

FILM REVIEW

Alain Kassanda, director. *Coconut Head Generation*. 2022. 87 minutes. English. Nigeria. Ajimati Films. No price reported.

Alain Kassanda, the founder of Ajimati Films and a video director, has garnered recognition for his impactful grassroots works that eloquently express the struggles faced by young people. Renowned for his innovative storytelling approach and unwavering commitment to addressing significant social and cultural issues, he meticulously shines a spotlight on pressing issues affecting Millennials and Generation Zs in Nigeria, with a particular focus on the southwest region.

The documentary *Coconut Head Generation* resonates with both Nigerians and the diaspora, addressing pertinent issues such as the Lekki Massacre of October 2020 and themes including police brutality, gender equality, student affairs, protests, unlawful and bad governance, academic staff Union of Universities strikes, and Black history. These topics, emblematic of the challenges encountered by students and youth, prompt critical discussions and call for actionable solutions. Through candid exploration, the documentary sheds light on past events and ongoing societal issues, inviting viewers to engage in meaningful dialogue and contribute towards positive change.

Set at the prestigious University of Ibadan, particularly within the Department of Theatre Arts, the documentary unfolds against the backdrop of the Thursday Film Review Series. Here, Theatre Arts students and graduates gather weekly, participating in intellectual roundtable discussions, reviews, and personal reflections to enlighten and raise awareness within their community. Moreover, the documentary provides a glimpse into the initiation rituals within the Theatre Arts Department, where new students experience symbolic beatings with branches adorned with leaves and buckets of water. This ritual signifies the acceptance of new members into the department, accompanied by music that embodies a sense of belonging and familial acceptance.

Furthermore, discussions extend to events such as the Black History Festival, paralleling the “Thursday Film Ritual,” wherein the notion of “education being a scam” in Nigeria is addressed. The discourse concludes that it is not education but the flawed educational system that presents challenges. Frequent educational strikes and substandard living conditions compound the hurdles within Nigeria’s educational landscape, reshaping the perception of education as an escape route. Despite these adversities, educated Nigerian youth navigate

neo-colonialism, governance issues, and corruption to carve out better economic opportunities and a sustainable future.

Coconut Head Generation effectively portrays themes including patriarchy, women's roles, female complacency, sexuality, survival, and gendered behaviours, all of which have significantly shaped Nigerian society. The documentary also highlights overlooked issues such as overcrowded hostels in tertiary institutions, where students accommodate their peers despite inconvenience. Furthermore, it delves into challenges such as rights suppression, student agitation, police brutality, sudden fee increments, and Students' Union alienation, illustrating the resilience and determination of Nigerian youth. Through these explorations, the documentary offers a comprehensive glimpse into the multifaceted experiences and struggles faced by young people in Nigeria, prompting reflection and dialogue on societal issues. Despite facing numerous challenges, students exhibit unwavering dedication to their arts, as reflected in their lifestyle characterized by football games on sandy fields, dimly lit study sessions amidst frequent power outages, and communal meals catered by local vendors. The juxtaposition of church services and Muslim prayers underscores the peaceful coexistence within the university community, offering poignant reflections on life's practical challenges and lessons inherent within the humanities.

Coconut Head Generation employs a unique visual style characterized by candid interviews, archival footage, and stylized re-enactments. Although subject to criticism for its unconventional approach and occasional disjointedness, this visual style effectively serves the documentary's subject matter. Engaging and accessible to a wide audience, particularly younger viewers accustomed to fast-paced storytelling, the documentary evokes emotional responses and adds depth to the narrative. Kassanda's aesthetic intricacy elevates the documentary beyond conventional storytelling, ensuring the exploration of widespread themes and contributing to its effectiveness as a thought-provoking and memorable piece.

In alignment with the essence of Kassanda's work, Nigerian students showcase strength and determination amidst chaos, channeling frustrations towards personal growth and exhibiting acceptance and tolerance towards one another. *Coconut Head Generation* serves as a testament to Kassanda's dedication to storytelling that informs, inspires, and catalyzes meaningful resilience and commitment to creating a better future, reflecting the enduring spirit of Nigerian youth.

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