

# CINEMA BUSINESS IN LAGOS, NIGERIA SINCE 1903

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## Abstract

Cinema business constituted an important aspect of the local economy in Nigeria during the colonial period. The business flourished from 1903 when the first film was shown in Lagos through into the 1970s and 80s. Lagos, being the nerve centre of commercial activities in Nigeria with a cosmopolitan population, had many cinema houses. Apart from enriching the owners, cinemas provided employment for many people and also served an important social function. People visited cinemas for relaxation and entertainment purposes. However, the downturn in the national economy and the emergence of the home video business created a negative effect on cinema ventures as many of the cinema houses were closed down. This paper is a history of the rise and decline of cinema ventures in the city of Lagos, Nigeria. It examines the nature of the business as well as the socio-economic impact on the society. It tries to unravel the factors that led to the decline of the business and the new trend in the re-emergence of cinema houses in the country.

**Key words:** Cinema, Business, Lagos, Nigeria.

## 1. Introduction

Prior to the advent of the television and home video in Nigeria, cinema was one of the major means of entertainment and relaxation in the country. Lagosians, in particular, already had a vibrant cinema culture since the colonial era. Cinemas, seeing films or motion picture was a popular form of entertainment and relaxation in Nigeria before independence in 1960. Cinema is a means of information, education and cultural development of the masses (Enahora, 1989: 101). It is a means of communication and comprehension. Cinema enables the people to immerse themselves in an imaginary world for a short period of time in addition to other side attractions it offers.

The cinema business flourished in Lagos from 1903 up the late 1980s and 90s. In its heyday, Lagos had more than forty cinema houses (Akarue et al, 1992: 37). The cinema houses availed the public the opportunity of viewing varieties of favourite films, both foreign and local. In spite of the importance of cinemas in the social and economic life of the Nigerian people, the subject seems not to have appealed to historians. The few works available on the subject of cinemas in Nigeria have been done by non-historians. This paper, which complements earlier studies on the subject of cinemas in Nigeria has been written from historical perspective.

The research questions which this paper seeks to answer are: How did cinema business emerge in Nigeria? What was the nature of the business? How were movies and films sourced? Who were the audience at the cinemas? How profitable was the cinema business and what impact did cinemas have on the society? In short, this paper examines the business side of the cinema culture in Lagos, the economic nerve centre of Nigeria.

Let us begin with a review of the little literature available on this subject. We do have many works that deal with the history of cinemas in Nigeria but there are a few studies on the subject of film making and television. For example, there is the work of Augustine Enahora on film makers and film making in Nigeria. The work sheds light on the problems and prospects of film making in Nigeria (Enahora, 1989). It also looks at the role of the cinema in national development. However, this work cannot be regarded as an historical research work on the subject of cinema business in Nigeria. Another work we can consider is that of Charles Umeh. This work examines the advent and growth of television broadcasting in Nigeria. Umeh's (1989) work sheds light on political and educational factors that influenced the establishment of television stations in Nigeria but does not say much about cinemas as an important element of mass media in Nigeria. We also have the essay written by O.O. Adenugba (2007) on the Nigerian motion picture industry. As the article title shows, the paper truly shows how the Nigerian movie industry has evolved over the years beginning from the colonial days. The paper talks about filming and film exhibitions in Nigeria. Since films were exhibited in the cinemas, he necessarily made reference to cinemas but the essay falls short of what can be regarded as a detailed account of the history of cinema business in the country.

## 2. The Cinema in Colonial Lagos

One of the developments which came with colonial rule in Nigeria was the cinema. Lagosians were the first to experience motion picture entertainment in Nigeria. The first film screenings in Nigeria actually took

place at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos, from August 12 to 22, 1903 (Adegoke, 2012). In that year, Herbert Macaulay, the foremost nationalist, was reported to have invited the Balboa and Company to Nigeria. The company had an exhibition tour of “silent films” on the West African Coast. The success of this effort, led to the influx of other European film exhibitors to Nigeria (NAI: COMCOL 1, 233/1). Apart from the Glover Memorial and Empire Hall, there were four other halls showing films twice a week in Lagos mainland and one hall each in Ebute Meta and Oshodi by 1921. By this time, cinema had become popular in Lagos with crowds of young and old people usually waiting for the doors of the cinema halls to open (Agbanoma 2007:7 citing Leonard, 1967:159). Indeed the combined efforts of the government and the church encouraged the development of cinema in Lagos in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The Christian missionaries used cinemas for religious propaganda while the government, during the First World War, used it as means of raising fund for war relief and for the Red Cross. The government also used the cinema for advertisement purpose. For example, the results of the 1923 Legislative Council election in Lagos were flashed on cinematograph screens (Leonard, 1967: 155 cited in Agbanoma 2007:8). The various military campaigns were brought vividly to the people through cinema exhibitions (*The Time of Lagos*, 1-8 August, 1916, 14 cited in Agbanoma 2007:7). The early films shown were documentaries and the films were mainly newsreels. The colonial government was not interested in exposing the economic potentials of cinemas to the colonies. Rather, her reason for bringing the cinema was basically political and to some extent social. The government was interested in producing and using documentary films to brain wash the colonied people and to propagate British ideals while at the same time enlightening the public on health, education and other matters (Okezie, 1995: 18 cited in Agbanoma 2007:24).

Subsequently, cinemas became a common feature of the social life in the emerging lagoon city of Lagos in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Indeed before this period, cinema operations seem to have been limited to comparatively small scale cinematograph exhibitions. The establishment of big commercial cinema houses with branches in strategic parts of the country only began in the late 1930s (Agbanoma 2007:8).

Cinema houses were established in the colony of Lagos with the express permission of the colonial government from 1937 (NAI: COMCOL 1, 233/1). One of the earliest cinema operators in Lagos was the West African Pictures Company owned by Mr. S. Khalil, a member of the Syrian community in Lagos (NAI: COMCOL I, 233 Vol. II). The company was granted the right to use the Glover Hall Lagos, including its Tennis Court Gardens and bar for three nights a week for cinematograph shows. Later, the West African Pictures Company established Rex Cinema in Ebute Metta, Regal Cinema and Royal Cinema, Lagos in the late 1930s and early 1940s (COMCOL, 233/Vol. 2; Also *Daily Times*, October 19, 1940: 7 and 8). The three cinema houses under the flagship of the West African Pictures Company were the major cinema houses in Lagos in the early 1940s (*Nigerian Daily Times*, September 4, 1939). The other cinema house in Lagos during this period was the Capitol Cinema.

During the colonial period, big commercial cinema houses were operated mainly by foreigners as shown in the example of Mr. Khalil cited above. One or two few Nigerians had participated in the cinema business in the early period of colonial rule. One was Mr. S.H. Pearse who muted the idea of establishing Kelvin Traveling Cinema Company in 1918 and the other person was Mr. S.O. Dawodu who showed film to the African Tennis Club in Lagos in October 1927 (Agbanoma 2007:8). Our sources are silent on the success recorded by this early attempt at getting involved in the cinema business by these Nigerians.

Since the cinema productions undertaken by the colonial government were documentaries used for public enlightenment to promote its policies on agriculture, infrastructural development and education (NAI: COMCOL 1, 233/1), they did not satisfy the social aspirations of the populace. However, the commercial cinema houses established in the 1930s and 40s filled this social gap as they offered entertainment to the rapidly increasing modern African elites and the colonial officials living in Lagos.

The colonial authorities were careful in granting licenses to operate cinemas as evidenced in the rejection of an application filed by Mr. J. C. Ticehurst on behalf of his client for the establishment of a cinema house at Ikoyi in 1938 (COMCOL, 233/1, 2). In 1942, the application for the permission to open a cinema at Odunlami Street, Lagos was also turned down because the colonial authorities believed then that the number of cinema houses was “sufficient for normal need” (NAI: COMCOL 233/1, 2). As a result of the growing importance of cinemas in the colonial economy, the government set up a Board of Censorship in 1937 under Ordinance No. 28 (an amendment to the cinematograph Ordinance of 1933) to handle all matters relating to the establishment and operations of cinema houses in the colony. The Board had among its members Hon. A. Alakija, Mr. I.B Augusto, (B.L.), Mr. J.R.P. McEwen and Dr. J.C. Vaughan. Other members of the Board were the Secretary, CMS Yoruba Mission, the General Superintendent, Methodist Mission West of the Niger, and the Principals of St. Gregory’s College, CMS Grammar School, and Methodist Boys High School all in Lagos (NAI: COMCOL 1, 233/II).

The restriction and censorship imposed on the proliferation of cinema houses in Lagos in the early

1940s were not unconnected with the design of the colonial government to control the flow of negative publicity and unwanted information during the ongoing war in Europe. Public opinion also influenced the decision of the colonial government in rejecting the application of some of the proposed cinema houses. The principals of CMS Grammar School, and the Salvation Army were among those who raised objection to the establishment of a cinema house at Odunlami in 1942 (Commissioner of the Colony to the Chief Secretary to the Government, April 2, 1942). The objection was based on the ground that cinema house would constitute a nuisance to the environment as it would attract all kinds of people including hooligans. Other possible reasons for not approving the request to operate cinema houses in Lagos during this period were the environmental and social implications of operating the cinemas. The colonial government reasoned that new cinemas would add unnecessarily to the number of places where crowds assemble in the colony. In addition to this, they would increase the “amount of light in the city during the black-out hours”. Above all, they would increase traffic congestion (NAI: COMCOL 1/233 Vol. II “Cinematography”).

In spite of the above, between 1939 and 1945 the British colonial administration in Nigeria still saw the cinema as a veritable medium of mass communication and mobilization in addition to entertainment and relaxation. In view of this, the cinema was effectively used by the British government to promote its war efforts and propaganda. Nigerians and Lagos cinema lovers were treated to varieties of British films such as “Queen Christina”, “Suez”, “Four men and a Prayer” and more importantly, daily update of the British war news throughout the duration of the Second World War.

The admission fees to the cinema during this period were in some cases 1s or 2s or 6d depending on the movie. Children were not also left out among the important cinema viewing audience in the colonial period. School children’s cinema shows such as “Rose Marie” featuring Jeannette MacDonald and Eddie Nelson were shown regularly by the cinema houses. The cinemas were also used to disseminate daily war reports during the Second World War under the caption “British War News”.

The end of the Second World War in 1945 led to an influx of American films into the country. In addition to this, the colonial government was forced to relax its stringent policies on the establishment and operations of cinema enterprises in the country. This led to a steady increase in the number of cinema houses in the country and Lagos in particular between 1945 and 1950. The opening of new cinemas in Lagos in the early 1950s, received succinct observation from W. Fowler, the Acting Administrator of the Lagos Colony in 1953 when he said that: “The opening of the cinemas demonstrates the growing cult of the cinema and it’s possibly a symptom of cultural vacuum which is yet to be wholly filled in Lagos.” (NAI, CSO/21, Colony Annual Report 1953).

Apparently, Lagos grew to become not only the administrative and economic centre but also an important social hub in Nigeria in the colonial era by virtue of its rapid growth and the emergence of modern African elites in the city. There were many cinema houses in the city. Indeed, on the eve of independence in 1960, Lagos had about twelve cinema houses, while Ibadan had three cinema houses (DTN, Advertisement, October 19, 1957:10). The cinema house in Lagos before independence in 1960 included Rex Cinema, Royal Cinema, Regal Cinema, Capitol Cinema, Casino Cinema, Kings Cinema, Central Cinema, Rialto Cinema, Corona Cinema, Odeon Cinema, Road House Cinema, Ikeja Arms Cinema and Glover Hall. There were in addition to this, branches of Rex and Odeon cinemas in Ibadan. It is important to state that the cinema business in Nigeria during this period was dominated by foreigners, namely Indians and Lebanese (Enahora, 1989:103). Suffice to say that by the time of Nigeria’s independence, the cinema culture had become fully established.

It is instructive that the commencement of television transmission services in Western Nigeria on October 31, 1959 was not an immediate threat to the cinema business in Lagos. This was because the Western Nigeria Television Service in Ibadan was not established to rival the cinema houses in the country (Umeh, 1989:56). But this led to the subsequent establishment of Eastern Nigeria Television Service in 1960 and the Nigeria Television Service in 1962. In spite of this, the cinema businesses in Lagos grew further in number and size with an army of insatiable cinema enthusiasts.

### **3. Cinema Business in the Post-colonial Period**

After independence in 1960, cinema business in Nigeria entered into a period of rapid expansion. Between 1960 and 1975, new cinema houses were established in the country; Lagos benefited immensely from this increase. The number of cinema houses in Lagos increased from twelve in 1960 to about twenty four in 1975. The post-colonial period also saw more Nigerians taking an active part in the ownership of cinema houses. Indeed some of the cinema houses which were previously owned by foreigners prior to 1970, were bought over by Nigerians. A good example of a Nigerian who did this was Mr. Edwin Clarke who bought Scala and a

number of cinema houses in Lagos in 1973 (Agbanoma, 2007). Apart from Clarke, some other Nigerian business men began to break the monopoly of the big commercial cinema houses owned by foreigners. Prominent among these businessmen were Chief Lisabi of Metro and Rivoli Cinema in Lagos and Alhaji Danjuma of Danjuma Cinema in Lagos. The increased involvement of the indigenes in cinema business at this time might not be unconnected with the efforts of the Federal Military Government who in the 1970s tried to limit the involvement of foreign interests in a number of enterprises in the country by promulgating the Nigerian Enterprises Decree of 1972. This decree gave exclusive monopoly for the distribution and exhibition of films to Nigerians. The involvement of Nigerians in the cinema business, however, does not mean that the business was totally taken over by them. Indeed, foreigners continued to play a very important part in the business (Enahora, 1989: 103).

The increase in the number of cinema houses in Lagos during this period was as a result of the expansion embarked upon by the West African Pictures Company which increased its cinema houses in the city from three in 1940 to six in 1975. A group of Lebanese businessmen, the Mattar brothers, also came into the country in the early 60s to establish their own chain of cinema houses (Akarue, 1992: 37). The Mattar brothers established the Roxy Cinema at Apapa, the Odeon and Central Cinemas at Ebute-Meta, Idera Cinema, Mushin and Plaza Cinema, Lagos. Other cinema houses in Lagos during this period included Sheila, Rainbow, Oregie, and Glover (*Daily Times*, July 2, 1975: 20). Many indigenous entrepreneurs found it difficult to invest in the cinema business because they lacked the capital, managerial skill and technical know-how to venture into the business.

The rapid increase in the population of Lagos was a major factor that propelled the increase in the number of cinema houses in the city. The population of the city increased from 126,474 in 1931 to 230,256 in 1950 and 655,246 in 1963 (Olukoju, 1994: 35 citing Sada and Adefolalu, 1975). In addition to this, the existing cinema houses could not meet the growing demand of the cinema viewing audience in Lagos. Furthermore, there was an unprecedented influx of cheaper Indian and Chinese films into the country which the cinema operators capitalised on to tantalise their patrons. The influx of the cheap Indian and Chinese films made it possible for the low income earners including artisans and the uneducated class in the country to embrace the cinema viewing culture. Aside from this, these films and more importantly their story lines were comprehensible even to the uneducated. The appeal of these films to the Nigerian viewing audience is quite understandable. Their story lines addressed issues of love, oppression, racial and class disparity which were to some extent peculiar to Nigeria, India and China where these films originated from.

An important development in the cinema industry in the post-colonial period especially as from the 1970s which we must not fail to mention was the transition in film production from celluloid to video production, a development that was to later have a major impact on cinema business in the country. The change from celluloid films to video was as a result of several reasons. Firstly, the production cost of celluloid films skyrocketed. Not only that, there was problem associated with its distribution. Whereas there was difficulty in distributing celluloid films, it was not so with video films which replaced it. Consequently, majority of the film producers who had once financed the production of celluloid films used in cinemas had to jettison it for the production video films which were easier to distribute and which movie lovers could easily enjoy or view in the comfort of their homes (Agbanoma, 2007). This factor was to later play an important role in the decline of the fortunes of cinema houses in Lagos.

The cinema industry in Nigeria appears to have received a boost from the federal government in 1975. In that year, the federal government embarked on the construction of the national arts theatre in Iganmu, Lagos. The construction of the edifice was part of the effort to prepare for the hosting of the Second African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) which took place in Nigeria in 1977. The theatre was a replica of the Bulgarian Theatre of Culture in Verna, Bulgaria (Arigbabu, 2009:61). The national theatre was completed in 1976 with two cinema halls in addition to the main bowl with a seating capacity of 5000. The two cinema halls had the capacity to seat 700 people each (Akinosho, 1986:39). The importance of the national theatre to the development of the cinema industry in Nigeria was that it provoked further interest and enthusiasm among Lagos cinema goers.

The emergence of Nigerian films in the early 1970s, also contributed to the growth of the cinema business in the country. The Nigerian films competed favourably well with the American, Chinese and the Indian films at the box office. Ola Balogun's film *Ogun Ajani* in 1976, (Akinosho 1986:40) and Ogunde's *Aiye* in 1979 and *Jaiyesimi* in 1980 respectively were indigenous films that caught the interest of Nigerian cinema lovers (Oguntayo 1990:47). Other Nigerians who got involved in film production following the oil boom of the 70s were Eddie Ugboma, Ladi Ladebo, Ola Balogun and Galadima (Adenugba, 2007). The Alarinjo Theatre troupes also made films such as *Ija Ominira*, *Owo L'agba* all of which appealed to the cinema viewing public in the country (Adenugba, 2007). Within a short period of time, indigenous movies relegated the foreign movies to the back place at the cinemas. In 1982, Ogunde produced another film titled *Aropin Tenia* and then *Ayanmo* in 1988. Other indigenous film makers like Moses Olaiya, alias Baba Sala produced *Mosebolan*, which was

reported to be one of the first successful indigenous films in Nigeria that thrilled the cinema audience. The film made a gross revenue of about N107 000.00 in five days in 1985 (Akinosho 1986:39).

#### **4. Nature of the Cinema Business**

Cinema business was a service based venture that involved the cinema houses providing a variety of entertaining films to the public. It did not involve the act of film making itself. Cinema houses were established to exhibit or show films to the public for an amount considered reasonable and profitable.

##### **4.1 Demand and Patronage**

Cinema houses attracted all classes of viewers. It was an avenue for the young and old people in the society to relax. Children were also allowed at cinemas for categories of films considered not harmful for family or general viewing. This censorship had always been the responsibility of the government since the colonial era (NAI: COMCOL I, 233/II “Cinematography”). When the Nigerian Films Corporation (NFC) was established in 1979, it was vested with the responsibility of censoring films in the country. But this responsibility was, however, later moved to the Nigeria Films and Video Censors Board, NFVCB. Nevertheless, cinema audiences in Nigeria since the colonial period developed over time to include the rich and the middle income class of people. The middle income class constituted an important class in the socio-economic stratum of the Nigerian society in the 1970s and 80s. In the social ladder, they were in-between the poor and wealthy class. Members of the middle income class were usually the young and often educated, urban professional class people in the country. They cut across both the public and private sectors of the Nigerian economy. Their combined economic power was behind the economic and social life of Lagos from the early 70s till the advent of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. The dwindling economic fortunes of the country which drastically wiped out the economic importance of this class of people also had significant impact on socio-economic life in Lagos and more importantly, on the cinema viewing culture in the city.

##### **4.2 Procurement and Types of Films Shown**

In the early days of cinema operations in Nigeria, the cinema owners usually entered into contract with the film suppliers for the films. For example, Edward Ramia Chidiak, was reported to have executed a contract with Messrs Cecil Cattermoul of London for the supply of 48 programmes of films every six months in Lagos at £50 a programme to run for twelve months in 1943 (NAI: COMCOL I, 233/II). Apart from this type of contract arrangement, cinema houses sourced their films directly from the film producers or the studios. Once a film was produced, it was passed on from the studios to the distributors who in turn passed the films on to the cinemas for exhibition. In some cases, the film producers sometimes approached the cinema operators to premiere their movie. This was usually the case with local film producers. The proceeds were usually shared at mutually agreed terms. Sometimes also, a producer could take his film directly to the cinema for exhibition (Personal communication with Mr. Adekunle Adebisi, June, 2012). Local film producers such as Adebayo Salami and Moses Olaiya for example, at various points in time took their films to cinema houses in the 80s and 90s.

Cost was a major problem associated with procuring foreign films for exhibition by cinema houses in Nigeria. For example, one of the informants stated that it was expensive to get the big “block buster” films. In addition to the high cost, sourcing for foreign exchange also constituted a problem in procuring foreign films. (Personal communication with Mr. Patrick Lee, Ozone Cinema, Yaba Lagos, January 20, 2012).

##### **4.3 Financing and Profitability of Cinema Business**

Finance is a crucial factor for a smooth and efficient running of any business. This is also true of cinema business. Cinema business is by nature a capital intensive venture. It involved the provision of a purposely built cinema hall capable of seating large number of people. In addition, equipment such as projector must be provided and this was also expensive. By the 1980s, it was also necessary for cinema house owners to have a stand-by generating set to checkmate public electricity power failure. All these, and the cost of procuring films combined to make the venture a capital intensive one.

Different financial models were used by cinema operators to fund the establishment of a cinema house and to run it. Some of the early foreign cinema house owners raised the funds through personal savings or proceeds from existing businesses. For example, Mr. Chidiak reportedly leased his cinema house in Port Harcourt to a Lebanese with a view to establish a cinema house in Lagos. (NAI: COMCOL I, 233/II). Other cinema operators in the colonial era resorted to borrowing, but our sources are silent whether this was from banks or close relatives and associates.

Another source of fund or finance in the cinema industry was the revenue generated from advertising. Various organisation or companies such as banks and manufacturing companies used to advertise their products and services at cinema houses. The revenue accruable to the cinema house in this regard was often substantial and from it, the cinema houses were able to meet their financial obligations. Retained profit was ploughed back into the business from time to time by the cinema companies.

Were cinema houses profitable? From available evidence, it appears that the cinema business during the period covered by this study was a profitable one. Unfortunately, given the peculiar nature of several African businesses, it is difficult for us to give exact figures of income and expenditure of a typical cinema house. Many of the cinema houses were owned and run by private individuals. They did not operate with Management Boards. They probably did not keep any comprehensive records and where such records exist, they are not available for the public. However, based on careful examination of available fragmentary evidence, one can observe the trend.

The West African Pictures, a pioneer cinema which operated a venture in Nigeria made substantial amount of money from its operations in the colonial era up to the early 70s. It was the success recorded in its operations and the profitability of the cinema business that informed its massive expansion drive in the country. The cinema company owned and operated not less than six cinema houses in Lagos alone during the period covered by this study (*Daily Times of Nigeria*, July 6, 1975:12). There is no doubt that cinema houses in Lagos enjoyed considerable patronage from cinema lovers until the economic downturn of the 80s changed the story. The cinema houses took good advantage of the large and enlightened Lagos population. This patronage in essence, translated into a lot of revenue.

Going by the level of patronage and the estimated revenue accruable to cinema houses, one could say that the business was lucrative. The turnover of cinema houses in Lagos in 1983 may have been somewhere around N20 million. For instance, the film *Papa Ajasco* by Wale Adenuga made sixty one thousand naira (N61,000.00) in three nights in 1984. The film *Mosebolatan* by Baba Sala made about one hundred and seven thousand naira (N107,000.00) in 1985. The great number of Nigerian movies especially the Yoruba films at the box office in the 80s testifies to the fact that the cinema business was a lucrative venture. Although cinema operators complained of low returns, the recent successes of the new cinema outfits in the country such as Silverbird Cinema, Genesis Deluxe Cinema and Ozone tend to show that the venture is worthwhile.

The newly established cinema outfits in Lagos also attest to the profitability of the business. For example, the least box office ticket at the cinema in Lagos is currently about N500.00 for children and N800.00 for students while adults pay as high as N1000.00 to N1, 500.00 (Personal communication with Mr. Patrick Lee, previously cited). With an average attendance of about 500 people especially during weekend shows, one can imagine what the profit look like for cinema owners.

#### **4.4 The Administrative set up of a typical Cinema House**

The early cinema houses were very simple to manage. This is because they only provided films for the audience to watch. Their management structure was not elaborate. They only required a manager, an operator, engineer and a cashier to sell tickets to the public. Indeed, when cinema houses newly came to Lagos, a typical cinema house employed a manager and an accountant in addition to the operator. Apart from this, there were those who specialised in ensuring order at the cinemas (Personal communication with Mr. Adekunle Adebisi, previously cited). But as the cinemas began to expand in size and operations, they had to employ other categories of personnel.

The complexity of the operations of a modern cinema business in the country, the organisation and the management structure of the cinema houses have changed dramatically. New cinema outfits such as Silverbird, Genesis Deluxe and Ozone cinemas are highly organised enterprises. They have top level executive managers, supervisors and customer relations personnel. Silverbird owned and managed by the Bruce family is headed by an Executive Chairman in the person of Mr. Ben Murray Bruce. He is assisted by other management and technical staff for effective operation of the organisation.

### **5. The Impact of the Cinema Business**

Cinemas impacted on the political and socio-economic life of the city of Lagos in several ways. The first noticeable impact is that it was used by the colonial government to pursue its objectives in Nigeria. As pointed out earlier, several of the films shown in the cinemas in the first two decades of the twentieth century were documentaries meant to explain the activities of the colonial administration to the people and to get the people to be loyal to the administration. Not only this, the early films shown in the cinemas were meant to promote the culture of the colonial master. Also, during the First and the Second World Wars, the cinemas were used as avenues for showing films meant to get support for Britain from the Colony.

Related to the above was the use of the cinemas in disseminating information to the people. It was used as a medium of disseminating information about matters relating to nutrition, personal hygiene, political socialisation, community development and the value of forming self-help associations (Agbanoma, 2007:46). The church also used the cinema as a tool of evangelisation. The Christian missionaries realised that “one picture is [sic.] worth a thousand words” (Leonard, 1967: 162 cited in Agbanoma, 2007:7). The church, therefore, used cinemas for religious propagation.

Cinemas also had a social effect in terms of providing avenue for relaxation and entertainment. In this regard, it provided an important outlet for the people to “ease off” tension. This should be appreciated in a busy city like Lagos. After a very hectic day at work, cinemas provided a good social outlet for people to “cool off”. As part of its socialising effect, it has also been said that cinemas “provided a common fund of knowledge which enables [sic.] the viewers to operate as effective members of the societies they live” (Agbanoma, 2007:45). This helps to foster social cohesion and awareness thereby permitting active involvement in public life.

Cinemas have also played an important role in fostering or promoting Nigerian cultural heritage particularly since the post-colonial period. Cinemas had served as avenues for disseminating the cultural and artistic values of Nigerian people. Several Nigerian film makers like Eddie Ugboma, Ola Balogun, Hubert Ogunde, Moses Olaiya and others have used the cinemas to exhibit their films which showed the rich culture of Nigerian people. In this regard, we can say that cinemas have played a strategic role in preserving the culture of the various Nigerian peoples.

The cinema houses in Lagos provided direct and indirect jobs for a number of people. From the 1960s through to the mid 80s, a typical cinema house provided direct employment for about 5 to 10 people who earned regular salaries. In addition to this, petty traders made brisk business around the vicinity of cinema houses. They sold wares such as alcoholic and non alcoholic beverages, gin, cigarettes and other items to cinema lovers. Beer parlour, restaurants and other relaxation spots also usually developed around cinema houses. Hence, we can say that cinemas acted as a catalyst for economic activities.

Modern cinema houses have incorporated services that allow clients to shop, dine and wine as part of what cinema viewers could enjoy within the cinema complexes. Silverbird Cinema, for example, has three restaurants and several other shops. These shops provide various services to the cinema audience such as restaurant services, boutique and beauty shops.

Cinemas have also become something in the form of a monument; an important reference point in the society. For example, a popular area in Agege has been named after the famous Pen Cinema that was formerly situated in that area. Similarly, Casino Cinema Yaba, is very popular and synonymous with the bus stop named after it in the Yaba area of Lagos.

The socio-cultural impact of the cinema is apparent in various forms in Lagos. It is common, for example, to hear songs, slangs and terms learnt from a popular movie in common usage among Lagosians. The term “askari” used to describe the police was derived from Indian movies and was popularised by movie goers in Lagos. In addition to this, people copied the mode of dressing popular with their favourite artistes especially Indian and American actors (Ayoola, 1952:211).

All these notwithstanding, the cinemas also have some negative impact on Lagos society. It has been said that social vices such as drug abuse and addiction, prostitution and violence partly found their way into Nigeria and Lagos society as a result of the influence of films shown in the cinemas. Advocates of this view argue that “Lagosians look on helplessly, while damaging cultural influences envelope the minds of Lagos youths through foreign films” (Agbanoma, 2007:43). This may however, not be absolutely correct because movies intended for cinema exhibition usually passed through censorship. In addition to this, under-aged children are usually barred from viewing films rated above their respective ages. It was the television rather than the cinema that can be said to have exposed the society to the negative influences of the foreign movies in the country in the late 80s (Akarue, 1990: 54-55). The management of the NTA recognised this when it clamped down on the influx of provocative videos into Nigeria in 1989 (Okoro, 1989:47).

## **6. The Decline of Cinema Business**

After the height reached by cinema business in Nigeria described above, the business entered into a period of recession and ultimate decline. The decline was not a spontaneous but a gradual process that began in the early 1980s and stretched into the 90s. The may be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, more television stations were established in the country, beginning from 1983. For example, in 1983, the Ogun State government established a Television Station at Abeokuta. That same year, the Lagos Television (LTV) was established by the Lagos State government (Umeh, 1989:62). These stations commenced the transmission of foreign movies mostly at nights and weekends. Some of the films which had hitherto spiced the box offices became available to viewers within the comfort of their homes. One factor which should not go unmentioned is the fact that the oil boom of the early 1970s afforded most Nigerians the opportunity of acquiring television sets of their own. For example, a survey conducted in 1974 reported that over 87 percent of Nigerians viewed more than two hours of television programmes daily across the country. By 1984, however, the number of television programmes and channels in the western part of the country and Lagos in particular, had increased tremendously (Umeh, 1989:62). This in effect took a toll on the operations of cinema houses as people began to embrace the new TV culture.

Another factor which led to the decline of cinema business in Nigeria was the arrival of the Video Home System (VHS). It certainly brought about a reduction in the number of cinema goers in Lagos. Varieties of foreign films came in this format and were quite affordable. The Indian and Chinese films most especially were abundantly available in the new format. This fact, coupled with the growing insecurity and the economic challenges in the country in the 80s, led to a decline in the patronage of the cinemas by the populace (Udeze, 2010:20). In the 1990s, only a few of the once vibrant cinema houses in Lagos were still in operation. Danjuma Cinema in Agege for example, folded around 1992. After this date, the only remaining functional cinema houses in Lagos included Kings Cinema, Roxy Cinema, Jebako Cinema, and Cini-Citi but they all also collapsed before 1999. The halls being used by some of these cinema houses were taken over by churches for religious programmes. For example, Casino Cinema in Yaba has been taken over by the New Revival Apostolic Church and other facilities around it converted into a shopping complex. The site of Pen Cinema in Agege was initially sold to a religious organisation by its owners but it is presently being occupied by a fast food outfit (Adekunle Adebisi, 42 years old, interview previously cited).

Another factor responsible for the decline of cinema business was the harsh operating environment which the cinema operators had to contend with in the country since 1981. The harsh operating environment must be situated within the context of the capital intensive nature of cinema business. Available evidence suggests that the average cost of a film in 1990 was about \$10,000.00 or N100,000.00 (Akarue, 1992:27). This statement is quite plausible because the cost of making a full length Nigerian film in 1986 was about N250,000.00, half of which was spent on foreign exchange (Akinosho, 1986). However, the cost of a 35 mm projector which cost N800 before SAP in 1986, increased to N9,000.00 in 1991 (Akarue, 1992:27). This and the exorbitant tax which cinema operators paid in Lagos amidst a dwindling revenue compounded the problem for some of the cinema houses in the city. Olatunde Moroundiya, the General Manager of Casino Cinema in Lagos agreed with this position. In 1991 for example, the Lagos State government took about 16 percent tax on films.

Another factor that led to the decline of the cinema was the economic downturn in the wake of SAP. SAP wiped out the middle class as an important economic class in country. It is important to stress that the extinction of this class in the society was a major problem which affected the fortunes of the cinema houses in Nigeria. Some of the negative effects of SAP included loss of jobs and high cost of living. Inflation occasioned by the high exchange rate of the naira against major international currencies made life unbearable for most people in urban centres in Nigeria especially Lagos. People were compelled to adjust and realign their priorities. As a result of this, visiting the cinema for most Nigerians and Lagosians in particular became a luxury.

## **7. Conclusion: New Trends and the Prospects of Cinema Business in Nigeria**

The rebirth of the cinema culture in Nigeria lends credence to the fact that the cinema business is a lucrative venture that has a lot of prospects. Silverbird Cinema, for example, expanded its operations in Nigeria from Lagos to other parts of Nigeria like Abuja and Port Harcourt within few years of its existence. The company has also extended its operations to Ghana (*The Nation*, July 11, 2010, 46). With a population of about 160million people, Nigeria is a fertile ground for any business to thrive. More importantly, Lagos has grown to attain the status of a mega city with a population in excess of 15 million and is still growing. The massive population of the city and the small number of cinema houses presently operating in the state provide an avenue for entrepreneurs to invest in the cinema business in Lagos. With three functional modern cinema houses in Lagos, there seems to be many opportunities for would-be investors in the cinema business in Nigeria. Moreover, the existing cinema houses in the city are already exploring the possibilities of expanding their operations by way of opening more cinema houses in the city. The optimism is hinged on the fact that currently there are just about 15 cinema screens in Lagos with a population of about 15 million people. When compared to the United States and India with about 6,000 and 10,000 screens respectively, there seems to be a lot of opportunities in Nigeria for would-be investors in the cinema business. Available evidence suggests that the cinemas now enjoy full patronage from cinema viewers across the state. For example, Nigerian films such as *Figurine*, *Ije*, *Inale* and *Ogun Aiku*, *Anchor Baby* are currently box office favourites (Ekunno, 2010:34).

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