

## **Patterns of Production and Aesthetic Elements in Some Nollywood Films**

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### **Abstract**

Film is one of the most important communication tools that spur the development of the human race. The reason for this is because of its power to critically evaluate the follies of man through the illusion of moving images. In the Nigerian cinema scholarship, however, the need to carry out a thorough study on the production elements and aesthetics of the content of Nollywood films is critical. The objectives of this study are to evaluate the pattern of production elements in some Nollywood films, examine the aesthetic values in the content of these films and observe the use of spectacle in the films. The paper adopted textual analysis method to interrogate three Nollywood films, with a view to ascertain the creative use of production elements that generate aesthetic values for the films. These elements were observed to enhance the aesthetic content of some Nollywood video films. The study concludes that Nollywood film emphasises the use of colourful costumes and beautiful decors to enhance the aesthetic value in the pattern of production elements of its films.

**Key Words:** Aesthetic, Decors, Elements, Spectacle and Nollywood

### **Introduction**

The power of film to evoke our emotions in the process of entertaining or communicating is, as limitless as the imagination of the filmmaker. Unlike the confine space of theatre where all the actions are limited to the physical space of the stage, coupled with the artistic capacity of actors and their props, film has the duplex capacity to project that which is real and somewhat not. In film, if you can think it, you can make it happen. Hawker and Soanes (2005, p. 852) define realism as “the representation

of things in a way that is accurate and true to life". In film reality however, the filmmaker possess the tools and skills with which to present his/her own version of reality according to his or her story, purpose and imagination.

What in essence, the above suggests, is the power of film to manipulate reality and the ability to also create its own reality. Realistically, film records that which is placed in front of the camera, hence, the adoption of dialogue just like theatre, to propel its action from one scene to another to enable the audience follow the dramatic action. This is why the term "realism" has often been used to describe film severally.

We adopt Andre Bazin's theory of realism for this study. Thomson-Jones (2000, p.17) states of this theory that: "the fundamental claim in his writings is that film is distinguished from other art form by its distinctive capacity for realism, a capacity that derives from the nature of the filmmaking process".

Going further, Thomson-Jones describes how film is more real than theatre, although we see real life people on stage in the theatre, while film is just an image of people on a flat screen. She explains this came about because of the ability of the camera to use medium-long shots, the use of deep focus lens and the composing film shots with dramatic details within different pictorial levels. She alludes to this as being the reason why people describe some loud films as being theatrical, although our instinct tells us otherwise.

Evidently, it is precisely the mobility of the cinema camera and the ability of the filmmaker to alternate two sequences of events in two different places that contribute to the same total effect, which gave filmmakers the power to create an alternate realism. They are able to do this through the use of creative editing. The use of visual image as a signifier is the source of film's power to control and manipulate reality in movies.

Nollywood filmmakers are not exempt from this capacity to forge that which emits from their creative imaginations. This they do, through the use of the production elements and aesthetics of the content of their films. In the process of their creativity, many issues are treated for the consumption of the audience, several of who see Nollywood films as the

epitome of what to aspire for. The use of these production elements has been so successful to the extent that Nollywood films keep growing in popularity throughout the nation and around the world.

This study examined the pattern of production elements in the content of some selected Nollywood films. The study investigated how Nollywood films deploy production elements to enhance the aesthetic value of its movies. It described the production elements of Nollywood films with the aim of understanding how they use the elements of film production to create aesthetic values for their movies.

Specifically, the study examined the pattern of production elements of colourful scenery, lighting, sound and dialogue in the content of Nollywood films. In this process, the paper adopted textual analysis method to interrogate three Nollywood films, with a view to ascertain the creative use of production elements that generate aesthetic values for the films. The objectives were to evaluate the pattern of production elements, examine the aesthetic values in the content and observe the use of filmographic spectacle in the films.

### **Literature Review**

Having surmounted the economic hardship of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the late 1980s and early 90s, film production has grown to be one of the biggest employers of labour in the Nigerian economy today, trailing behind agriculture. Fielding-Smith (2014, p.1) attests to the fact that: “On a continent where economies usually depend on extracting natural resources or on charity, movie making is now one of Nigeria’s largest sources of private-sector employment.” The video film producers actually invest their own funds, at their own risk to bring products to the market for the masses. Adeleke (2003, p.51) buttresses the resurgence of film production in Nigeria when he states that “the end of celluloid culture in Nigeria ushers in the video film culture. Some television producers and cameramen who have either retired or opted out of television stations considered video film culture a fertile ground; hence they plunged into video film industry.”

The continued growth of the industry is an affirmation of the industry’s resilience, as well as the enduring efforts of stake holders in the industry. The video film industry which started in the late 1980s in

Nigeria has today, grown into a very big industry since its inception. Part of the reason for this growth is the adaptation of the production elements to match the worldview of the audience by the producers.

Okome (2010, p.39) agrees with the shared background of the video producers and audience as a major reason for the popularity of the videos. He states that “Nollywood and the cultural products it sells constitute one social document, a *tableau vivant*, if you like, of contemporary Nigerian social and cultural history from the bottom up.” This bottom up approach to filmmaking is why Nigerian films and music are called popular culture, because of their representation of the general society.

The popularity of the video film phenomenon in Nigeria has been on the high side in the last twenty years, especially after the country returned to democratic system of governance in 1999. This is due in part, to reduction in cost of production as a result of the new digital video equipment and its effectiveness in looking like celluloid production, as against the high cost of production and distribution of films produced on celluloid.

Adeleke (2003, p.53) in one of these debates declares that: “As of today, film-going culture is on the wane as members of the public are quite aware that no film house exhibits new celluloid except video films which will soon be produced as a home video for the consumption of the members of the public”. Although the above may in fact, be the situation of events in 2003 when the suggestion was made, the present turn of events has shown otherwise and more cinema houses are opening up nationwide.

Most people do not go to cinema houses for celluloid or video format screening, but rather, for a social experience of having fun with family and friends which may not be available when done in individual houses. Writing about the recent explosion of Nigerian films on the world stage, Barrot (2005, p.90) submits that: “For almost fifty years, Nigeria’s contribution to third world cinema was nothing to write home about. In just a decade, the growth, due to the incursion of video productions, has produced a phenomenon that has intrigued scholars...and other experts”. This statement confirms the popularity of video films and the employment opportunity that has been derived from it.

To reiterate the video film's contribution to the nation's economy, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was rebased for the year 2013 as the biggest economy in the African continent for the first time with a GDP of about \$510 billion. Describing the economic development Emejo and Omanufeme (2014, p.4) state that: "South Africa with a GDP of \$384.3 billion is the continent's second largest economy". Two critical sectors being measured for the first time with positive reflection on the overall economy are telecom and entertainment. The entertainment sector is mentioned in the article as the home video and music industries.

Apart from the economic contributions of Nollywood's popularity to the Nigerian nation, Nollywood has also serve as a cultural ambassador to millions of African Diaspora all over the world. This fact, Oyewo (2008, p.82) affirms in his submission that:

The various Yorùbá communities outside the country too, particularly those in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and the Republic of Benin have also identified with the Yorùbá video films, not only as a form of entertainment but also as a cultural aide memoire which stimulates their cultural awareness and satisfies their nostalgic yearnings.

Therefore, when one take into account, the various contributory activities of Nollywood to Nigeria it becomes obvious that the industry is making meaningful impact to the socio-economic development of the nation. From entertainment to job creation, from economic growth to being an ambassador at large for the popular culture of the country, Nollywood is projecting the Nigerian image in positive light.

The projection of this image is done through the use of the production elements and aesthetics of the content of their films. Therefore, this study is preoccupied with the pattern of production elements of colourful scenery, lighting, sound and dialogue. Each and every one of these elements has its own distinct contribution to Nollywood films. Odedina (2019, p.298) speaking of Nollywood image projection states that: "The use of costumes and properties in the dramaturgy of Yoruba video films is one of the characteristics that make

the style of the industry unique amongst the various video production industries in Nigeria”.

What is stated therein about the Yoruba video films is also applicable to Hausa and Igbo films, as well as dozens of other cultures that make the interwoven fabric of the Nigerian nation. Nollywood bring all these various cultures together through the presentation of films using production elements to tell the Nigerian story, from Nigerian point of view.

### **Production Element of Scenery**

The positioning of cinema screen to a higher eye-level is by no means an accident. Like theatre, film is situated on a higher locale to evoke our psychological sense of reverence. The screen is also made big to emphasize this feeling in addition to enable all the audience see all the action. The ability of the camera to magnify objects and characters a thousand fold has made film, a unique entertainment art form.

It is therefore, not surprising to find in film, the display of magnificent buildings and scenery, which could only be duplicated in photography on a much lesser scale. This kind of scenery display is shown in *Chief Daddy* (2018) as the introductory scene of the film. From the imposing exterior of the magnificent house, to the exquisite interior decorations and vast flowing living space, the audience is put in awe by the show of opulence.

In contrast, Labato’s two room apartment which he shares with his mom in *Taxi Driver* (2017) is puny and unimpressive. The areas of interest shown in the scenery of the two films are also of contrasting qualities. While both films display the streets of Lagos as a backdrop for their productions, Labato’s scenery is comprising mostly of the motor parks and slums inhabited by touts and criminals, while *Chief Daddy*’s environment shows the exclusive areas of Lagos supported by valuable cars in the driveways. This high end scenery in the production of *Chief Daddy* gives the film an aesthetically pleasing look that could encourage an audience to watch the film again.

Due to better technology and equipment, Nollywood films are not just limited to tangible materials such as houses, cars and properties alone, but have also adapted their dramas to technological processing of

computer graphics and software. This new development in technology is seen in *Rah da Hakki* (2017) as the leading police officer is being haunted in his sleep by the ghost of Mallam Musa the innocent security guard, whose life is terminated through extra-judicial killing by the police.

### **Production Element of Lighting**

Lighting is a critical production element of film. This is because, film is a mostly visual medium of entertainment and the audience could only be entertained by what they see. For film to be seen properly at the end of production, particular attention has to be paid to lighting of the production. Even if most of the action takes place in the daytime, there is still a need for the light to be manipulated to reflect the intent of the director. In a night scene however, there is a need for extra attention to be paid to lighting, because of the sensitivity of the camera lens to light.

The lighting of several scenes in *Rah da Hakki* is not done properly, even in some of the daytime scenes which take place indoors. While the actions are clearly visible, there are several shadows that could have been done away with if the lighting compositions were properly constituted. It is a similar story for *Taxi Driver*, where shadows appear on the walls even during daytime shooting.

For *Chief Daddy*, the lighting composition works well with the total mise-en-scene of the film. Even in night time party scenes comprising of several dozens of people with different shades of costumes and make-up, the producers deployed dozens of decorative lamp pole lightings that is colourful and at the same time, enhance the lighting package of the film. This shows that creative ways of using what is already available makes a big difference in the success and failure of these production elements.

### **Production Element of Sound**

Although film thrives on visual communication medium, the full impact of film could not be fully realized without the sound component of which dialogue is one of the most important aspects. Sound has many components in film, but the most important aspect of it is the synchronization of the visual action with the sound. This means if the action on the screen shows two people talking with each other, the sound

emanating from the audio part of the movie must sync with the lip movement of the speakers. If a door is being closed, we want to hear the natural sound of a door closing.

In addition to the above natural sound matching the visual film however, successful films tend to go beyond the obvious by investing part of their production funding in the ambience and aesthetics of sound. This implies that aside from the clarity of traditional sound of dialogue that carries the film narrative forward, the producers are aware of the production environment and deploy the ambience of the locale.

In *Rah da Hakki*, there is a scene where the police officers raid the antagonist's house to find his robbery proceeds which he stashed there. It is a night scene and when the police vehicle engine stops, we hear crickets and other insects sound. Although we could not see the insects, the ambience sound matches the location and time of the particular scene which makes the operation of the police officers ominous and dangerous.

These officers are using legitimate authority of police work, to do an illegal operation by colluding with an armed robbery kingpin to share in his foreign currency converted loot in exchange for his freedom. This is why the particular scene looks very dangerous, as none of the officers truly believe the antagonist. They are very tense in the criminal's house, not knowing if his gang are waiting to kill them. The ambience sound magnifies the danger and makes their fear and apprehension believable.

### **Production Element of Dialogue**

Dialogue has several roles to play in the success of a film and Marshall (2014, p. 1) stressed this importance when she states that: "Dialogue authenticates the speaker as an individual or a real person rather than the imaginary creation of a story teller. As is the case with stage drama, dialogue serves to tell the story and expresses feelings and motivations of characters as well".

One of the ways that dialogue can tell the story is through verbal expressions of different characters in the film and this verbal interaction amongst the actors actually carries the story forward from scene one to two, progressively until the end of the film. In *Taxi Driver*, Labato Omo Alhaja's conversations with his mom, friends and

neighbours helps to identify him as a low-life, lazy and lack of ambitious young man, who lives on the borderline of criminality. The way he speaks, even to his uncle who offers him a car for cab driving free of charge, leaves no other interpretation other than being a bum.

On the other hand, the protagonist of *Chief Daddy* is also identified through his interactions and dialogue with family and friends as a responsible well to do member of the society. Even in death, the respect with which family and friends speak about him leaves no one in doubt as to the kind of person he was during his lifetime and the regard accorded to him.

The above is how through dialogue, we are able to identify what the film is all about, where it is taking place, why we are seeing the action we see and what to expect next. Dialogue also reveals the character of each actor to us, not just their name and identity, but what kind of person this particular man is. Is he a simple humble man, or a proud complex man? By saying what they say and saying it the way they say it, each character reveals his/her own idiosyncrasy to the audience without expressly introducing themselves. The character revelation and location identity are also very important in Nollywood films through the use of dialogue.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

This paper examined the pattern of production elements of scenery, lighting, sound and dialogue in the content of three randomly selected Nollywood films. The study investigated how Nollywood films deploy these production elements to enhance the aesthetic value of its movies. The findings of this study were as follows:

- i. The pattern of production elements in Nollywood films is uneven and unequal.
- ii. The aesthetic values in the content of these films are greatly influenced by the quality of the production elements.
- iii. The creative use of filmographic spectacle in some of the Nollywood films did generate aesthetic values for the movies.

The paper concludes that creative use of the production elements give movies better chance at enhancing the overall aesthetic design of films.

An example of this is the appearance of shadows on the wall in *Taxi Driver*. It is observed that the film deployed lighting during the shooting, but in an inappropriate manner. Some of the creative ways to remove shadows is to bounce the light, instead of focussing it on the subject to soften the edges and eliminate the shadows. The use of light reflector has also been known to minimize shadowy figures in films when properly deployed.

The study therefore suggest the consultation of professional lighting and other crew members in order to get the hidden value within the aesthetic content of the production elements of Nollywood films.

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