dominates those which are its enemies” (Gramsci, 2006, p. 85).

A class or social group exercises ‘leadership’ first even before attaining governmental power, and when it is in power, it becomes dominant while claiming to lead. The ideology here is that the interest and tendencies of subordinate groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, is taken into account through what Gramsci describes as ‘compromise equilibrium’ i.e., a concrete coordination of the interests of the dominant group and those of the subordinate groups. By this, the texts and practices of popular culture move within this compromise equilibrium by functioning as sites of struggle between the forces of ‘incorporation’ operating in the interests of dominant groups and the ‘resistance’ of subordinate groups. Graeme Turner expanding this view defines popular culture as,

A site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic – that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice – it is also political, to examine the power relations that constitutes this form of everyday life and reveal the configurations of interest its construction serves (2003, p. 5).

Antonio Gramsci, according to Tomaselli, has identified three key terms in the analysis of culture. The first of these is ‘common sense,’ which Gramsci refers to as “the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become ‘common’ in any given epoch.” The second is ‘ideology,’ which “can be thought of as a coherent set of ideas which have a limited ability to transform the way in which men and women live out common sense.” The third key term is ‘hegemony,’ which refers to a “situation in which a ruling class, or more precisely, an alliance of fractions of the ruling class is able not only to coerce the subordinate classes to conform to their interests, but to exert ‘total social authority’ over those classes” (Tomaselli, 1983, pp. 14-15).

Gramsci argues that the point of doing this cannot rest solely on force and coercion, rather, it must be attained in such a way that force does not predominate excessively over consent. In other words, the concept of hegemony refers to a process in which a dominant group does not merely rule a society but leads it through the exercise of “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci, 2006, p. 85). Thus, the dominant class attains its legitimacy not necessarily through coercion alone, but also through a method of consent that appears natural and inevitable. Hegemony is not a direct imposition of thought and action from above: it is always the result of negotiations between dominant and subordinate groups. Through a process of ‘resistance’ and ‘incorporation’, ideological assertions become self-evident and accepted as normal reality or common sense by all groups. Where such negotiations and concessions fail, and the subordinate class challenges the economic fundamentals of the ruling class, the dominant

group employs other means. In such extreme cases, the processes of hegemony are replaced with the coercive force of the state through repressive state apparatuses like the police, army, judicial system, etc.

Gramsci argues that popular culture and the mass media are accounted for by the concept of hegemony. For Hall, "popular culture is the site at which everyday struggles between dominant and subordinate groups are fought, won and lost. This is why popular culture matters" (Procter, 2004, p. 11). Using this Gramsci's theory of ideological hegemony, popular culture is what people make from their active consumption of the texts and practices of the culture industries like Nollywood. "Mass media are tools that ruling elites use to perpetuate their power, wealth, and status by popularizing their own philosophy, culture and morality" (Lull, 1995, p. 33). Hebdige (2005) explains this further when he argues that "youth cultural styles may begin by issuing symbolic challenges, but they must end by establishing new sets of conventions; by creating new commodities, new industries or rejuvenating old ones" (p. 357).

## **Conclusion**

The methodological approach of studying films from the perspective of ideology and hegemony theory builds on the argument that popular culture is a site of ideological struggle between dominant and subordinate groups, and between dominant and subordinate cultures. In Gramsci's view, "popular culture is the battleground upon which dominant views secure hegemony; further, it is a permanent battleground, the parameters of which are partly defined by economic conditions, but that specializes in political struggle expressed at an ideological, representational level" (Turner, 2003, p. 178). The texts and practices of popular culture can be conceived from ideological perspective and "analysed in many different configurations: class, gender, generation, ethnicity, race, region, religion, disability, sexuality" (Storey, 2009, p. 81).

Hegemony theory, as a praxis for the analysis of the ideological nature of film and cinema, creates an enabling approach of analysis of texts

and practices of popular culture, away from the history-stopping, imposed culture of political manipulation approach of the Frankfurt School, and the sign of social decline and decay approach of the 'culture and civilization' tradition. Also, it avoids the culturalism approach to popular culture as an inferior culture emerging extemporaneously from below, and the structuralism approach to popular culture as political apparatus which forces subjectivities on passive subjects. In plain terms, the Gramscian approach to popular culture differs from all of these in that it implies a response (Tomaselli, 1983, p. 12).

As earlier noted, the cinematographic apparatuses of camera, screen and projection are the conventions of cinematic language which filmmakers use to make the hidden messages of films concealed from viewers. This is because the ideology of film positions the viewer as subject of the medium, i.e. to remain perplexed by the imaginative worlds they have successfully created, and not get distracted by the technicalities of the production process. Thus, the filmmakers infuse the political, cultural and religious ideologies of the text in the aesthetic reinforcement of familiar or captivating sights and sounds.

According to Gocsik, Barsam and Monahan (2013), "the same commercial instinct that inspires filmmakers to hide their methods and mechanisms from our view also compels them to favour stories and themes that reinforce viewers' shared belief systems" (p. 50). Thus, the task of the ideological film critic is to expose the cultural indices and mechanisms of ideology in the basic cinematic processes. "A classical Marxist approach to popular culture would above all else insist that to understand and explain a text or practice it must always be situated in its historical moment of production, analysed in terms of the historical conditions that produced it" ((Storey, 2009, p. 61)). By so doing, the layers of implicit meanings which are consciously or unconsciously crafted are revealed through a process of 'reading' and 're-reading' (similar to the approach of Macherey). "The tools that scholars use to analyse films in this manner are borrowed from critical

theories first developed by social theorists, cultural critics, and philosophers” (Gocsik, Barsam & Monahan, 2015, pp. 51-52).

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