

# Sociological Portrayal of Lagos in Nigerian Cinema: A Multifaceted Analysis

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## Abstract

Lagos, Nigeria, renowned for its multicultural history, is explored in this article within the context of Nigerian cinema and sociological perspectives. This article investigates how Nollywood films depict Lagos using sociological theory that emphasizes representing society as it is. It begins with the city's historical evolution, emphasizing its role as Nigeria's entertainment capital and its impact on the film industry. The article underlines how Nollywood films influence perceptions of Lagos, advocating for balanced portrayals. It analyzes three Nollywood films to illustrate the city's diverse character. These films represent different facets of Lagos, showcasing its dynamic and diverse character. Findings from the study reveal that while some filmmakers aim to promote Lagos as an attractive and vibrant city, there is a need for a balanced representation of the city's various aspects. The article also addresses the ethical responsibility of filmmakers to inform viewers when a film is purely fictional or contains elements of reality. In conclusion, this article offers valuable insights into the sociological portrayal of Lagos in Nigerian cinema, highlighting the need for a more balanced and responsible depiction of this multicultural city. Ultimately, the article emphasizes the influence of film on society and calls for thoughtful storytelling in a city with a dynamic, multicultural identity.

**Keywords:** Audience perception, Film depiction, Lagos portrayal and Sociology of film.

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## INTRODUCTION

Lagos, originally referred to as Oko, derived its name from the Oko farmland where the first settlers, fishermen in the region, established a village called Armoire. The appellation later evolved to Eko and subsequently to Lagos, bestowed by Portuguese traders due to perceived similarities with a coastal town in Portugal named Lagos de Kuramo (Lagos by the sea beach) (Kotun 15). From its inception, Lagos has exhibited a commercial orientation and a rich history of attracting diverse individuals from global locales, including Ghana, Togo, Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Benin Republic. The city also accommodates communities of Nupe, Hausa/Fulani, Niger, and Igbo origins. Renowned as the entertainment capital of Nigeria, Lagos thrives in arts, music, fashion, and film due to its extensive population, providing entertainers with a vast fan base and contributing to job creation through the city's abundant material and human resources, establishing it as a megacity.

This article delves into the cinematic facet of entertainment in Lagos, which has historically served as

the primary hub for film distribution in Nigeria, preceding other states like Kano and Asaba. According to Haydes (134), Lagos is pivotal to Nigeria's filmmaking and distribution, being the epicenter of industrial and commercial activities in the country. Although Nigerian films are produced in various locations such as Asaba, Aba, Onitsha, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, the marketing structure is predominantly centralized in Lagos. The city is the foundation of the Nigerian film industry, influencing the portrayal of Lagos by certain film producers, making it a desirable working location for entertainers.

This paper undertakes descriptive research on film sociology, exploring its impact on audiences. The motivation for this study arose from the pervasive perceptions about Lagos, exemplified during the author's visit to the eastern part of Nigeria. There, a prevailing notion portrayed Lagos as a realm of affluence where prosperity is abundant. This belief, traced back to Nollywood films, prompted an investigation into the origin of the Lagos state philosophy perpetuated through cinematic narratives. Films serve as a potent medium for depicting societal narratives, influencing public

perceptions both domestically and internationally. The author acknowledges personal attitudes towards certain countries shaped by cinematic portrayals, prompting the inquiry into how societies are represented in films.

This paper concentrates on films depicting Lagos state, given its status as an entertainment hub and a metropolitan city, aiming to illuminate the manner in which it is portrayed in Nigerian films. Employing a sociological theory emphasizing representation based on reality rather than idealization, the study seeks to unravel the nuances of Lagos' portrayal in the Nigerian cinematic landscape.

### **Reflections of Society: A sociological analysis of Lagos in contemporary Nollywood films**

According to Aristotle, the evolution of art transpired from imitating man during the classical period to mirroring society, as humans are inherently products of their societal milieu. Consequently, individuals cannot detach themselves from society, and this societal influence inevitably permeates their artistic expressions. Art, therefore, exists as a reflection of social relations, establishing an intricate relationship between art and society. In accordance with sociological theory, the essence lies in representing society as it is, rather than as an idealized construct. Sociological works concentrate on the societal environment in which characters dwell, its impact on them, and the social forces that govern their actions (Dictionary of Literary Terms).

The realm of film, as a form of art, aligns with this concept, portraying life and society. This study aims to assess the applicability of this notion to films, particularly those filmed in Lagos. As posited by Chukwu-Okonkwo, art achieves its true essence when it authentically mirrors the life of a given society, encompassing aspects such as culture, politics, and religion. Drama, as an extension of art, should derive its substance from the societal occurrences, emphasizing factual aspects of life rather than idealized representations. The overarching objective is to address societal issues and instigate reform or regeneration within the community (17).

While acknowledging the potency of art as a means of expression and tension alleviation, it is recognized that art, including film, is inherently subjective and potentially unreliable compared to other forms of expression. Matarasso notes the ubiquity of talent, creativity, and imagination, making it challenging to govern their application (2). Despite this, art remains a valuable tool that should not be compromised. In the context of film, designated as an art form, the contention arises concerning its representation of society. The pursuit of marketability often leads to embellishment, but the study advocates for a balance, suggesting that in non-fictionalized aspects, films should still authentically represent the culture they depict.

The specific societal context under examination in this study is Lagos state. Applying sociological theory to these films necessitates an understanding of the nature of the society portrayed to determine the extent to which the films authentically mirror it. Three Nollywood films; *The Wedding Party 1* by Mob Abudu, *Hire a Man* by Chinney LoveEze, and *The Ghost and the Tout* by Toyin Abraham; have been selected for examination to elucidate how Lagos is portrayed in these cinematic works. While recognizing Lagos as a brand that can be effectively and tastefully promoted, the study contends that the cinematic portrayal of Lagos should extend beyond its bustling aspects, encompassing a more comprehensive representation of the societal fabric.

### **Navigating Cultural Dynamics in a Lagos Wedding - A Cinematic Analysis of *The Wedding Party* Directed by Kemi Adetiba**

The romantic comedy drama directed by Kemi Adetiba unfolds a narrative intricately woven around the union of two families, one Igbo and the other Yoruba, who come together through the marriage of their children. At the core of the plot lies the wedding party, the events that precipitated the union, and the celebration itself. Adunni, a Yoruba woman, becomes the wife of Dozie, an Igbo man. The central conflict arises when Obianuju, Dozie's mother, expresses strong opposition to the marriage. She holds the belief that her son could have made a better choice in a life partner. Consequently, she participates in the wedding as the groom's mother but not as an enthusiastic mother-in-law. The film unfolds the challenges faced by Adunni and Dozie's love, triumphing over hurdles such as the awkward moment of a tong in Dozie's pocket on the way to the reception and the unexpected airing of a bachelor's party video during the reception.

Set against the backdrop of Lagos, the film captures the vibrancy and complexity of wedding festivities in the city, showcasing the journey from the church to the reception. It delves into various elements of the celebration, including decoration, food, theft, and the wedding planner's quest for success. The narrative essentially provides a cinematic exploration of what a Lagos wedding celebration entails, reflecting the diverse cultural elements, challenges, and joys that are integral to such occasions.

### **Lagos Unveiled: A Cinematic Celebration of Diversity, Entrepreneurship, and Cultural Harmony in *The Wedding Party 1***

From a sociological perspective, the film serves as an exhaustive exploration of the multifaceted nature of Lagos, portraying it as a megacity that encapsulates both dynamic and serene elements. Depicting Lagos as an ever-active metropolis, a hub of creativity and industry with a welcoming demeanor—the film strategically engages in positive promotion, presenting Lagos as a vibrant and dynamic brand. The cross-cultural

marriage between Adunni and Dozie serves as a testament to Lagos's inclusive nature, particularly as Dozie's parents, belonging to a different tribe, are portrayed as affluent individuals who have thrived in Lagos. Scenes featuring Efik dancers entertaining wedding guests further underscore Lagos's openness to diverse cultures, with both mothers appreciating the performance despite potential cultural misinterpretations.

The film adeptly showcases the vibrant creative and entrepreneurial landscape of Lagos, evident in various elements of the depicted wedding. Notable contributions from local entrepreneurs play a crucial role in capturing the essence of the city's dynamic spirit. The meticulous attention to detail extends from the choice of venue, the prestigious Eko Hotels and Suites, to the involvement of talented local professionals who leave an indelible mark on the wedding's aesthetics and execution.

Mai-Atafo, the visionary designer behind the wedding dress, contributes to the film's portrayal of Lagos's thriving fashion industry. Cakes by Tosan, responsible for the intricately designed cake, represents the excellence and creativity found in Lagos's culinary arts scene. Zaron Makeup, entrusted with the bride's makeup, showcases the city's vibrant beauty and cosmetics industry. Posh Secrets, Elife, and Heels.com collectively underscore the significance of local businesses in enhancing the overall aesthetics, providing the bride and groom with impeccably crafted lingerie, photography services, and stylish footwear.

The Grove Band's performance at the wedding reception highlights the musical talent within the city, while Knot Catering Services takes charge of the catering, exemplifying the diversity and excellence present in Lagos's culinary sector. Royal Gems Jewelries, adorning the cast with exquisite jewelry, contributes to the film's reflection of the city's thriving jewelry industry. Lastly, K-Square Protection, responsible for ensuring security at the wedding reception, reinforces the role of local companies in providing essential services for high-profile events. Collectively, these contributions not only add authenticity to the film's portrayal of a Lagosian wedding but also serve as a celebration of the city's rich entrepreneurial ecosystem. The film effectively weaves these elements into the narrative, showcasing Lagos as a dynamic and self-sufficient metropolis with a wealth of creative and enterprising talents. The diversity of dishes offered at the wedding, spanning indigenous and continental cuisine, reflects the culinary richness of Lagos. Additionally, the film captures the city's vibrant party life during wedding receptions and bachelor parties. Notably, the narrative underscores Lagos as a place of tranquility, exemplified when Adunni seeks

solace by the beachside at night, dispelling preconceived notions about the city's busyness.

Kemi Adetiba's deliberate effort to portray Lagos in a positive light transforms the film into a form of positive propaganda, showcasing the beauty, entrepreneurship, party life, and the bustling yet serene aspects that define Lagos. *The Wedding Party 1* thus emerges as a cinematic portrayal that emphasizes the creative, natural, and material richness of Lagos, contributing to a positive image of the state.

In the romantic comedy-drama *The Wedding Party 1*, helmed by director Kemi Adetiba, the storyline revolves around the convergence of two families hailing from distinct tribes — one Igbo and the other Yoruba. The narrative unfolds as these families unite through the matrimony of their respective offspring. The film intricately navigates the events leading up to the wedding, the matrimonial ceremony itself, and the myriad challenges and jubilations that accompany it. Adunni, a Yoruba woman, joins in matrimony with Dozie, an Igbo man, and their love emerges triumphant amidst a tapestry of obstacles, encompassing cultural disparities and unforeseen incidents that transpire during the vibrant wedding festivities in Lagos.

#### **A Brief synopsis on *Hire a Man* by ChineyeLove Eze and *The Ghost and the Tout* by Toyin Abraham Love, deceit, and reconciliation: Unraveling sibling rivalry in *Hire a Man***

*Hire a Man* is a romantic comedy film directed by Desmond Elliot and produced by Chineyelove Eze. The narrative revolves around a woman, Tisha, who devises a plan to hire a man to pose as her fiancé. This scheme is concocted when she learns that her younger sister, Teni, is engaged, triggering a sense of rivalry between the two siblings. The underlying animosity stems from Tisha's perception that Teni, who is two years her junior, has always been able to effortlessly claim anything she desires, including Tisha's childhood love interest. Motivated by this rivalry, Tisha hires a man to accompany her to a family retreat, envisioning him to be lackadaisical and incompetent. However, an unexpected twist reveals that the man she hired is, in fact, a wealthy individual who has recently acquired the company where Tisha is employed. The plot takes a further turn when Teni uncovers the deceitful nature of her own fiancé. As the truth about their respective fiancés unfolds, the sisters experience a reconciliation by the film's conclusion. Tisha and Jeff, the man she initially hired, find themselves romantically involved, adding an element of unexpected love to the storyline.

*Hire a Man* explores themes of rivalry, deception, and eventual reconciliation within the backdrop of a romantic comedy. The film, under the direction of Desmond Elliot, weaves a narrative that

blends humor with the complexities of familial relationships and romantic entanglements.

### **Spectral Justice in the *Tout and the Ghost*: Unraveling a Murder Mystery in the Heart of Lagos**

The narrative of the film centers on Mike, a man whose life is tragically cut short just days before his wedding. His untimely demise gives rise to a complex web of potential suspects. In an intriguing turn of events, Mike's spirit becomes determined to unravel the mystery behind his murder. Fate brings him into contact with Isila, a local girl residing in Lagos' ghetto. Isila, however, encounters an unsettling event when she crosses paths with a masquerade during the forbidden hours of the night, traditionally off-limits for women. This encounter results in her sighting a ghost. Despite initial reluctance, Isila ultimately agrees to aid Mike's ghost in his quest for justice.

As the plot unfolds, the investigation into Mike's murder proves to be challenging and fraught with difficulties. The resolution of the mystery comes to light when it is revealed that Mike's best friend, Dayo, perpetrated the crime out of greed. The film navigates through the intricacies of the investigation, incorporating elements of suspense and paranormal encounters to unveil the truth behind Mike's tragic demise.

### **Divergent Vistas: Contrasting Portrayals of Lagos in *Hire a Man* and *The Ghost and the Tout***

The film *Hire a Man* vividly portrays the enchanting and affluent side of Lagos, offering picturesque views of Amen Estate and positioning Lagos as an appealing tourist destination. In contrast, *The Ghost and the Tout* presents a different facet of the city, showcasing the rural and less privileged aspects, thereby challenging preconceived notions about Lagos as a city flowing with prosperity. These two films collectively unveil the diverse faces of Lagos, demonstrating that it is not merely a land of abundance, but a city with varying landscapes and societal dynamics.

In *Hire a Man*, the film begins by showcasing the opulent nature of estates in Lagos, particularly highlighting Amen Estate as a model. The cinematography provides both an overview and close-up views, focusing on the affluent lifestyle of the characters. This film underscores the idea that certain areas in Lagos are associated with wealth and prosperity. On the other hand, *The Ghost and the Tout* delves into the Elegushi area on the island, presenting a more modest and sandy environment with wooden houses. This portrayal challenges assumptions about the lives of people residing on the island, affirming sociological theory by representing the area as it is.

*The Ghost and the Tout* strategically uses a region on the island to depict the existence of touts, countering the assumption that such elements are

confined to areas on the mainland. The film authentically represents the lives of people in that specific area, aligning with sociological principles that advocate for accurate depictions of societal realities. Conversely, *Hire a Man* showcases Lagos as a desirable tourist destination through the display of Whispering Palms, emphasizing its beauty from the beach to the inn, gardens, and park. The film positions Lagos as an exquisite location for retreats, picnics, and vacations, challenging stereotypes about the city.

Moreover, *The Ghost and the Tout* capture the dynamism of Lagos by illustrating the coexistence of affluence and poverty within the city. In contrast, *Hire a Man* primarily focuses on presenting the magnificent aspects of Lagos as a whole. Both films contribute to a nuanced understanding of Lagos, showcasing its varied landscapes, societal dynamics, and economic disparities.

### **Findings and recommendations**

Certain filmmakers prioritize catering to audience preferences to ensure profitability, acknowledging the audience as the ultimate consumer. While this commercial consideration is understandable, the representation in film should not veer into complete falsity. As previously emphasized, film serves as a powerful conduit for conveying societal norms and images. Inaccurate portrayals not only misinform the audience but also betray the society being depicted. Films, whether expressive, imaginative, or laden with fiction, should transparently communicate their nature to viewers. This is exemplified in some foreign films, which distinguish between true-life films, biographies, fantasies, and realistic depictions, even when the latter may incorporate elements of fiction for entertainment purposes. The discernment of film genre, therefore, assumes a pivotal role.

Moreover, Lagos, as a brand, lends itself to relatively straightforward representation. Numerous film practitioners have depicted Lagos state in various ways, yet some fall short in presenting its multifaceted nature. This deficiency significantly impacts public perceptions of Lagos. Rectifying this distortion and portraying Lagos comprehensively falls within the purview of filmmakers. Sociological theory underscores the responsibility not only to satirize societal flaws but also to proffer remedies. Regrettably, some film practitioners engage in mere parody of societal ills without offering solutions or suggesting a way forward. Addressing this gap is essential for a more nuanced and socially responsible cinematic landscape.

### **CONCLUSION**

Film, as an artistic medium, inherently possesses expressive qualities. Simultaneously, it functions as a conduit for the portrayal of diverse cultures to external audiences. In light of this, it becomes imperative to maintain equilibrium. Film producers are

urged to diligently navigate the delicate interplay between artistic expression and cultural representation, recognizing the potential impact of cinematic content on audience perceptions. Consequently, a conscientious approach is warranted in the creation of motion pictures to mitigate the risk of disseminating misinformation, underscoring the significance of adhering to the intended genre of the film.

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