

## **HYPOTHESIS OF INVERSE EFFECT IN NOLLYWOOD FILM'S CRISIS RESOLUTION**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Long before the advent of film and literary narratives, Africans were familiar with the shrill of the villain's malice and the thrill of the hero's valour in folktale stories told under the moonlight. With the transformation of Africa's socio-cultural life by the process of modernization, the art of storytelling is remediated among many other channels, on the home video films: Nollywood. Common to the patterns of storytelling, most Nollywood films concludes with the hero dismantling the negative effect of the villain and the crisis instilled within the fabric of the culture. Virtue triumphs over vice in Nollywood. However, different from oral storytelling, visual storytelling can be far more gory and vivid in details compared to the former. In the visual dramatics and diatribe between vice and virtue, before vice becomes vanquished by virtue in the plot of Nigerian films, the negative vice must be displayed in full force with concomitant consequences. This in some ways re-enact the age long debate of theodicy in both philosophy and theology; the presence of God and the problem of evil. This paper postulates and verifies by film analysis the unequal distribution of time and space in film plot between the portrayal of the vice that is condemned and the virtue that is promoted. By such unequal narration exposition, this paper conjectures that films can have an inverse effect of teaching the vice it seeks to condemn. As Pope wrote, "Vice is a monster of such frightful mien, as to be hated needs but to be seen; but seen too oft, familiar with its face, We first endure, then pity, then embrace."*

**KEYWORDS:** Hypothesis of Inverse Effect, Hollywood, Film's Crisis Resolution

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The often asked questioned whether Africa had a philosophy prior to the advent or the intrusion of the west smacks of a certain derogatory and imperialistic tonality. However, such an epistemological poser more often than not, is the offshoot of a myopic mainstreaming of the method and means of the conservation and transmission of the corpus of knowledge. The African great grandfathers may not have scribbled their geometry on papyrus nor inscribed their philosophy on pages of parchments and skins, they may not have ascribed the wise sayings to the unitary sagacity of an African Aristotle nor attributed it to incisive Socrates, but in their own peculiarity, the corpus of wisdom and knowledge, hindsight and history, mystery and morality were shared and transmitted from generation to generation.

Long before Columbus commenced his voyage, years before colonization came to violate and vitiate the African Weltanschauung, the young African minds were educated and socialized not

by an abstracted geometry but by the living force of pulsating story telling. While it is quasi redundant to remember that the tradition of 'reciting long stories, from generation to generation, existed from time immemorial on the African soil', it is functionally appropriate to note that story telling served the multiple role of coding, conserving and communicating the African traditions. Story telling in the optics of Greeley (2001) served the unique role of infotainment. Story telling entertainingly communicated relevant information. It is worth noting that the correctness of the African stories did not consist of a scientific accuracy of account of reality but functions in the realm of myths.

African stories are populated by the engagement of various literary genres and mythical characterization beyond the realms of plausible human, animal and inanimate activities. Figures such as animals depicted in personification terms, humans with magical powers, inanimate objects with mythical abilities populate story tales in Africa. Some of the African stories are explicative cosmogonies describing how the world came to be, explanatory narratives describing why things are the way they are like why the Turtle's carapace changed from being smooth to rough and the mythical etiologies of things, why dog is domesticated, etc are popular in African tales.

"Stories animate human life; that is their work. Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, as possible, and as worth doing or best avoided" (Rananga, 2008). Stories play a functional role in human affairs. According to Shea (2009) human life depends on the stories we tell: the sense of self that those stories impart, the relationships constructed around shared stories, and the sense of purpose that stories both propose and foreclose"

African storytelling had a special link with morality. In traditional Africa setting such stories would be a primary means of building characters as well as developing verbal dexterity and mental acuity in children. Stories in African setting apart from these values also have epistemic values as these create and enhance knowledge. African stories were stories of victory of the good over evil. No matter the dynamics of African stories, the good more often than not triumphs over evil. With the change in society due to modernization, the Africans never stopped telling stories but something changed however, the locus of storytelling changed from the village setting to the screen of video films and the new storytellers are not the sages (old men and women) but their enlightened grandchildren. However, storytelling on the new *technologized* arena comes with its own nuances.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In spite of the fecundity of the Nigerian film industry Nollywood, despite the growing popularity, preference and the pride of place of Nollywood films on the entertainment screen of Africa, the Nigerian film industry nollywood is denigrating awash in an avalanche of vicious and virulent criticism: from poor scripts, recurrently over flogged themes, poor picture quality and cracked sound quality to poorer distribution management. However, implausible as it may sound to the ears of all populist critique of Nigerian film makers, it is the conviction and assertion of this paper that the Nigerian film makers and script writers beyond the accident of scenes, shots, and sometimes gory expositions, are highly moral persons and are strongly working to promote the virtue at the detriment of the vice.

Like its proximate progenitor: tales by the moonlight or story telling as others prefer to name the act, hardly does a Nollywood film closes with the triumph of the evil over good, the victory of the villain over the hero. It is an uncommon feature for the anti-hero to vanquish the virtuous. Despite the disadvantage position of the good, the virtuous, the hero, in Nollywood films like ancient African stories meant to teach morals, the good always triumph over evil, virtue over vice, the innocent knocks off the corrupt. This paper however critically investigates possible patterns of self-sabotage by the story plot. So that while evil triumph over the good, does the story plot inversely teaches and offer greater exposé of the negative at the detriment of the positive, the vice over the virtuous?

Philosophically too, this juxtapositioning of the good and evil, reinforces the problem of theodicy: the presence of omnipotent God and the problem of Evil in the world. It shows the eternal and ever present conflict between the forces of good and the forces of evil. This eternal, ever present conflict evident in the home video now and often serves as a re-enactment of the inexplicable contentious problem of good God and the presence of evil which Leibniz had anticipated. Thus using the philosophical endeavour of Leibniz, the centrality of the problem becomes apparent.

### **Research Objective**

Because of the dynamics of interaction between narrative time and narration time and the possible influence of the two in perception of media text in all its variety, this research seeks to investigate how narration time of vice predominate narration of virtue in such a way that it re-enacts the atheistic problem of evil.

### **Research Question**

Does Nollywood film narration privileges vice over virtue by time allocation?

## **THEORETICAL FRAME WORK**

The theoretical frame for this analysis is the theory of remediation. The theory of remediation is an offshoot and further development of McLuhanian' *medium is the message*. Propounded by Grusin and Bolter (2000), the theory holds that media remediate. By remediation is implied the ability of new media to refashion the older media. Like McLuhan had earlier argued, the content of new media is old media. The thesis of remediation however, posits that not only does a new medium assume the older media as its content but new media equally refashions older media within its system. When television assumes within its grammar the media of photography, it does not just assume photography it also refashions it. As the new media refashions older media, it also reframes and repurposes the content of older media. Text on the computer screen does not have the same exact quality like the text printed on paper.

Remediation tries to improve on the quality of the content of the earlier media through a double logic of *immediacy* and *hypermediacy*. Remediation purposes to represent reality qua reality unmediated. A classical case in recent times is the level of involvement and entanglement that 3Ds promote. New medium promises to offer a more authentic and real experience of reality. Under remediation, new media promises to grant a more immediate and unalloyed encounter of reality. Immediacy "dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave the audience in the presence of the thing represented (2000)." Immediacy is inextricably tied to hypermedia.

Hypermedia entails the convergent employment of diverse media. In order to achieve immediacy, new media must assume a welter of other media. A dynamic web page would not only employ the technology of photography, video, two or three dimensional computer composting, but it will involve text, video and even sound. Because of the varied forms of modulations and montage that the act of remediation entails, a new media is capable not in a deterministic manner but by privileging to occasion different modes of experiencing. How does this relate to the problem under study?

The video films as a new medium in Nigerian cultural *mise en scène* remediate the old but relevant tradition of storytelling. The logic of remediation in this instance like the multilayered nature of convergence is multifarious. Story telling experience is remediated in and through the script, the actors, the plot, the montage, vcd or DVD technology and finally through viewership. Through these varied fora of remediation, storytelling experience is refashioned and repurposed. Because media is never a mirror of reality, the representation of the video film must speak the language of the video film not of the print or of orality.

It is the conjecture of this paper that when story telling is assumed within the langue of video films, the representation of storytelling is remediated, and consequently the experience of storytelling is equally remediated too. The imaginative aspect of storytelling is pictorially depicted in the regime of film production. However, the possibility of accentuation that is possible on the video platform is pragmatically impossible in the context of orality. Dancing and singing may be anticipated in and demonstrated in oral storytelling but the level of accentuation that slow-motioning a dance, changing camera angles from *primisimmi piano* to panoramic shots can effect are not possible within the ambience of oral storytelling.

Media may not inextricably determine culture as the derogatory reference to media ecology in the technological determinism infers but each media is potent with altering capabilities of representation and experience and film does affect the mode of experience of the ancient art of storytelling.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

From Agenda setting through cultivation theory to the host of effect theories, the mass media has often been conceived as powerful and effective tools capable of impacting the audience and eliciting responses of varied degrees. It has an obvious didactic effect such that it educates, teaches and impacts on a variety of audience. Such an effect paradigm underscores the utility of the mass media for the promotion of cultural aspects. In simple logic, if the media and its content does and can affect lives, opinions and perspectives, it becomes logical therefore for stories that promote good morals to be told in the hope of creating better peoples. The term Nollywood has become the popular baptismal name that describes the buoyant industry that has grown around the Nigerian film experience. It is worth mentioning from the onset that the name defines a range of dramatic features that does not fit into the classical notion of cinema but occupy its place in Nigeria. Nigerian video films began around the late eighties (Adesanya 2000:42).

Motley of variables gave birth to the beginning of the video films. Firstly, The oil boom and subsequent diversification of Nigerian public sphere has been argued as a prime impetus for the adventure to video production (Larkin 2000:216), Secondly, the decline and quasi-death of

the celluloid film making, and thirdly the emergence and popularity of video technologies in Nigeria (Amobi, 2009:185).

As Haynes (2000:1) observed the video films “are something between television and cinema and they do not fit comfortably within the North American structures of either”. The earlier cinema tradition gradually died partly due to finance and technology and above all to the manageable option provided by the video films. It is indeed truthful to note that the video films are prevailing art form in current Nigeria. Though relatively young, the Nigerian video film has become a prime time entertainment medium for Nigerians in and outside the country. According to Uchenna (2004:242) the Nigerian video films have not only become a paramount medium of entertainment and relaxation within Nigeria and diaspora but the growth and acceptance of the medium was unanticipated in Africa. Little wonder that the names of the actor and actresses are more famous in the country than that of government personals.

Scholars and economist are currently at debate to measure the progress of Nollywood against other national film culture like Hollywood and bollywood. Some (Ukah 204) actually suggest that the Nigerian film industry is second in financial output only to Hollywood with approximately above a thousand films a year.

The film in Nigeria has assumed the post of an agent of socialization to the Nigerian culture (Onuzulike 4). It has been argued that the video films is a fecund sociological field where Nigerian popular culture and the African imagination becomes accessible (Haynes, 2000:4, Onokome & Haynes 2000:51) while Ogundele held that “the ubiquitous presence of the video play in Nigeria plus its popularity, point to its importance as a new medium for the production, dissemination and consumption of one specific form of popular culture (Ogundele 2000:96) . While most of the films are produced in English language or Pidgin English, a wide variety of Nigerian video films are produced in local languages, most prominently: Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. Smaller tribes in Nigeria are not completely left out of presence in this new video public sphere of entertainment.

The Nigerian video films have a dynamic relationship with the culture. The video films have become the new space of remediating the old and new culture of Nigeria. Virtually all aspects of the Nigerian life are represented on the screens of the Nigerian video films: from romance, politics, business, social affairs to politics. From domestic issues to political affairs, from business ventures to social issues, not leaving out the religious dimension, the Nigerian video films tell its story with a characteristics intense human emotion and a dramatic extravaganza

## **METHODOLOGY**

Because of the peculiarity of the research question and population, this paper assumes the literary analytic frame propounded by the Jesuit scholar Jean Louis Ska (6). It is a special type of content analysis in the study of literary genres. In the optics of Ska, the notion of time is fundamentally important to narratives on two scores. On the first score, because they ‘recount events that happened in time’, secondly and more importantly, the act of narration presumes a ‘certain time and the arrangements of events in certain temporal order. It is worth noting that the distinction between narrative time and narration time was not peculiar to Ska (5) alone, Chatman (Cited in Ska 5) uses the notion of story-time and discourse time and Sternberg uses represented time and representational time. The distinction between narrative time and

narration time in Ska (2000) can be simply conceived as the difference between the time an original event took place measured in units of real time (seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months and years). It is the original duration of actions and events in a story. Narration time in the optics of Ska on the other hand is the time it takes storyteller to narrate the story, a writer to write the script, a film maker to shoot the footage. Narration time can be measured in words, pages, films, cassettes and spaces occupied on the computer. Narrative time is the time it took an event to unfold while narration time is the space it took to retell the event. The various aspects of narration time may not be equal to the time it took an event to take place. A narrative time of 20 years may occupy the narration space of one paragraph while a narrative time of 2 years may occupy the narration time of 200 pages. Narration time shows the influence of the authors slant and finger of redaction. Narration time in Ska (2000) may be divided chronologically birth, adult life and death, it may also be done thematically, time of wellbeing and time of ill-health. Applied to the field of film analysis, narration time in this research will assume two basic duration: virtue narration time and vice narration narration. Virtue narration time will consist of the time on a film plot that is dedicated to the narration of the predominance of virtue and vice narration will consist of the time the film took to narrate and expose the predominance of evil.

For a sample population, the researcher randomly chose two films *Blackberry Babes* and *Secondary School Girls*.

### ***Blackberry babes***

Produced by Sylvester Obadiegie, *Blackberry babes* narrate the story of the craze and crave for blackberry phones among teenage and adolescent girls some three to four years ago. Starring the emotional demonstrative acts of actresses like OgeOkoye as Damisa, Tonto Dikeh as Vivienne, and their bevy of friends and admirers: Nicole, Kimberly, Keisha, and dominant male figure Duke (Muna Obiekwe) and wide assortment of sugar Daddies on whom the ladies rely for the acquisition and upgrade of blackberry phones. While Damisa and Vivienne flouts their collective array of blackberry phones acquired through sleeping with many Sugar Daddies and stealing from them, their friends were not so lucky with rich sugar daddies, they had to steal, lie and deceive to own a blackberry phone. While the film tell the tale of Mary Remy who uses her blackberry phone rightly bought for her by her fiancé to browse, do her assignment and gain admission abroad, others use it purely for pleasure and chatting. Nemesis would however catch-up with all the ladies who stole, cheated and defrauded to buy their blackberry phones as some were arrested and others disgraced, Mary was empowered by a more judicious use of her blackberry phone to gain academic advantage. The vices of the bad girls destroyed them and the virtuous one is extolled by her virtue.

### **Application of the narrative versus narration framework**

While the narrative time of the film remains inaccessible because it remains in the films mythical time and outside the scope of mathematical calculation, the narration time of vice supersede over the narration time of virtue by 65% to 35%. More film time is therefore dedicated to the exposition of how the bad girls, plan, strategize, connect with the rich sugar daddies, sleep around, defraud the sugar daddies. The vice that it sought to condemned is thus given prominence over and above the virtue that it promotes hence; evil and negative forces seemingly enjoy some form of prominence.

### 1) *Secondary school girls.*

The Nigerian film *Secondary school girls* was produced by Vincent Elobuike. The film demonstrates the good, the bad and the ugly in a mixed secondary school ambience. The film stars veteran Nigerian actress like Eucheria Anunobi, and other younger female actresses like Calista Okoronkwo as Ego, Moyolawal and others. The film narrates the drama of corrupt senior students who were either sexual perverts, cultists, drunkards and smokers, party addicts and domestic prostitutes. Younger and more innocent students are compelled to join the bad gangs. The prevalence of vice in the school is highly anchored on the character of some corrupt teachers males and females, and the gatemen. The drama of corruption in the school is juxtaposed with the disciplinary efforts of the principal, a dedicated and intelligent crop of few students. The escalation of vice in the school leads to the death and disappearance of some students, thus the conspiracy of evil is broken. True to the Nollywood ethics, virtue triumphs over vice, some of the corrupt students meet their Waterloo, and the corrupt staff are arraigned.

### **Application of the narrative versus narration framework**

In this particular film, the conspiracy of vice was continually juxtaposed and opposed by virtue. But while there is fair share of time and scenery, the narration time of vice once again supersedes over the narration time of virtue in a ratio of 55% to 45%. Even though virtue triumphs over evil in the film, the film plot also had demonstrated in more detail exposition of lesbianism, patterns of teacher-student immoral rapport, pattern of ways to settle gatemen, student gangster cult. These could serve a didactic effect on the unsuspecting minds, on minds whose critical ability is underdeveloped. Such minds might grow to appreciate such negative skills in the when things are difficult.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper sets out to discover pattern of time and scene sharing in Nollywood narrative. It is the stand of this paper, that the traditional medium of storytelling has ascended the screen of video film production. Stories are no longer told by the moonlight but by the luminous light of television screen. However, by such ascendancy to a newer medium, the act of storytelling is remediated. True to the African storytelling spirit, while good always triumphs over evil in Nollywood stories, it is the take of this paper that such style of ending films seeks to promote virtue and decrease vice. But by the act of a protracted exposition of the audience to negative vices for longer time, Nollywood dramas and films can also inversely socialize the audience into evil.

All the religions of the world have long been into the preaching and teaching that all vices bring the perpetrators to a dismal end but that knowledge has not deterred the religious people completely from vice. Therefore, the reliance that the demonstration of the dismal end of vice and villains will deter people after exposing them to the sensational thrill of the vice should be done with caution.

It has also been our position that to juxtapose these two elements (good and evil) in home videos while re-enacting the cosmic war ideology, resonates the theodicy debate in a more vivid manner. The difference in narration time of these two elements with vice often accorded more time than virtue has a negative impact on the message that is being communicated in such videos. It creates a situation of learning by an inverse exposition of the desired end.

### **Recommendation**

It is the recommendation of this paper that film makers and film censor's board must work to decrease the rate of vividness of negative exposition of vice in films plot.

Cognizant of the limitation of this paper, it might also help to empirically test the possibility of the influence of the negative exposition on film consumers.

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