

Verisimilitude in Nollywood Movies

INYANG, Emmanuel Nyong

Department of Mass Communication

Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria

Abstract

Nollywood has over the years made successful attempts at defining and redefining the Nigerian culture through her movie productions. Movie makers in their bid to satisfy their audience and make profit have devised means of arousing and sustaining the interest of their audiences through the use of certain camera angles, particular sound, lighting and editing techniques. This article looks at how movie makers are able to showcase Nigeria's rich and diverse cultures and to create a semblance of reality using the various elements and techniques at their disposal. It employs a semiotic approach in analysing select Nollywood movies, looking at how each element is related to what comes before and after it as in steps of a plot – *syntagmatic relationships* and the enduring principles and rules that organize the movies – *paradigmatic relationships*. The article suggests that movies are largely fictions and that the best a movie can do is to appear to be real – the reality here is usually constructed based on signs and symbols that are familiar and frequently used by members of a given culture or society and that even though movies are largely fictions, and seek mainly to entertain viewers, there should be a strong connection between what happens in the mediated world and the real world.

Keywords: Verisimilitude, Nollywood, Movies, Semiotics, Paradigmatic, Syntagmatic, Culture.

Introduction

Movies are no longer as simple as they were in the days of William Dickson, Thomas Edison, and the Lumiere brothers. The movie audience has become enlightened and literate in the grammar of film and so, since movies, apart from books are the only mass medium not dependent on advertising for financial support (Baran, 2013), movie makers in their bid to satisfy their audience and make profit have devised means of arresting the attention; arousing and sustaining the interest of their

audiences through the use of certain camera angles, particular sound, lighting and editing techniques.

Movies like television make use of certain common conventions in creating meaning and a semblance of reality to their audience. Chandler (2002) refers to these conventions as the 'grammar of television and film'. Chandler's list includes some of the most important conventions for conveying meaning through particular camera and editing techniques, as well as some of the specialized vocabulary of film production. These conventions are, however, not rules as expert practitioners often break them for deliberate effects, which is one of the rare occasions that we become aware of what the convention is.

Dancyger (2011) notes that philosophers have variously theorized that our very capacity to think of material objects (things) can be explained because they are accessible to our senses, or intellects, because they fit the categorical apparatus; they participate in the universal, because they have both the primary and secondary qualities; and so on. He goes further to explain that movies as materials –like books, can be uninteresting if they do not create special problems for any theory. What this means is that when we talk about movies, we are not addressing the material object (film as a medium) but the abstract object (the content) or meaning –usually in the form of a narrative.

Narratives are not material, yet they are at the same time not immaterial or mental. Narratives relate to ideas about life, existence, and other things that are not part of the physical world – they are our way of making sense of lives and the world. This implies that narratives are like relationships –while people are concrete, the relationships between them, equally real are abstract. The stories, plots, themes or meanings, in short the content of the movies are abstract objects.

These abstract objects need to be properly arranged sequentially in order to make sense to the viewers. Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) note that human beings suspect that what is called “content” is but information or data until it is made into something, until it is “formed”. This is in line with Plato and Aristotle's claim that it is the forming of content that great literature is made. The arrangement of contents in literature – especially the movies – is most generally termed “form”. Form is closely identified with structure. Structure has to do with the relationship between different segments (shots, scenes and sequences) of a movie.

Sillars and Gronbeck (2001) are quick to note that two kinds of relationships basically exist in most literary works: horizontal and linear relationships (how an element is related to what comes before and after it, as in the steps of a plot), called syntagmatic relationships and vertical relationships (the enduring principles or rules that organize a work), called paradigmatic relationships. These two patterns of relationship are worthy of note when studying movies.

The movie world is an imaginary world that attempts to mimic the real world as Dancyger (2011, p. 4) specifically notes:

The real world includes among its contents things, people, relations, abstractions; so does the world on film; the world we discern on film stimulates the real world so closely that we can speak of a semblance, even of a continuity between the two.

This tends to argue for Social Construction of Reality, a theory that explains how cultures construct and maintain their realities using signs and symbols.

Nollywood has over the years, made successful attempts at defining and redefining the Nigerian culture through her video film productions. It started as a medium through which the British colonialists were able to spread their successes during the Second World War and to reach out to their people in Britain before progressing to show documentaries on notable events in Nigeria. Private investors had also existed; they rented films or exhibited them in cinemas, but these were more of foreign movies. Indigenous filmmakers later began to produce and distribute movies (films) with local content, showcasing Nigeria's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and making profit for themselves. Today, with the proliferation of indigenous videos in Nigeria, movie audiences have come to rely on Nollywood –the movie industry in Nigeria for information as well as to learn about the diverse cultures and traditions that abound, while entertaining themselves.

This paper sets out to examine how the ideas and emotions communicated in select Nollywood films are formed and structured to appear real and make meaning to the audience, by drawing attention to the horizontal and linear relationships that exist in between them.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is guided by Social Construction of Reality and Formalist Film theory. Social construction of reality explains how cultures construct and maintain realities using signs and symbols available to them. It seeks to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the creation of their own reality. Social construction of reality, according to Baran (2013), explains how people who share a culture can also share an on-going correspondence of meaning. Things generally mean the same to an individual as they do to others. A stop sign, for example, has just about the same meaning to everyone.

Nollywood movie makers use signs, codes, and conventions that are familiar to their audience in creating meaning or constructing a semblance of reality, so as not to distract their viewers from the narrative. These signs, codes and conventions could either have connotative or denotative meanings. For example, understanding how the simple combination of shots can create an additional idea: the blank expression on a person's face, a plate of *jollof*rice (a unique table food eaten in Nigeria and other West African countries), furnished with *moin-moin* (a kind of food snack made from beans), salad and chicken, and then back to the person's face. While nothing in this

sequence literally expresses hunger or desire, the juxtaposition of the images conveys that meaning to the audience. Unravelling this additional meaning can become quite complex – lighting, camera angle, shot duration, juxtaposition, cultural context, and a wide array of other aesthetic elements can actively reinforce or undermine a sequence's meaning.

Formalist film theorists on the other hand consider the formal and technical elements of a movie; i.e. lighting, scoring, set design, use of colour, shot composition and editing, and how they are employed to enhance the plot of the film. The arrangement of different elements and plots does add perspective to film. Formalism at its most general considers the synthesis (or lack of synthesis) of the elements of movie production, and the effects, emotional and intellectual of that synthesis and the individual elements. For example, we can consider a single element of editing. A formalist might decide to study how standard Nollywood continuity editing creates a more comforting effect and non-continuity or jump-cut editing might become more disconcerting or volatile. One might choose to consider the synthesis of several elements such as editing, shot composition and music. The shot selection could go from very wide to very close and tense; the length of shots can decrease as the sequence progresses towards its end, while the music builds. All these elements in combination rather than individually can create tension and add more to the plot, thereby aiding in the construction of reality in video films. Formalism is unique in that it embraces both the ideological and auteurist branches of criticism. In both cases, the common denominator for formalist criticism is style.

Synopses of the Selected Movies

October 1 is a 2014 movie scripted by Tunde Babalola, produced and directed by Kunle Afolayan. It is a thrilling story set in Colonial Nigeria that narrates the ordeal of Danladi Waziri –Sadiq Daba, a police officer from Northern Nigeria who is deployed to a remote town of Akote in Western Nigeria to investigate the frequent female murder cases in the community, and have the mystery solved before the Nigerian flag is raised on October 1, Nigeria's Independence Day. On arrival, Afonja –a sergeant at the Akote police division, is assigned to assist him. The search for the serial killer takes different turns as innocent men are detained, one of which is killed by the father to one of the victims because he is suspected to be the serial killer. Soon after, it is discovered that Aderopo –the Prince of Akote, who was hitherto taken to Lagos on scholarship by Rev Father Dowlin –a catholic missionary, but was consistently assaulted sexually by the priest had returned home so angry with the community for sending him off to suffer such cruelty, and so decides to take vengeance by striping parents of their virgin girls as a punishment to the community for their negligence towards him.

The movies gets to its climax when Inspector Waziri's superiors asks him to put the blame on an innocent citizen –Usman Dangari instead of the Prince, because

Usman is a nobody while the Prince of Akote is from a prestigious background and has ties with Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The production design and cinematography are fantastic. Tribalism, western imperialism, paedophilia, homosexuality, unification and strong ties connection between western culture and the current Boko Haram insurgency are reflected in the movie.

Iyore is a 2014 Nigerian drama produced and directed by Frank Rajah Arase. It tells the story of a life after life –a circle that we live in, not remembering who we were in the world before. It is a mythical tale set around the ancient city of Benin in present Edo state of Nigeria. It is a blend of historical facts and fiction. *Iyore* explores a tragic love story centred on the rich culture of pre-colonial Benin through to the present day Benin whilst exploring the supernatural ideas of reincarnation.

Teacher Osarugwe, a character played by Rita Dominic, teaches her class about the historical tales and conquests of the Benin Empire, and opens up the door to a love story surrounding one of the three sacred virgins of the great Benin –Amenze and Edosa. Amenze –a virgin maiden whose fate is to be buried alive with the King once he is dead holds a secret that could destroy her and the sacred traditions of the Kingdom forever. In order to avoid the mortification, she escapes the Kingdom along with her lover Edosa. Their escape causes an uproar, which leads to a series of battles between kingdoms and kings.

As the story evolves, Osarugwe herself goes through personal battles when her childhood love Prince Azuwa resurfaces to profess his undying love for her. Confused due to the fact that she is now a married woman, Osarugwe is caught up in an inner battle of what is right and wrong. Osarugwe's story is so vividly reminiscent of the story she tells her students in school, that the idea of reincarnation becomes so prevalent. This magical tale brings out the scents and sites of old time Benin while exploring the beauty of forbidden love and the idea of reincarnations.

Apaye is a 2014 Nigerian biographical film directed by Desmond Elliot. It stars Clarion Chukwura, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Belinda Effah, and Mbong Amata. The film, *Apaye*, shows the life of the central character –Yepayeye, a mother of six, who's good-for-nothing husband abandons her for a small girl. She is left with six children to feed, clothe and cater for. After she toils relentlessly, sickness is an unwelcomed guest; her strength comes to life through her father's love.

In the midst of separation, lonesomeness and despair, her relentless search for a job and prayers pays off, as she gets a job with a secondary school. Her joy is inexpressible and knows no bounds. With partial hope restored, she becomes a mother to needy students, providing food for the hungry, and standing up for the needy. Her generosity and love for children comes alive with her new job.

As life would have it, she loses her job and returns to status quo. This time, surviving with six children becomes hell on earth. These times in her life are a deluge of sorrows, tears and heart-rending moments, as the children have grown and are jobless.

More than ever, knowing a God in heaven who sees, hears, cares and answers questions, she is determined to succeed, as it takes her weeks to decide if it is in her best interest. She stays, cried to God so much so that her neighbours asked the children to take their mum to the psychiatrist. Life pushes her and she pushes life. In the midst of all, she stands in God, and in Him she finds victory.

Intertextuality

These movies are selected based on certain shared characteristics. While *October 1* and *Iyore* share the idea of a powerful traditional stool, *Apaye* and *October 1* share a narrative story technique, where the central character is identified and made to tell the story from the beginning to the end.

Rhetorical tropes

Rhetorical tropes are those elements that are used in persuading or influencing viewers to believe that what is signified is real. In *Iyore*, sculptures and cultural artefacts are used to establish the ancient Benin Kingdom. The three movies make use of flashbacks, insert editing, special effects, and shot composition, narrative, sound, lighting and unconventional camera/lens movements to tell their stories. Such tropes are meant to aid viewers in drawing meaning from the movies.

Modality

Modality is the reality status accorded to or claimed by a sign or text, whether in fact or fiction, actuality or acting; live or recorded. It assesses the plausibility or possibility of the events depicted or the claims made in it. A particular kind of special effect is used in the selected movies to create an impression that the action(s) or word(s) has certain effects on some individuals. One of such effects is the kind of lightening that is used to connote that some kinds of actions have taken place; this effect is used in *Iyore* to establish that there is a negative tie between Osarugwe and Prince Azuka, as a result a curse that was placed upon them before reincarnation.

Syntagmatic Structure of the Movies

October 1 opens with images of a young lady being raped by a seemingly unknown person. Next, the camera establishes a scene, where a group of people are celebrating Nigeria's independence, then focuses on Inspector Waziri walking into the office of the district colonial officer, who then walks him into another room with Lord Sabastian Tomkins –a DCO in Mombasa, Kenya and Gen Fred –an attaché to the government in Lagos, seated on a round table, then a flashback to Akote as Inspector Waziri narrates his experience from his arrival and how he was able to carry out his assignment.

There is a flash forward to the present day, as Inspector Waziri concludes his

account to the British officers. The officers are against his desire to speak the truth on the identity of the real killer and they instruct him not to tell anyone about it. He reluctantly succumbs to the pressure for the sake of a peaceful independence.

Iyore opens with an extreme long shot on a vehicle driving into the prison yard, before focusing on Prince Azuma and his attorney coming out of the prison gate as Osarugwe welcomes and takes him home after serving 19 years jail term. On getting there, Azuwa finds the place strange, and Osarugwe tries to explain to him all that happened while he was away, then introduces his children to him. After these scenes, the cast is rolled and a vast land mass with caricatures of people and donkeys moving about are used to establish the great Benin kingdom as Rita Dominic does the narration. The next scene shows Osarugwe in class, teaching students the history of Benin Kingdom. After the class, some of her students propose to visit her at home the next day but she informs them that she will be travelling to her village. The next scene establishes a village setting, where Osarugwe is shown telling the story of the ancient Benin kingdom, where the king had three sacred virgins to be buried with him alive but one of them (Amenze) had an affair and got pregnant for Edosa—a great warrior in the kingdom. The next scene shows Edosa and Amenze trying to escape from the village. This shocking, bittersweet tale of hers spans generations and continues even to the present. The movie employs a series of time shifts, flash backs and forward cuts and multiple story arcs. Somehow, all of these story arcs are related and help in telling the story.

Apaye opens with an extreme long shot with a voice over narration establishing the landscape of Ogbia in Bayelsa State of Nigeria, and then a woman is shown holding to children's hands and walking towards Yepayeye's house and lamenting of money to pay their fees. On arrival at Yepayeye's, there are other children there, Yepayeye orders that the children be fed while he ushers the woman into her living room. After listening to the woman's ordeal, Yepayeye promises to take care of the situation. She urges the woman not to put her hope in any man, as her destiny is in God's hands and hers. She encourages her to hold on to God's words as written in the bible and all her sorrows would turn to joy.

Clarion Chukura documents the life of Yepayeye, taking viewers from her birth through to her very turbulent journey in life—how she braves several odds such as adoption, poverty, spousal infidelity, physical abuse and single parenthood on her way to becoming a social icon.

Paradigmatic Analysis

October 1 suggests that Nigerians regard tradition over government authority, for instance, in the scene where Inspector Waziri orders sergeant Afonja to arrest the high priest of Akote—an act which is considered a taboo in the community, with the threat of facing a disciplinary action, Afonja chooses tradition over his job. The movie also shows the esteem Africans hold for virgins—Aderopo, the serial killer, only went for

virgins as his victims because their purity was not only a value to their families, but to the community at large; he wanted to inflict the exact pain he felt when Rev Father Dowling consistently molested him every Thursday for six years, turning him into a blood thirsty savage.

The movie reveals that in the pre-independence Police, loyalty beat self-interest, the suspension of sergeant Afonja caused a revolt amongst the other police officers who started slacking in their duties because of the absence of their representative of 'rank and file'. Consequently, Inspector Waziri had no option but to reinstate Afonja to his duties. The movie is somewhat a mirror of the society because it highlights the tribal divisions before the independence, for instance, when Sumonu –a palace guard – was suspected to be the killer, there was no rancour in the community about it but when a Hausa man was detained on the basis of the murder, without even going through a trial, the Yoruba as well as the Igbo concluded he was guilty.

October 1 also suggests that not every suspect to a crime is the actual criminal, and as such, a proper trial should be conducted to further ascertain the person's guilt or innocence –the Hausa man took the fall even though he was innocent mainly because he was not from the community and because a proper trial was not conducted.

Iyore is a tale of two lovers, doomed by fate to remain eternally apart and this central romance, as well as what becomes of the lovers is what keeps the viewers glued to their screens. So many things go on at the same time –too many plot swings and time jumps, but not enough time to follow anything to a satisfying conclusion. The arc between Osarugwe and Eweka especially suffers short shrift and the tension explodes prematurely instead of igniting to a slow burn.

Rita Dominic plays not just the lead role, but a dual role –casting and narration. She does not quite disappear into the role of a Benin maiden, as her movie star looks constantly get in the way. It would have made more sense if she had learnt a few lines of the local Benin dialect.

Joseph Benjamin has built a career playing boring second fiddle to famous co-stars. He is at it here again and while his hard work shows, he is still overpowered by his more famous co-star. Cameroonian Okawa Shaznay plays multiple roles that are essentially similar but raised on Rajah-Arase's style of rushed film making. She finds herself overpowered by the demands of her roles. Paul Obazele has a brief but scenery chewing role as a powerful Oba.

The picture is crisp, with plenty to look at in terms of fine scenery and colourful period costumes but the locations, even those from the pre-colonial days have a contemporary feel, not quite convincing of their authenticity. Some noticeable energy is put into staging the fight scenes, but *Iyore*, like most Nollywood films, still has more than its fair share of dialogue. The work of the make-up team shows so much that Rita Dominic looks more like a Zaron cosmetics model than a common

school teacher. Special effects do fine work until they have to stage a lightning scene that just comes off not really fair.

There are the aged lovers, Osarugwe and Eweka (Rita Dominic and Joseph Benjamin). Then in a series of flash back scenes, the origins of their romance is traced to when big haired Osarugwe was a young wife, teaching History at the local high school, and married to another man. By some stroke of genealogy, Joseph Benjamin (Eweka/Azuwa) becomes the crown Prince of the entire Benin kingdom, but is also engaged to another woman. Both Eweka and Osarugwe were childhood sweethearts and now, Eweka resurfaces and wants her way back into Osarugwe's life. Custom dictates otherwise though and he is expected to marry a princess from a neighbouring Yoruba kingdom

This thread bears a striking similarity to events of previous generations, one which has been encapsulated as history and which Osarugwe narrates to her eager students. In this narration, a maiden queen shares a forbidden passion with a foolish warrior that ends in bloodshed. In yet another narration that occurred much earlier, an act of betrayal leads to devastating consequences.

Apaye stretches the truth, showcasing western outlaw, a criminal, a great musical composer, a war-time military hero, the pains of a woman and six children in the throes of a father who is psychologically traumatised. The screenplay attempts to pack the entire events of a person's life into two hours and subsequently suffers sometimes from this urgency with some of the scenes feeling rushed and even disjointed. However, the dialogue and small life details are rendered beautifully onscreen. There are little gimmicks i.e. when the actors are scooping water out of their flooded home and when Apaye –Yepayeye works as a cook in a secondary school, that adds a sense of credibility to the film and a careful attention to details that have not been quite visible in recent Nollywood offerings. The music is engaging and the production design is top notch, although the war scene could have used a bit more help in coming vividly alive. The screenplay is one directional and takes the easy sentimental route, alternating between going for your tears and succumbing to the blanket cover of religion every time.

Apaye has its flaws. It is a straight laced narrative and the director does not attempt any inspiring camera angles or cinema tricks. He tells the story faithfully and judiciously proving that one does not need to wow audiences to impress, and that sometimes competence is enough. '*Apaye*' unintentionally makes a strong case for the biopics. If careful attention to details is paid, they could be Nollywood's next frontier.

The first part of the movie is fantastic. But a few minutes into it, it became disjointed. The editing and probably the fact that the production team is armed with too much research findings, the dis-joined storytelling approach makes it frustrating for a sharp literary mind. However, the '*Apaye*' characters spur a number of motivations for viewers. For its considerable level of fabrication, one expected, the film, no doubt, altered events to suit the storyline. The events are portrayed more

dramatically than they occurred, as time in the movie is “condensed” to fit the storyline.

Connotations and Denotations

Camera angles always act to signify meaning. Usually, shots are taken at eye-level to make the viewer feel as if he/she is part of the action. Eye-level shots are usually interactive and make the viewer live comfortably in the world of film. Camera shots can as well be taken at subjective points of view. In a high angle shot, for instance, the camera looks down on the cast and suggests that the viewer is superior to the cast while in a low angle shot, the camera looks up to the cast and presents him or her as being superior to the viewer. These points of view shots are only used when the filmmaker wants to create deliberate effects. In most scenes in *Iyore* where the Oba of Benin kingdom is shown, the camera takes the image at a low angle point of view, presenting the Oba in his majesty and grandeur. In *Anchor Baby*, however, a high angle shot is used to capture Paul and Joyce in the police net and immigration office respectively. This is done intentionally to portray their weaknesses at such times.

The things that appear in front the camera –the scenery, set, props, actor, their costumes, etc. also influence the verisimilitude of the film in the eyes of its viewers. They help express a film's vision by generating a sense of time and space, as well as setting a mood, and sometimes suggesting a character's state of mind. In *October 1*, for instance, the costumes of Afonja and his men and the scenery go a long way to make viewers believe that the movie takes place in pre-colonial Nigeria even when they know that the movie was acted in 2014. The opening scene of *Anchor Baby* where Paul and his wife Joyce are seen walking down the stairs toward the park has wonderful scenery, beautiful enough to make viewers agree with them that their child needs to be born in America. Even the opening scene of *Apaye* that shows panoramic view of the Niger-Delta creeks is enough to influence the verisimilitude of the viewer and create realism in them.

Lighting, sound and graphics do add perspectives to movies. Lighting can create atmosphere and mood as well as signify meaning. In *Murder @ Prime Suites*, the scenes where Agent Ted investigates the crime suspects are intentionally made to appear dark and tense with the aid of lighting –spot lighting. *October 1* also used lighting to manipulate colour in the entire production. Sound usually adds life to images. Sound may either be part of the action or added to create atmosphere or mood. Most of the movies under review make use of music to set their tone and the dialogue between different characters helps to interpret the roles. The movie, *Scars*, makes use of 'voice over' to introduce Miss Lawson at the opening while she drives into the compound. Computer-generated images are also used to create realism in films. *Iyore*, for example, uses animations and graphics to establish the ancient Benin kingdom.

October 1 employs continuity editing to keep the sense of narrative flow as

inspector Waziri tells his story. *Murder @ Prime Suites* employs more of jump cuts – a dramatic edit that breaks time and space continuity and uses flashbacks to bridge the gaps in between time and space, such that the story appears continuous and natural as the investigations go on. *Iyore* employs multiple editing techniques – so much of jump-cuts, cross-cuts and follow-cuts – to follow actions in separate scenes, and to follow certain actions to their consequences. Various editing techniques are employed at different times in the select movies to drive the story. Sound bridges are also used to carry sound across shots.

The role played by Mike Ezuronye in *Scars* fits him perfectly well; another person who could have played such role well is Jim Iyke or Ghanaian actor, Majid Michel. Joseph Benjamin carriage as a prince in *Iyore* and even his role in *Murder @ Prime Suites* creates a picture of someone who is highly responsible and emotional. The truth is that certain film stars carry certain sensations that can fit into certain roles, and so, they have become signifiers of meaning. They create expectations of character and action, genre, and powerful iconic representations.

While the people we see in films are concrete, the relationships between them are equally real and abstract. These relationships, vertical and horizontal, help to put video films into perspectives. *October 1*, for instance, explores such themes as tribalism, western imperialism, paedophilia and homosexuality, and suggests unification and strong ties between western culture and the current Boko Haram insurgency. *Murder @ Prime Suites* explores themes of betrayal, murder, lies, greed and lust. *Iyore* brings out the scents and sites of old time Benin while exploring the beauty of forbidden love and the idea of reincarnations. *Scars* explores themes of lust, deceit, betrayal and heartbreak. *Anchor Baby* promotes the idea that children born abroad often fare better than children born at home, and dwells on several themes: love, betrayal, dreams, desperation but the dominant one is the exploitation of illegal immigrants. *The Mirror Boy* showcases the power of the African tradition –how supernatural forces can draw people from very far places to their villages when they want to. *Apaye* though a biopic, shares the central theme of Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* that a woman's role in the society is to produce children, and in particular, to produce male children and that the joy of motherhood is giving her all for the sake of her children. These themes which are commonly shared in Nigerian societies add life and credibility to the movies.

Summary and Conclusion

Nollywood filmmakers most often attempt to make their productions seem real, even when they are not. They use all the elements and techniques at their disposal to create a semblance of reality. On some occasions, they claim to produce the films based on true life stories; some are even classified as biopics – the documentation of lives and times of great individuals who left footprints in human history. The essence of all these usually is to make their movies appear real even when they are not. This tends to

make the movies believable and attract viewership as movies do not rely on advertisement to sell themselves. Rather, they depend on the knowledge and skills of the filmmaker in the art of filmmaking. Producers and directors must be able to use their screenplay to tell stories that would arouse the emotions of viewers and make them long to buy and watch the movies.

This article examined select Nollywood films to account for how their producers and directors were able to win the hearts of the audience and where they failed to. It explored their storylines, plots, characters and their roles, the different production elements employed, and the various techniques of video production. The movies have been presented in the form of synopses to lead the reader(s) into the storyline. The researcher has also looked at how the filmmakers were able to combine the different elements and techniques at their disposal to create a coherent whole –a meaningful movie. The movies have also been x-rayed to see the filmmakers' approaches and the different paradigms through which they put together the movies. This research has its roots in *Social Construction of Reality* –the idea that cultures construct and maintain realities using signs and symbols available to them, and *Formalist Film Theory* –the idea that the synthesis (or lack of synthesis) of the elements of movie production, and the effects, emotional and intellectual of such synthesis and even the individual elements aid in movie productions.

Film, like every other medium of communication, attempts to send a message to its audience with the intention of making them respond or act in a particular way. Nollywood films are no exceptions, they try to reach out to their viewers with ideas that will stir up their emotions, make them relax, and believe to an extent that the stories presented to them are real even when most times they actually know that such stories are not real even when there are based on the true life stories. The best a movie can do is to appear to real –the reality here is usually constructed based on signs and symbols that are familiar and frequently used by members of a given culture or society.

Even though films are largely fictions, and seek mainly to entertain viewers, there needs to be a strong connection between what happens in the mediated (movie) world and the real world, otherwise there would be a dissonance between what is supposed to be and what is in the movie world, and the viewer(s) would experience mental discomfort.

A summary of the movies analysed shows that from the moment we start watching a movie, we begin to get involved, and that the first few images –the opening sequence are very important, as they give a lot of clues as to what the film we be about and sets the tone for the rest of the movie. We would look at the opening shots of place and time and put them into context. We look at the actors we are presented with and make assumptions about their characters and roles in the film and their relationship with each other. We look at the title of the film –the way it is worded and the style of lettering and we try to guess what genre of film it will be. We listen to

the sound which is often predominantly music at this stage, and the tone and beat again give us further clues as to how the film will develop. We do all these automatically –at this time, we are receptive and actively involved.

Without realising it, we enter into the world of film and begin to read the signals that have been set up for us, and we begin to decode the grammar of film.

References:

- Baran, S. (2013). *Introduction to mass communication: Media literacy and culture*. 8th Ed. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Baran, S. and Davis, D. (2012). *Mass Communication Theory: Foundations, ferments, and future*. 6th Ed. USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Campsall, S. (2002). *Analysing moving image texts: 'Film language'*. GCSE Film Analysis Guide. Retrieved from englishbiz.co.uk/downloads/filmanalysis/pdf.
- Chandler, D. (1994a). *Semiotics for beginners* [www document] URL. <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/semiotics.html>
- Chandler, D. (1994b). *The grammar of television and film*. [WWW document] URL. <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/short/gramtv.html>
- Culler, J. (2002). *The pursuit of signs: Semiotics, literature, demonstration*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge & Hegan Paul
- Dancyger, K. (2011). *The technique of film and video editing: History, theory, and practice*. USA: Focal Press.
- Dominick, J. (2013). *The dynamics of mass communication*. 12th Ed. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Inyang, E. N. (2013). *The grammar of TV and film in the making of Nigerian movies*. In *Journal of Media, Communication and Languages*. Vol. 4(1), 103-114
- Sillars, M. and Gronbeck, B. (2001). *Communication criticism: Rhetoric, social codes, cultural studies*. Illinois: Waveland Press Inc.
- Sless, D. (1986). *In search of semiotics*. London: Croom Helm.
- Stam, R., Burogoyne, R. and Fletterman-Lewis, S. (1992). *New vocabularies in film semiotics: Structuralism, post-structuralism and beyond*. New York: Routledge.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Social Extensions of Realism*. In *Screen*. Vol. 18(1), 61-74.