

FILM REVIEW

Niyi Akinmolayan, dir. *Room 315*. 2016. 27 minutes. English. Nigeria. Anthill Studios. No price reported. YouTube.

Niyi Akinmolayan's reputation has grown since the production of *Wedding Party 2* (2017), *The Arbitration* (2016), *The Setup 1 & 2* (2019 and 2022), and *The House of Secrets* (2023), all under the stables of Anthill Studios in Lagos, Nigeria. Akinmolayan films have been selected for international film festivals. Their quality can compare with works of other Nollywood veterans including Kunle Afolayan, Eneaji Chris Nneng, Tope Oshin, and Kemi Adetiba, among others.

Room 315 is a short film that centers on Dr. Stone, a successful psychiatrist who is confined to a wheelchair. Despite his disability he displays professionalism when attending to his patients who have different mental, physical, and psychological problems. He lives a normal life and is well respected by his differently abled colleagues. The narrative reveals the dark secrets of his patients who discuss their challenges separately with him. The film is structured in two phases: the first depicts characters whose dialogue is not voiced—which include a lady, a drug addict, and an embattled husband and wife—while the second deals with four vocal encounters with Nina, Adam, Edwina, and Taiwo.

The film is strongest in its camera work and a few dialogues. It opens with a medium shot of a door with the inscription "Room 315." What follows are a few other medium shots with Dr. Stone in his office attending to different patients one after the other. A few close-up shots are employed but only when the story of a patient is most intense, eliciting empathy from Dr. Stone. For instance, a close-up reveals Dr. Stone who is lost in thought, reflecting on the physical condition of Edwina's husband, Taiwo, who like Dr. Stone is also confined to a wheelchair after a car accident. We later learn that Taiwo was Dr. Stone's classmate back in medical school. Another close-up reveals Dr. Stone holding a photograph, which he fetches from a book shelf, featuring young graduates including himself, his once-able colleague Taiwo and a few others. Each character speaks boldly about his/her plights, with Dr. Stone being meticulously attentive.

The filmmaker offers the viewer a full perspective on why Dr. Stone is significant to his patients while revealing the disabilities of the patients: Nina is traumatized because she does not receive attention from her parents and ends up a sex worker. Edwina is traumatized by her husband's physical disability and Adam constantly reminisces over the many atrocities he committed as a young man. The viewer is aware of the factors responsible for Nina's, Edwina's and Adam's trauma. The narrative presents a sequence of flashbacks which focus

on (i) Adam as a young man, practicing as an unlicensed medical doctor who carries out countless abortions for young females but abandons one on a certain day when he realizes that the law enforcement agencies are after him; and (ii) Edwina, who as a young lady experienced neglect and was left to die in a hospital. In the flashback scene, she receives attention from Taiwo who, as a young medical doctor rescues and eventually marries her. The flashback scenes offer the viewer a glimpse into the characters' pasts, and put in proper perspectives the visual precision that follows the development of each character.

Throughout the film, Dr. Stone listens to each of his patients as well as suggesting ways to steadily overcome their issues. This is why he says, "I don't know how to measure my ability, but I am the only one qualified for this job." Dr. Stone is not only confined to a wheelchair but also uses artificial teeth. In a medium shot, a tumbler is placed on a table into which he drops the artificial teeth, while another medium shot follows revealing Dr. Stone meticulously massaging his jaw. The film testifies to the reputation and professionalism of Dr. Stone, who has worked as a psychiatrist in the hospital for nine years, despite his disabilities. Alicia Ouelette has argued that, disabled people face more employment challenges than nondisabled people (in *Human Rights and Disability: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2017). What Niyi Akinmolayan accomplishes with this short is to inaugurate an imagined cinematic world in which disabled characters in Africa can be respected, and also illustrates how they can compete with their nondisabled counterparts without prejudices—an imagination which yet fulfills the UN Convention which recognizes that a violation of the dignity and worth of the human person can be likened to discrimination against any person on the basis of disability.

Room 315 is an interesting film which benignly re-presents the conditions of equity-deserving people in a postcolonial society, and how they seek care from the same society that influences their actions and inactions. Akinmolayan addresses the issue of marginalization of disabled people and how they can overcome their travails with the support of those who know what it means to show care in the most willful of ways.

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