

The Auteur as a Socio-Political Commentator: A Reading of Selected Films of Tecu Benson.

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Introduction

Undeniably, film is a powerful and significant art form—more serious even than many other art forms. Its absence from the life of our contemporary society would most probably constitute a social catastrophe. In the words of the art historian and critic Erwin Panofsky:

If all serious lyric poets, composers, painters and sculptors were forced by law to stop their activities, a rather small fraction of the general public would seriously regret it. If the same were to happen with the movies, the social consequence would be catastrophic. (as cited in Quart and Auster 2).

As an art form, film and society are inseparable. The field of sociology of arts has often considered the relationship between arts and society. The conclusion that 'art is society and society is art' (which has somewhat become a cliché) applies with double emphasis to film - "*a powerful visual medium with extraordinary ability to influence the thinking and behaviour of its audience*" (Ukadike 31). This owes much to the visual bias of film. It should be stated at the risk of stressing the obvious that the film medium has become so central to human existence that no nation can afford to ignore

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the power of the screen any longer. The committed filmmaker knows only too well that he will always aim at using his works to impact on and attempt to influence the world around him. The question then is how true is this assertion when weighed against the realities of the peculiar nature of Nollywood?

Some of the early video films produced in Nollywood paid little or no attention to the issue of making explicit socio-political statements about the Nigerian polity. The reason for this is not farfetched: most of the pioneer producers and marketers who are the live wire of the industry are basically motor spare parts dealers and electronic merchants either at Idumota Lagos or at Iweka Road and Main Market Onitsha. They ventured into film basically because of its high yielding profits (Shaka 136). The hunger of Nigerians for self-representation, says Shaka, ensured public patronage at that time. With the present status of Nollywood as the third largest film industry in the world, there has been a revival of interest in virtually all aspects of the industry. Ipso facto, the relation of the socio-political perspective of contemporary Nollywood films to the nature of the Nigerian polity cannot be overemphasised. A good number of Nollywood filmmakers in contemporary times have begun to give their films the due important socio-political import. Nollywood is becoming too deeply embedded in Nigerian culture to be isolated from her political realities.

Filmmaking is a collaborative venture involving the works of many - what Steven Kene chose to term "an army" (as cited in Grass and Ward 2). A whole lot of people and industry control go into shaping the final product. To who then do we assign the ideological stances of those films whose socio-political meanings are not open to contesting and contradictory interpretations? In the Nigerian (Nollywood) situation, do we apply them to the script writer who creates the story?; or the

director ("who is responsible for all creative factors that transform a story line into a motion picture" [Adesanya 51]); or better still, the almighty marketer who provides the financial base and consequently dictates what goes and what does not go in the industry? Peter Biskind in attempting to discuss this issue in the Hollywood context did not mince words in positing that the one who provides the financial bedrock for the industry dictates the ideological thrust. Hear him

A conservative director may work with a liberal writer, or vice versa, and both, even if they are trying to impose their politics on their films..., maybe overruled by the producer who is only trying to make a buck and thus expresses ideology in a different way, not as a personal preference or artistic vision but as mediated by mainstream institutions ... which transmit ideology in the guise of market decisions: this idea will sell, that one wont (as cited in 265).

This view could be modified to serve our purpose here: the marketer in Nollywood takes exactly the position Biskind assigned to the producer, and the open film market in Nollywood is the mainstream institution. To this, the auteur theory vehemently argues that the auteur is the author of films and should be credited with the socio-political commentaries of his films.

The Auteur Theory

Auteur is the French word for author. The auteur theory as dubbed by the American film critic Andrew Sarris is an outgrowth of the cinematic theories of earlier film theorists and critics, most especially Andre Bazin's and Alexandre Astruc. Its roots can be traced to Bazin's "interest in Mise-en-Scene

to concentrate on visual style in the way in which films were composed and constructed for the viewer" (Turner 37). However, scholarly accounts of the origin of the auteur theory locate 1948 as its starting point with Alexandre Astruc's essay 'the Birth of a New Avant-garde: La Camera Stylo.' In this work, Astruc made strong elucidations for the concept of *Camera Stylo* (Camera pen) which puts forth the idea of cinema as a tool for the expression of the individual artist. He called on directors to wield their cameras as writers their pen, and refused to be hindered by traditional story telling. Although Astruc's *Camera Stylo* failed to take roots, its elucidations about the film artist (director) as a serious writer and film as an individual's expression had direct influences on the concept of *Cinema d'auteurs* which dominated the discussions of *Cashiers du cinema* in the 1950s.

Yet, it was the article *Une certain Tendence du Francais* (which is translated to mean "A Certain Tendency in French Cinema") by Francios Truffant that first made use of the term 'auteur'. This article which appeared in the January 1954 issue of *Cashiers du cinema* dealt with the concept of *politique des auteurs* (which could literally translate to "author's policy"). This concept was in total disagreement with *tradition de la qualite* which had hitherto dominated French cinema. *Tradition de la qualite* "was a tradition which gave the central creative role to writers... leaving to the director the secondary role of implementing the scenarios" (Caughie 35). The concept of *Politique des auteurs* argues, rather tenaciously, that there is an individual who should impose his creative will on the film project and that this individual is the director. He tagged this director-led cinema *cinema d'auteurs* arguing that such a cinema is superior to the *cinema de Qualite* (quality cinema) produced by the *tradition de la qualite*. The quality cinema he disdainfully tagged *cinema de papa* (dad's cinema) accusing them of "being

script-led, redolent with safe psychology, lacking in social realism and of being led by the same old script writers and filmmakers whose time were up" (Hayward 14). As it attacked French cinema of the time, the polemic of *politiques des auteurs* attempted to bring into the cannon, certain American (Hollywood) films and filmmakers who had already been jettisoned into cultural junk heap by critics and theorists. Little wonder it caught the fancy of American film scholars. In his essay 'Notes on the Auteur Theory' (1962), the American film expert Andrew Sarris originated the half-English, half-French term 'auteur theory' as it is been used today when he stated succinctly "henceforth I will abbreviate *La politique des auteurs* as the auteur theory to avoid confusion" (Caughie 62). Says *Wikipedia* (the free web encyclopaedia), Sarris later published his views in a book that was to become the "unofficial bible of auteurism" under the title *The American Cinema: Directors and Directing 1929-1968*. The auteur theory, it must be warned ab initio, does not deal with a homogenous body of rules and guidelines that cut across national and/or ideological boundaries without alterations and modifications, because, according to Peter Wollen, "it grew up rather haphazardly and was never elaborated in programmatic term in a manifesto or collective statement" (530). Hence, what will follow is a radical, but critical, survey of the concept, basic tenants and criticism of auteur theory.

As could be deduced from our discussion so far, the auteur theory started with the preoccupation of finding an author for the feature film. The crux of the matter lies with the fact that film is a collaborative venture involving the works of many. To this, the auteur theory argues, in the exact words of Caughie (10), that "film is an art, and art is the expression of the emotions, experience (sic) and 'world-view' of an individual artist." This negates the notion that all the collaborative artists

involved in filmmaking have equal strength of contribution. Consequently, the duo of Lovell and Kramer opine that

...the creation of a film becomes increasingly regarded as an individual rather than a collective process. The contributions of actors along with cinematographers, editors, sound recordists, production designers etc was, if acknowledged at all, subordinate to the directors genius. (2)

The director, and not the writer of the screenplay, is seen as the author of the film since what conveys the message of film is a fusion of the fundamental visual elements of camera angle, blocking, lighting and scene length and plot line. The script (the text) is only fragmentary and one of the least important elements the director works with.

In its later and modern usage, auteur is not indiscriminately assigned to all directors; neither does it limit itself to acclaiming the director as the author of film. The auteur is that particular director "with a recognisable and distinctive style who is considered the prime author of a film" (Cook 919). The contributions of the director that will elevate him to the status of an auteur according to Kilborn (313), "will be measured in part by the degree to which the finished product bears that individual's creative flair." The (highly competent) director whose marks of distinction are not clearly left on the film is at best referred to as *metteur en scene*. In the exact words of Buscombe (24), auteur theorists

...share this belief in the absolute distinction between the auteur and metteur en scene... and characterized it in term of the difference between the auteur's ability to make a film truly his own, that is a kind of original and the metteur en

scene's inability to disguise the fact that the origin of his film lies somewhere else.

Adherents of the auteur theory are not quite agreed on a particular set of features to look out for in the auteur's work. But of all features, auteur theorists prescribe the common threads that could be deduced as including that the auteur:

- (a) Repeatedly return to the same subject matter
- (b) Habitually address a particular psychological and moral theme
- (c) Employ a recurring style
- (d) Stick to a particular genre, or
- (e) Demonstrate a combination of the above.

Walker (62) adds that the auteur must in addition be unique in his artistic status and particular mode of production and distribution. This is Walker's way of saying that the auteur should take charge both artistically and financially.

Auteur theory has come under the attack of film critics since its inception starting from Sarris' coinage of the term 'auteur theory' supposedly to avoid confusion. What Sarris dreaded so much and attempted to avoid -confusion- was exactly what ensued. Sarris and his followers in their postulations went contrary to what the elder statesman, Andrew Bazin, tagged "the cult of individuality" (Caughie 26) by arguing that the failure of the auteur is better than the success of the *metteur de scene*. Hence, critics of the director-centred auteur theory fault the larger than life status assigned to the auteur. Some other critics according to the *Stanford Encyclopaedia of philosophy*, believe that

A negative consequence of the influence of auterism is the neglect of other important contributors to the making of film. Actors,

cinematographers, screenwriters, composers... etc all make significant contributions which the auteur underestimates.

To some other film critics especially the 'New Criticism' school of thought, cinema as an art cannot be said to be transparent neutral and innocent. They, therefore, demand that the cinema be picked and deconstructed to unveil its subtext, the auteurs' objectivity or otherwise as well as the auterial intertextuality. Semiotics for instance demands a critical evaluation of the discourse and non-discourse (the said and the non-said). Psychoanalysis on its own part questions the unity of the auteur theory by emphasising the conscious and the unconscious motives of both the film and the auteur.

Auteur theory leaves us with a whole lot of contradictions and confusions. Yet, these are conditions we need to investigate as sine qua non to its existence and appreciation. The theory nonetheless provides a useful focus for some efforts in the scholarly study of film. With the contradictions and confusions, it becomes possible that the theory could be applied to any film industry irrespective of its stage of development. It will thus amount to great disservice to continue to deny Nollywood auterial attentions - not with its international high rating. In a discussion on the place of auteur theory in Nollywood, Ihentuge (105) concludes that "there are Nollywood directors whose works reveal a clear indication that they are qualified to be termed auteurs" and that "Teco Benson is one of such." What follows is a discussion of selected films of Teco Benson to reveal a Nollywood auteur who uses his films to run socio-political commentaries on the realities of the Nigerian nation.

Biographical Background to Teco Benson.

Born on Sunday, February 28, 1971, Teco Benson hails from Ojoto in Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra

State. He had his primary education at the Universal Primary Education School, Oji River. He attended Boy's High, Inyi and Community Secondary, Udi for his secondary school education which he completed in his home town, Ojoto. He read Public and Environmental Health at the Enugu State School of Health Technology. He also holds a Post Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Pathology of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Teco Benson, who is married with children, has several awards to his credit.

Prior to 1997, Teco Benson was a civil servant with the Health Department of the Anambra State Environmental Protection Agency- a job he started combining with part-time acting in 1994. In 1996 he produced *Compromise* as his first full time production. Teco Benson finally quit civil service in 1997 to pursue a career in directing -"to concentrate on calling shots from the other side of the camera" (Adetula 41). He made his directing debut in 1997 with *Waterloo*. Teco Benson's road to auteurial control began when he opted for directing in 1997. As a beginner, he started by directing in all genres - doing anything and everything. In his determination to produce more sophisticated works, he opted for one of the genres, the action film genre, beginning with his production of the award winning *State of Emergency1* (2000). This, of course, is in line with one of the dictates of auteur, the theory that the auteur stick to a particular genre. Since the production of *State of Emergency1*, Teco Benson has focused more on this genre. *False Alarm* (2001), *Broad Daylight* (2001), *Formidable Force* (2001), *Senator* (2003), *War front* (2004) *Explosion* (2006) and *Mission to Nowhere* (2007) are some of his action films.

Teco Benson as a Socio-political Commentator: A Reading of His Selected Films.

A critical reading of Teco Benson's action films reveals an auteur that is committed to change his society with the medium

of film. Hence, he uses his films to make socio-political comments about his immediate environment. Teco has been an adherent of the auteurial dictate of habitually addressing a particular psychological and moral theme which bothers on the need for a total socio-political re-orientation of the Nigerian people. He has made conscious efforts to always treat this theme in his films through various subject matters and points of view. *State of Emergency*, which could be regarded as the first serious attempt at action film in Nigeria, marked a new epoch in filmmaking in Nigeria. The story of *State of Emergency* is contemporary as it touches on such national and international socio-political issues. The most glaring is the issue of peace keeping that led to the formation of the Omega Squad in the film. The auteur is using this film to ask if it is worth the huge waste of human and material resources. Is it not better to channel the 'big brother' role Nigeria is playing in Africa into maintaining peaceful co-existence rather than going to fight for peace to return in war devastated countries? Does it not amount to a sort of 'afghanistanism' for our government to continuously talk of the problems of the other countries when it cannot effectively handle the various sheds of crises that have bedevilled the country? These and many more fundamental questions are naturally provoked by *State of Emergency*.

The abandonment of the surviving members of the Omega Squad in Angola in *State of Emergency* is a portrayal of the neglect; abuse and dehumanisation a good number of our elder statesmen and patriots suffer in Nigeria. Many who risked their lives and staked their youths for our fatherland in several instances suffer abuse and abandonment from government. Civil servants, men of the armed forces and para-military agencies, former sports men et cetera who are opportuned to attain retirement status do not usually receive their retirement benefits while those who are unfortunate to die in active service

are as good as forgotten. *State of Emergency* is Teco Benson's call to right the wrongs done such people. The promulgation of decree 46 of August 15, 1970 by General Yakubu Gowon, which occasioned the dismissal of police officers and men who fought in the Biafran side despite the "no victor no vanquished" declaration, is one of such injustices that Teco Benson is pointing at as demanding government's action. Yet he appeals to the aggrieved not to take the laws into their own hands but to follow the path of peaceful agitation as the said dismissed Biafran police officers did under the auspices of Association of Retired War Affected Police Officers (AWEPO). The result of AWEPO's law agitation is the conversion of their dismissal to retirement by President Obasanjo in May 2000, and the consequent payment of the first phase of their retirement benefits in January 2007 - about 37 years after their dismissal (*Daily Champion* Editorial 10).

Another important socio-political issue treated in *State of Emergency* (and which has become a hydra headed monster in Nigeria) is that of hostage taking typified by the hostage taking of all those in attendance at the Minister's conference by the Omega Squad. One will not be saying anything new if one says that hostage taking in Nigeria is an offspring of oil derivation and revenue sharing. Yet it is very disheartening to note that most Nigerian governments have only paid leap service and played the ostrich with this issue. Although some of the hostage takers in recent times are propelled by selfishness, the issue of hostage taking especially within the Niger Delta region demand a permanent, practically workable solution to the oil issue in Nigeria. The issue of marginalisation in Nigeria can also be deduced as one of the issues that the hostage taking in *State of Emergency* is pointing at. Is it right for instance, that the South Eastern zone of Nigeria will continue to be so grossly marginalised, even humiliated? Is the absence

of any sea port or international airport, the side lining of the zone from certain strategic positions (oil, security etc) and the five-state status of the zone (against at least six in other zones) justified? What is the government doing about the constant attacks in various forms (ethno—religious, Apo killing, selective demolition etc) on the Igbos who struggle daily to live above marginalisation and lack of federal government presence to search for decent ways of emancipating themselves everywhere within and outside the country?

The inability of the security agencies in *State of Emergency* (the police, army and SSS) to handle the hostage takers portrays the failure of such agencies, "the situation which has necessitated law abiding citizens to adopt stringent security measures for self defence or personal survival" (Ayakoroma 8). Save for the aid of Agent Smith (Saint Obi), it would have probably been impossible to put the Omega Squad under check in the film. The weakness of the power sector in Nigeria is portrayed with the power outage witnessed in the venue of the ministers' conference. The power sector, one of the key areas in the 7-point agenda of President Yar'Adua, is one sensitive area that our government has not done more than make 'powerful' policies which according to Achebe (3) end up giving us '...plenty of food for thought and nothing at all in our stomachs'. In all, Teco Benson still hands down the cautionary note that the aggrieved should always seek legal redress. He made sure that the hostage takers were apprehended and the viewer gets the impression that their crime will be appropriately punished. Hence, the closing caption in state of emergency reads **"You may have a genuine reason. But never you take the laws into your hands"** (original emphasis).

The Senator (2003) which the auteur refers to as "a political explosion" captures the politics of ranchor and acrimony that

has characterised the Nigerian political process right from the first republic. The story revolves around a young man, Larry, who employs blackmail, character assassination and murder as means of actualising his lifelong ambition of becoming not only a senator but also the senate president. First we see the effect of wrong parental upbringing on the society as Larry is not given the pre-requisite home training foundation. Instead, Larry is introduced to amoral life through the knowledge of the parents' double affairs. His father (Laz Ekweueme) was dating his secretary while his mother (Rachael Oniga) was dating a close family friend. He uses this knowledge to blackmail his parents to giving him money whenever the need arises. The story of *The Senator* is one long scroll of blackmails and assassinations which Larry employs as means of achieving his political ambition. This type of dangerous politicking is characteristic of the political arena in Nigeria. The notions that "the end justifies the means," "politics is a do or die affair" and "the winner takes it all" are some of the notions the auteur point at in such a way that call for re-orientation. Apart from the family, the educational institution is portrayed in *The Senator* as repellent with such vices as examination malpractice, cultism, shortcuts to academic excellence and other sharp practices. Half-baked graduates are churned out in several hundreds of thousands on yearly basis while higher degrees are no longer awarded on merit. *The Senator* is the auteur's further treatment of his theme of the need for socio-political re-orientation for Nigeria. But it must be pointed out that the character of Larry is a flaw in his treatment of this theme in the film. Larry is not in any way brought to book for his crimes. Rather he achieves his goal because the film ends with the road being very clear for Larry to plot his way to the Senate and we see Larry and his friend Mike celebrating their victory. With this type of ending, the critical viewer will obviously get worried as to whether the

auteur is glorifying crime.

Advance fee fraud, colloquially called 419 in Nigeria, is one issue that has battered the image of the country abroad and continually scared away foreign investors. The first contact with a Nigerian abroad is handled with utmost care and with the fallacious notion that every Nigerian is a fraudster. As if that is not enough, the siphoning of public funds and the laundering of same into foreign accounts is almost becoming a culture. This has further dented the image of the country abroad and negatively affected the rating of Nigeria as regards corruption – Nigeria is rated among the topmost corrupt nations in the world. In the bid to tackle fee fraud and money laundering, the Federal Government of Nigeria under Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, through the EFCC Establishment Act 2002, established the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The commission is to help combat these crimes. According to the E.F.C.C web site,

The preponderance of economic and financial crimes like advance fee fraud (419), money laundering e.t.c. has had severe negative consequences on Nigeria, including the decreased direct investments... and tainting of Nigeria's image. The menace of these crimes and recognition of the magnitude and gravity of the situation led to the establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

Explosion (2006) is Teco Benson's contribution to the campaign against advance fee fraud, money laundering and other forms of cyber crimes repellent in our country Nigeria. The film opens with the members of the 419 syndicate, the Black Angels hunting for prey on the internet. Fee fraud syndicates are commonly referred to as the "yahoo boys" in

Nigeria. The outcome of the Black Angels hunt is the murder of Mr. Hopkins and the sharing of his five hundred million dollars. *Explosion* is the auteur's further advice that Nigerians should have a rethink about acquiring wealth through fraudulent means. At the end of the film, all the members of the gang ended up tragically. Most 419ers in Nigeria claim that it is not a crime but rather a way of getting back from the white man a minute part of what he exploited from Africa as a result of slave trade and colonialism. These could be heard from the character Steve Onyeama (Kenneth Okonkwo) who tells his son that they (the 419ers) are only "taking back from the white man what he stole from Africa"

As the fight against fee fraud and money laundering intensifies, most 419ers are abandoning their trade to venture into other decent enterprises. A whole lot of them now occupy sensitive positions in government, as Senator Nuhu Aliyu confirms. Some have gone into business while some others, especially in south east Nigeria have gone into other areas including becoming traditional rulers. Worthy of note also is the fact that most of them now use their ill gotten wealth for charitable work and philanthropy. In *Explosion*, Steve gave out what was remaining of his ill gotten money wealth to the pastor for the erection of a gigantic church building. A good number of them however do not whole heartedly abandon crime. This group verbally gave up 419 but continued using some other ventures as a cover up as their boys were still somewhere searching for who to defraud. It is on record that nemesis still catches up with some of them. The case of Chief Hon. Maurice Ibekwe who died in EFCC net during the investigation of a 419 case involving him is a good example here. Chief Ibekwe as at the time of his death in EFCC net was serving his second tenure as a member of the Federal House of Representatives. In *Explosion*, Steve claimed to have gone

off crime and to have taken up a new status as a pastor, yet he continued to secretly indulge in crime which was the cause of his mysterious death right inside the church. Before his death the senior pastor is heard telling him "like a dog you went back to your vomit."

The auteur also used *Explosion* to make a political statement about the corrupt and inefficient nature of the Nigerian police. They murderers of Mr. Hopkins would probably not have been found if not for the private detectives hired by the America government in the film. Even when Steve was apprehended, the Nigeria police in the film were unable to properly interrogate him to get at the other members of the gang. With this, the auteur is vehemently calling for reform in the Nigerian police. It must be pointed out that in his bid to make this political statement, certain derogatory statements were unjustifiably brought in by the auteur. In one of the court scenes, the magistrate, in trying to comment on the huge amount Mr. Hopkins was robbed of, said

This is an amount which when converted to naira and given to the police force could discourage them from mounting road blocks and collecting twenty naira (N20) from members of the public.

It is unusual that a man in the status of the magistrate could cast such an aspersion on the Nigerian police in a court session, not minding the seriousness of the case at stake, and the national, international and diplomatic interests represented in that court.

Mission to Nowhere (2007) is the auteur's piece of advice toward a proper investigation of the various forms of intimidation, assassination attempt and outright assassination in the country. The increasing rate of assassinations has further charged the security atmosphere of the country. This is worse

among the political class. Nigerians wake up almost every morning to the shocking news of assassinations and assassination attempts. On 23rd December, 2001, the then Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation Chief Bola Ige was brutally murdered in his home amidst 'tight' security. The murders of Marshall Harry (the National Vice chairman of ANPP South -South zone), Chief Ogbennaya Uche (the ANPP senatorial aspirant for Orlu Senatorial zone Imo state), Aminasoari K Dikibo (a PDP gubernatorial candidate in Rivers State), Capt Jerry Agbayegbe (Aviation chief), Chief Uche Ogbe (of Imo state), Chief Funso Williams (PDP governorship aspirant Lagos State), and Ayodeji Daramola (of PDP Ekiti State) are some of such brutal murders. Unfortunately, virtually none of these killings has been conclusively investigated and the culprits punished. The government does not do more than being the chief mourner at such times and setting up investigative panels.

Teco Benson is using his *Mission to Nowhere* to go a step further than advice on the need to properly investigate these murders. The only direction Nigerian investigative personnel look towards during the assassinations, especially when the victims are known political figures or their relatives, is the political motivation. Hence such killings are usually tagged 'politically motivated' killings. *Mission to Nowhere* is the auteur's advise that we look beyond political motivation because some, if not a good number of them, are not actually politically motivated. In the film, Mrs Naomi Adams (Barbra Soky) was murdered in her study. She is the wife of John Adams a popular political figure and a strong opponent of the incumbent administration. Because of the husband's political interest, the emphasis became the political motivation behind her murder. It was believed that she was murdered either by her ex-husband or his political opponents. Either way, there are political

undertones. If she was murdered by the husband, it must be to protect his political ambition by putting a stop to Naomi's nefarious activities or to stop her from revealing secret pieces of information to his opponents. These could mar his political ambition. If, on the other hand, she is murdered by opponents of Chief Adams, it could be to distract him in his politics or shift the suspicion of the murder on him to make him unpopular before the electorate. At the end of the film, it was discovered that Mrs Adams was actually murdered by her above suspicion, amiable looking house maid Tina (Uju Okeke) for reasons that go far beyond political ambition. The auteur is simply making the political statement that some of the brutal killings especially of prominent political figures are motivated by facts that go beyond their political ambition. If such killings are to be investigated in the light of this, the mysteries behind them could be unravelled.

Teco Benson also used *Mission to Nowhere* to advise that people should be careful in engaging other people for such jobs that necessitate direct contact on a daily basis. House helps, drivers, gardeners, cooks, security men, e.t.c usually have direct contact with their bosses daily. Such people can conveniently endanger the lives of their bosses, murder them or lead enemies to them. Tina's actions in *Mission to Nowhere*, clearly portrays this. She is the least person any one could suspect in Mrs. Adams murder, not with her harmless disposition.

CONCLUSION

Teco Benson has conspicuously set an enviable precedence in his career as a Nollywood auteur. It will be fallacious to assume that his works are flawless. The errors noticed in his works are as a result of the level of development in the country and by extension Nollywood. But with the level of growth and

the radical experiment going on in the industry, there is every hope that subsequent works will attain the expected Hollywood status including pursuing all leads in criminal investigation and making sure that all crimes are punished. Worthy of note also is the fact that the auteur, Teco Benson has been making conscious attempts to minimise interference in his works- the latest being his establishment of a film production (TFP Global) network, and an ongoing attempt to control the financing and distribution of his own works so as to maintain absolute auteurial control. Meanwhile, he still controls most other important aspects of the film production process in his films, while the post – production are usually handled by his TFP global network studio under his strict supervision.

More often than not, critiques of Nollywood are presented as fables whose morals depend on the teller's point of view, intentions, biases and prejudices. Due to its process of evolution, Nollywood has travelled by a road that uses trial and error as a developmental process. It will be fallacious to assume that the industry has gotten to it's peak just as it will be suicidal to constantly discuss the faulty side of the industry overlooking landmark achievements that have over the years resulted from conscious efforts of the auteurs of Nollywood. There is admittedly a monumental amount of work to be done to fully realise the potentials of Nollywood.

In view of the exposition we presented above, this study is proffering that in as much as Nollywood personnel have important roles to play in the development of the industry, scholars, film theorists and critics, and in deed the generality of Nigerians, have crucial roles to play. Balanced constructive criticism will do well in pointing out direction. Auteurism is therefore being recommended as an alternative mode of criticism for Nollywood. A group of films, the works of a director, could be taken and analysed to reveal their subtext and their

auteurial intertextuality. This will help reveal the numerous access routes to what the director says as well as lead to an understanding of directors who hitherto have only been incompletely comprehended. There is need to further research into the works of other Nollywood auteurs and even into Teco Benson's oeuvre. There is need to investigate other dimensions of their theories, and avenues through which they could be explored to benefit Nollywood. Peter Woolen's admonition several years ago should suffice here to further buttress this:

We need not two or three books— But many, more. We need comparisons with authors in other arts – the task which the critics of cahiers du cinema embarked on is still far from completed. (as cited in Caughie 145 – 146)

On the part of Nollywood auteurs, this study is of the view that they should strive to rise above the various factors that place them under undue checks thereby hampering their creative capabilities. One of such factors, and in fact the greatest hindrance to the auteur's work in Nollywood, is finance. The auteurs can organise self help groups and co-operatives where they can pull resources together in order to finance, produce, exhibit and distribute their works. This will further put them into total auteurial controls of their works and enable them to have control over the socio-political commentary on contemporary issues rather than being saddled with stories, subject matters and themes the marketer thinks marketable. Nollywood has out grown the era of 'flying chairs', disappearing persons, 'Babalawo' e.t.c. films. Emphasis should be shifted to contemporary socio-political issues.

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