

Vol. 2, No. 1 | June 2020

The Problematic Mise En Scène of Neo-Nollywood

Samantha Iwowo, PhD.

Media Production Department, Faculty of Media and Communications, Bournemouth University, United Kingdom

Abstract

This paper deconstructs the typical mise en scène of neo-Nollywood films. Herein, “neo-Nollywood” as coined by Nigerian filmmaker, Charles Novia (2012: 124), will be the descriptor for the cinema sphere of the mainstream Nigerian film industry, Nollywood. It will argue that there is a considerable level of illiteracy about cinematic language in neo-Nollywood productions, and that this troubles its capacity to “tell its stories” to the world articulately. It will submit that this inability stems from a predisposition that seeks to tell a story – being overly reliant on dialogue - rather than to show the story through its mise en scène of audio-visual metaphors, which is the definition of cinema. The conversation will be with core attention to three films: *30 Days in Atlanta* (2014), *Chief Daddy* (2018) and my most recent screenplay, *Mugabe* (forthcoming), directed by Robert Peters. Each film will be analysed via textual analysis with reference to the theories of dramaturgy and mise en scène. Reflections on my practice as a screenwriter and director will also be invited to the conversation. This paper draws on findings of my doctoral research, which bridge the gap between the scholarship of neo-Nollywood film studies and that of its practice, with core attention to cinematic techniques. Until this research, this gap in Nollywood studies remained unaddressed.

Keywords: Nollywood, neo-Nollywood, Hollywood, Cinematic aesthetics, Cinema, Frame, Mise en Scene, Creative, Composition, Metaphor, Dramaturgy, Directorial Vision, Film, Our Stories.

© 2020 Communication Cultures in Africa

DOI:

Neo-Nollywood's Expansionist vision:

You either know how to use filmic tools, which have a universal appeal or you don't. We can say we're doing our best...we imitate its [cinematic] templates but this won't work because we don't understand what we imitate... (Ajai-Lycett, 2017).

The quote above fuels the context in which this paper reflects on the typical mise en scène of neo-Nollywood films. This is relevant because of the expansionist vision in the sector - to attract commercial audiences in mainstream Anglo-American film markets. The vision runs alongside the popular Nollywood-rhetoric: "This is how we choose to tell our stories". Yet by combining this (sometimes postcolonial) rhetoric with the expansionist vision it is difficult to achieve the latter. I submit that this is so because the insistence on the chosen way of telling stories may justify making films with faulty cinema techniques, yielding products that are unattractive in the markets the industry seeks to access. To this end, there is the need to first unpack the expansionist vision of neo-Nollywood.

Since neo-Nollywood is rather informal, developments and trends in it are inclined to being inadvertent. Hence it becomes problematic to speak about its vision as a conscious collective decision of practitioners in the field. It can therefore be described as the sum of the individual visions of several neo-Nollywood filmmakers. This vision is illustrated in my personal experience. When I was commissioned to write the screenplay, *Oloibiri*², the producer also requested I secure the services of a Hollywood director, or at least a U.S indie-film director "with access to Hollywood distributors" (R. Ofime, 2013, pers. comm., 6 November), the intention was to gain paying audiences beyond Africa. I, thereupon, contacted Hollywood Academy-Award winning director, Curtis Graham, for I was also at this time, his informal PR representative in neo-Nollywood. In this same year, I received several other related requests to facilitate such Hollywood-Nollywood collaborations. These attest to what I have described as the expansionist vision of Neo-Nollywood's expansionist vision.

Film director, Omoni Oboli (O. Oboli 2017, pers. comm., 20 September), agrees with this perspective when she submits: "[such a collaboration] is the vision of every Nollywood filmmaker". Others, even when they differ on particular details, also acknowledge the expansionist tendency in Neo-Nollywood's vision. Bimbo Manuel (B. Manuel, 2017, 25 September), actor and screenwriter states that neo-Nollywood

² The film was originally titled *Oloibiri* but for marketing purposes in the West, it was renamed *Blood and Oil... The story of Oloibiri* by the producing and marketing teams.

is “in the manner of its most successful film - *The Wedding Party* - looking to increase commercial viewership of its African crowd”. These crowd are found across the globe and Mo Abudu (2017), producer of *The Wedding Party* (2016), insists that she also seeks to make programmes she can sell to mainstream Anglo-American media spaces. Neo-Nollywood filmmaker, Femi Odegbami, acknowledges that the vision exists: “It is not in itself faulty” but in “typical” neo-Nollywood thinking, it stems from a mind-set of “inferiority complex” [perhaps a recognition of its comparative disadvantage in the global industry] (F. Odugbami 2017, pers. comm., 11 September). In 2016, Kene Mkpuru, founder and former Chairman of Nigeria’s fastest growing cinema distribution company, FilmOne, sounded determined to steer neo-Nollywood filmmakers from this vision. He (K. Mkpuru, 2016, pers. comm. 1 October) emphasised that his company was not interested in the Western film festival awards given to neo-Nollywood films, but was rather focused on generating profits from the African continent. However contrary to the above, *The Wedding Party* distributed by FilmOne was amongst the neo-Nollywood films, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival, thus suggesting that Mkpuru does consider the validation of a North-American film festival relevant to his business.

Another move by FilmOne taken to strengthen partnership ties with Century Fox Studios, also confirms this vision. During the 2016 Africa International Film Festival (AFRIFF) which FilmOne co-convenes, the company prioritised the screening of Fox Studios’ *Birth of a Nation* (2016) over its film, *The Wedding Party*. The former was screened at the festival’s most important event – on the opening night (Mkpuru in NAN, 2016) thus relegating its own production. What makes this relegation particularly apparent is that at the time *The Wedding Party* was the most commercially successful film in the history of Nigerian cinema. This might reflect an acknowledgment of superiority of the mainstream, but may illustrate the aspirations of an insecure industry or its desire to impress, if nothing else. Thus, it can be argued that the desire to gain significant commercial viewership in mainstream Hollywood is stark, whereas a section of neo-Nollywood goes on disavowing this.

When examined via the marketing lens that acknowledges symbolical construction of images (Cornelissen 2011: 64), one can argue that the deliberate annual hosting of NAFA Awards in the district of Hollywood is for the brand-association; so that Neo-Nollywood even in its press releases can be associated with the global cinema giant. However, as stated above, this vision is being inadvertently frustrated by the filmmaking style prevalent in neo-Nollywood. The next section offers an overview of Nollywood and its more recent sphere, neo-Nollywood (which is the focus of this paper) for the benefit of those less familiar with it.

Neo-Nollywood – Map and Problems:

Map:

For clarity in this discourse, I divide Nollywood into two sections made distinct by their manifest production values. Concurring with Novia (2012: 124), I refer to the section of industry operating within the cinema sphere as neo-Nollywood, and term the makers of the home-video and direct-to-DVD movies as “traditional” Nollywood. In the industry, the latter are largely “Asaba Nollywood”. The negative connotations of this reference to the industry as ‘inferior’ informs my decision to avoid the use of that label.

Across the world Nollywood has become non-dismissible in in the discourse of film studies. While still considerably othered, it commands attention with its innovative appropriation of scarce equipment and financial resources, and its defiant journey from ghettoised filmmaking, to bringing the discourse of African cinema to a significant position on the global stage. The economic profundity of (neo-) Nollywood is also present in it being a major employer of (working-class) youths (Okome, 2007b: 1; Ugor, 2009: 1). By 2014, and with no financial governmental or international support, the industry was contributing 1.4% annually to the nation’s otherwise oil-dependent economy (Provost, 2014). By its defiantly cheaper filmmaking template and self-funding, Nollywood mocks the Western filmmaking hegemony, as well as the African-cinema orientation of seeking Western funding. I am convinced that this self-sufficiency makes (neo-) Nollywood better positioned as an African anti-colonial film form because its financial autonomy questions the integrity of traditional African cinema as a form of resistance to Western domination. For indeed, where lies the dignity in requesting financial benevolence from the West if it is for the purpose of insulting the benefactor?

Although often criticised for its hurried and often informal processes, Nollywood is “a fast-growing popular-art culture” (Ajiboye, 2011). Conversations on “traditional” Nollywood as an influencer of African media, are common within its scholarship (Pype 2013: 199). Concurring, Becker (2013: 182, 183) espouses that it is a brand of pan-Africanism on screen for the forging of “Afromodernity”. To the average African, the names of several of its actors including, Patience Ozokwor, Pete Edochie and their long list of film credits provoke an immediacy of resonance.[][]. This popularity spills into spaces of the Caribbean; Bryce (2013: 245) ascribes to “traditional’ Nollywood the value of an African space of authentic identity-construction for “heritage conscious individuals”. This is with reference to those of Caribbean descent hitherto oscillating between prevailing Western filmic stereotypes of African primitivism and site of origin misted over by a romanticised past.

Such evidence of its successes and transportability define Nollywood as a (postcolonial) character defiant to the economical hamstringing of subtexts in the filmmaking trade (Okome 2007a: 1, 2; Okome 2007b: 7, 8; Okhai 2008; Haynes 2011: 72; Ogunjiofor 2011; Obiaya 2011: 142). Okome (2007a: 1, 2; 2007b: 6, 7) in his appraisal of the industry, concurs with the views of founding filmmakers (Zeb Ejiro, Peace Fiberesima, Bond Emerua in Okome 2007b: 7, 8), that it is an entity conscious of and decisive in its style of visual narratives about Africa. The problem with this approach is its inadequate attention to the elements of filmic mise en scène. The framings often appear to lack deliberate composition. Often, the camera seems to be aloof within scenes, angles and/or moves made without motivation to enrich or advance the plot, not teasing the viewer, or satisfying their curiosity by offering subjective perspectives. The frames are hardly layered in fore, mid and backgrounds by blocking and patterned set-designs to offer narrative clues and visually pleasing depth for attracting and sustaining attention. Lighting is not particularly invited as a narrative device. Sound is also not typically employed as metaphoric embellishments. Narrative is typically driven by dialogue and theatrical performances detailed in exaggerated voice tones and gestures. Nevertheless, this verbosity has been defined as a deliberate pattern of blending African oral narratives into filmmaking, and the autonomous ways Nollywood has decided to tell its stories (Okome, 2007b: 2).

The rise of its “neo” sphere implies that (emerging) filmmakers in the space appreciate that Nollywood can no longer remain as dismissive of the grammar of cinema, and attempts to curb the neglect by focusing on the following markers that distinguish it. At least four of these seven traits characterise neo-Nollywood films: 1) relatively big-budget productions, 2) films made on 35mm cameras, or others with high-quality image sensors that can achieve at least 2K quality images, 3) considerably sophisticated cinematography, 4) transnational collaborations with Anglo-American filmmakers (Parkinson, 2009), 5) international premieres (Ovwe, 2011), screenings at international film festivals (Soffel, 2013), 6) lacing film-plots with imitations of Western culture (Haynes, 2011:77), as well as, 7) seeking local and international theatrical distributions.

Amazing Grace (2006) by Jeta Amata marks the inauguration of the neo-Nollywood “revolution” (Uzor, 2012; Nelson, 2007; Jury, 2007; Reuters, 2007). Shot on 35mm camera, it stars a relatively popular British actor, Nick Moran. This was the first time in Nollywood these ambitious steps would be taken, simultaneously. The successes of *Amazing Grace* promised Nollywood an audience beyond African shores; it was screened at the Cannes Film Festival, making it the first Nollywood movie to premiere at this elitist film festival. Nu-Metro Distribution, in a landmark decision, would sign “a proper distribution contract...for an African film with a guaranteed minimum of \$75, 000” (Barrot, 2011). Since 2006, neo-Nollywood has increased exponentially.

Novia (2012: 124) submits that its “quality-minded producers” saw that the re-invention of Nigerian box-office could only be achieved if “attention was paid to quality of the movies and the attendant packaging”. Apparently, Amata’s 2006 revolutionary production became the benchmark of quality. Soon after this would come an unconscious movement of filmmakers and films following these patterns, which for space cannot be listed here.

Problems:

With all this progress, inattention to plot and *mise en scène*, continues to trouble neo-Nollywood, raising tense questions about how accessible the films are to non-initiates. The dialectic that Nollywood has fashioned its own grammar of cinema is flawed since its components often do not stem from a deliberate disruptive approach that is aware of the principles which it subverts. I have heard some neo-Nollywood director insist that the flat framing of their shots – productions devoid of carefully planned composition – is a deliberate approach, yet the absence of the knowledge of composition becomes apparent, when they are asked to elaborate on the conventional option(s), which has been “rejected”. With the exception of rather odd instances, one can only effectively disrupt what is understood.

‘76 (2015) by Izu Chukwu, a neo-Nollywood political feature, has screened in the West and received some feedback from its U.S and UK screenings. Dalton (2016) of the *Hollywood Reporter* commends the film for being “a cut above most straight-to-DVD Nollywood productions, which are typically cheap and amateurish”. That said, Dalton (2016) adds that the plot has a sluggish pace; that the acting includes stiff performances sinking into melodrama; that the dialogues are bereft of subtexts; that the film has some “jarring technical and stylistic issues”. He also hints that the film could be a huge success amongst “Nigerian communities” in the diaspora (the West) - notice that this makes no suggestion that it would potentially attract a non-Nollywood audience.

The British film reviewer, Jonathan Romney (2016) shares these views: “The film’s often rough finish, plus a cluttered narrative not always accessible to non-initiates, won’t yield significant crossover exposure. But ‘76 should thrive in established African distribution channels”. Though this appears condescending, in his feedback lies some truth – that the Nollywood rhetoric about “the way we have decided to tell our stories” is not appreciated when viewed through lenses of widely held cinema conventions. As with any language, cinema has its conventions – its grammatical structure, and as neo-Nollywood progresses, it must decide on what paths to take to address the desired external audiences who demand dramaturgical standards of narrative. They exist in a space where excellence is monstrously fostered, with the slightest filmmaking flaws subjected to humiliating responses. A recent example is

seen in the wave of negative feedback (Stutterheim, 2019; Vineyard, 2019; Sharf, 2019) to the narrative structure of the final season of *Game of Thrones* (2019). Conversely, neo-Nollywood could remain inward-looking where “regardless of what the critics may say on quality of execution or quality of acting, [Nollywood] still meets the expectations of the large army of viewers” (K. Odotola 2016; pers. comm., 12 April).

Neo-Nollywood has received even more scalding Hollywood reviews, based broadly on (dis)regard for cinema vocabulary (Bradshaw 2014; Quirke 2014; Kenigsberg 2014; Rapold 2015; Lodge 2015; Tsai 2015). These reviews warn of the disconnect between the current materiality and implications of its traits on the one hand, and on the other, the applauding of the industry by itself, its audiences and affirmative (postcolonial) scholarships. Indeed, certain Nigerian scholars and practitioners agree that the scholarship of neo-Nollywood is not abreast with the current realities of its industry (F. Odugbemi 2019, pers. comm., 17 June; D. Ajakaiye 2017, pers. comm. 29 July).

Habitual defiant spirit in Nollywood seems to be a dual edged sword – at once cursing and blessing neo-Nollywood. For instance, it primes the decisive approach to filmmaking thus ensuring continental successes, whilst also fuelling an attitude of resistance and cynicism to cinematic improvements required for its expansionist vision. Nollywood filmmakers (in both spheres) are likely to assume that their films are viable in mainstream Anglo-American commercial spaces, even outside diaspora communities. Observing this trend, Ajibade (2013: 271) wonders whether these audiences are not imagined. This attitude tends to stiffen disposition against improving production qualities as expressed in the rhetoric, “this is how we tell our stories” used in some of its defining moments (J. Ajogwu 2017, pers. comm., 29 September; K. Joseph 2017, pers. comm., 13 September).

I witnessed this where the same rhetoric was given to the director of *Oloibiri*, Curtis Graham when he complained that the investors had recut the film depleting its aesthetic values, without prior notice to him (C. Graham, 2016, pers. comm., 25 November). Graham had been contracted to make a film with conventional cinematic vocabulary that are accessible to more diverse audiences such as the targeted Hollywood market. The investors had recut the film with little attention to plot, and *mise en scène*. The first version by Graham had earned the film Best-Screenplay at the NAFCA Awards (2015), and Best Film award at Los Angeles Black Film Festivals (2016). By contrast the recut version won no awards in Africa for screenplay; the story has also received several negative viewer feedback (Izuzu 2016; Kareem 2016).

It must be acknowledged that there are exceptional situations. For example, there are a few producers who keep abreast of cinematic conventions but where such knowledge is scant, cinematic illiteracy persists, largely unchallenged. The next

section will define dramaturgy and mise en scène, positioning these as framework for the textual analysis of the three films selected for this discourse. This is to fulfil the mission of the paper to unearth evidence of illiteracy in neo-Nollywood, which I argue restricts attainment of its vision for expansion into mainstream Anglo-American film markets.

Defining the “Telling”: Dramaturgy as a Critical Tool of Mise En Scène

In arguing that film is a visual metaphor, Nilsen (1930: 17) submits that “art-image” is realised through the artists’ (that is filmmakers’) subjective treatment of their subject, facilitated by their social perception and an understanding of the laws governing reality. With this realisation, image can only be made “with the discovery and mastery of the specific means of expression of the given art-product” (Nilsen 1930: 17). This fulcrum, of art being indispensable to cinema, is echoed by Eisenstein (1949: 185,186) who states the following, in praise of the audio-visual medium as the basis for enriching narratives with all the potentialities of art:

How easily the cinema is able to spread out in an equal graphic of sound and sight the richness of actuality and the richness of its controlling forces, compelling the theme more and more to be born through the process of cinematographic narrative, written from a position of emotion indivisible from the feeling and thinking man (Eisenstein 1949: 186).

The compelling power of cinematic subtlety when skilfully employed has been identified as a successful propellant of Nazi propaganda (Hochscherf and Winkel 2016: 190). It is from the knowledge of its orientating capacity that *Sembene* (2005) observes that “cinema is only in the hands of film-makers because most of our leaders are afraid of cinema”.

In this space of cinema as art, Stutterheim (2019: 23) suggests that film is undergirded by a long established “secret order” of representing events in “an organised abstraction of reality” to arouse pleasure by combining the familiar and the surprising - two elements which aesthetics and psychology agree can provoke this feeling (Stutterheim 2019: 20). This process of constructing abstraction is borne of a methodology of metaphoric approach which guide filmmaking to be a medium which predominantly communicates by showing or by the deployment of resonating symbolisms. Anything less is literal, and especially when repetitiously done, it is patronising to the person(s) with whom the film is in conversation.

According to Burch (1979: 78), between 1905 and 1915, American filmmakers began to see the need to amass a wider demography of audiences to include financially stable middle-class and aristocrats, if the trade was to flourish (a need also identified by the French Impressionist filmmakers). This attraction relied on the capacity of the filmmakers to tell stories embedded in literary techniques. Until then the international bourgeoisie class was largely uninterested in early cinema for its inability to reflect the “primacy” of the “subject” [sic] of a scene, after the manner of novels and stage (Burch 1979: 78). Indeed, early films could not direct the eyes of the spectator to the objective of a scene, using visual cues and metaphors. Much was shown in long lock-down shots.

A primary approach to solving this problem was to eliminate the distance between audiences and the mise en scène, by fragmenting a scene, and projecting the most important aspect of each fragment with a clear signifier using elements from the mise en scène (Burch 1979: 78). Between 1905 and 1930, Classical Hollywood and the avant-garde movements of France, Germany and the Soviet Union would construct what has become the contemporary poetics of immersive cinema from stage, literature and painting. For instance, D.W Griffith is credited with enhancing intimate viewer experience by creating the close-ups on facial expressions (Gibson 1979: 20; Dancyger 2013: 5). Burch (1979: 79), however faults this “legend”, insisting that Griffith was one of the last directors to prioritise close-ups on persons.

By 1915, “electric lighting” engendered “more subtle modelling and chiaroscuro effect” (Burch 1979: 81). Thus, cinematographers, then termed cameramen, began to demand working with controllable lighting. For this purpose, theatre spotlights, street lamps and photographic lamps were adapted for use “until lighting equipment companies, M.H Wohl and Co., and Kliegl Bros., actively began making studio lights after the types in demand” (Fielding 1967: 121). Eisenstein (1949: 72-83) theorised (and experimented with) the five techniques of montage to enrich vantage viewing of the mise en scène and narrative unfolding. Dzigan Vertov, via his experimental film, *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), would expand the list of camera movements and angles with inventions including freeze-frame, slow-motion, Dutch-angle shot, reverse shot, tracking shot and extreme close-up. Altogether, movements, angles and lighting would enable cinematography create illusions of visually pleasing three-dimensional frames (from the typical two-dimensional nature of image capturing), characterised by patterns of foreground, mid-ground and background.

Production design was also progressing away from George Méliès’ *Trip to the Moon* (1908), constructed with sets containing trompe lo’iel backdrops, to sets constructed to convey the realistic geographic setting. At the time, according to Barnwell (2004: 4), this gravitation was informed by the aforementioned progress in camera work.

Indeed, this concurrent development implied that production-design needed to rethink how a set would look from each camera perspective. Again, “reduc[ing] the distance [between audience and mise en scène] at all cost”, remained the motivation (Barnwell 2004: 4), but proximity to the mise en scène is not all that makes cinema. Cinema also requires the dramaturgical manipulation of plot, and audio-visual elements. This is why Trencsényi (2014) makes the point that historically, dramaturgy and mise en scène developed together, thus they cannot be separated.

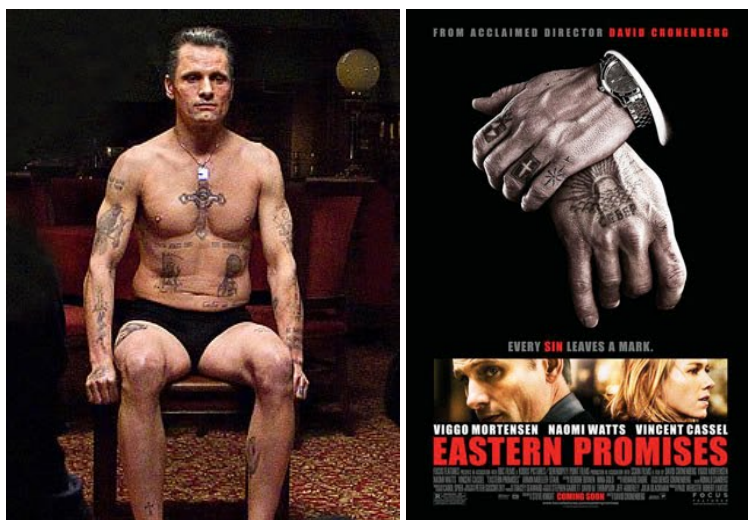
The theory of dramaturgy emanates from the interest of Gotthold Lessing in how audiences engage with (theoretical) elements of a play, like themes and their artistic representations, and how they react to these in line with their tastes (Baldyga 2019: 8). Stutterheim (2019: 11) notes that at the heart of this was the desire to attract audiences to the stage, thus Lessing’s study included how a story - its staging and performance - influenced audience response. Findings from these influenced advice given by Lessing to theatre productions which he supervised from the planning stage, through the rehearsal phase, to their performance. According to Romanska (2015: 2), Lessing also saw the dramaturgical role as one of a “public educator” who “enlighten[s] the mass”, challenging prejudices and ignorance. To this end, therefore, emphasis was also placed on accurately “researching, historical and political aspects of a play”.

Stutterheim (2019: 20) reports that in film, symbols are created by considering the “well-constructed balance of the constant and variable”. *The constant* includes the familiar (the backbone), essential story elements like the plot, theme(s), character and corresponding arc (Stutterheim 2019: 24). These exist in explicit aspects of dramaturgy – a word that derives from the Greek word *dramaturgia*, meaning “to compose a drama” (Pavis 1998: 124). Thus, the dramaturg is one who “arranges various dramatic actions in a meaningful and comprehensive order” (Romanska 2015: 1). Whether conventional or experimental, these constant elements yield structure, causality, and generic motivation to a story (Stutterheim 2019: 26). Since, people are attracted to stories that are able to hold a beginning, middle and end, together comprehensibly, stories lacking this ability will tend to attract comparatively smaller audiences. The variable - or the elements of surprise in dramaturgy - are created from the directorial ability to identify the themes and rhythm of the story and translate them to metaphors.

These concepts of *constant* and *variable* become even clearer when unpacked through the terms “explicit dramaturgy” and “implicit dramaturgy” (Stutterheim 2019: 26). Explicit dramaturgy speaks of the mise en scène, and the implicit dramaturgy entails the directorial skills that help weave metaphors into the components of the mise en scène as in the creation of motifs, for example. When a

director deploys a theme - the constant element - to take on the form of an audio and/or visual metaphor, and showcases this repeatedly at key moments in the plot, it becomes a motif. Hence, Pramaggoire and Wallis (2005: 59) contend that the components of mise en scène supply the materials (to the filmmaker) for creating motifs, which helps to develop characters and support themes. These components are cinematography, performance, blocking, production design, and sound design. Editing is another component; Gibbs insists on regarding it so since visual style invites viewers to see; it addresses “both what the audience can see and the way in which we are invited to see it” (2002: 6). Since camera placements and motions are bound in a continuum which strives to sustain this invitation in a non-distracting manner, the relevance of editing to this continuity cannot be ignored. When cleverly interwoven with plot, metaphors and motifs forestall the overt reliance on dialogue and melodramatic performances for storytelling.

Western films offer striking examples in the use of these dramaturgical elements - whereas (neo-) Nollywood does not; hence the necessity of this paper. *Eastern Promises* (2007) exemplifies the use of human figures as motif of the crime world. Nikolai is the fixer in this gangster film, and every tattoo on his torso tells the story of his hierarchical ascension in the underworld. The elusive chicken in *City of God* (2002) symbolises the protagonist, Rocket, who struggles to remain crime-free in an illicit-drug-riddled neighbourhood. In the opening scene of *The Departed* (2006), camera-movement (in form of a parallax shot), as well as lighting and blocking are combined for a menacing introduction of the mobster boss, Frank Costello.



The fixer, Nikolai’s tattooed torso, and promotional material for *Eastern Promises* with more examples of tattoos indicative of the theme—Every Sin Leaves a Mark

Images from Cole, J (2010) *Eastern Promises* in *Not Just Movies Blog* Available at <http://armchairc.blogspot.com/2010/09/eastern-promises.html> (Last accessed 3 June 2020)

Denzel Washington's *Fences* (2017), combines editing and cinematography to substantively expose the insolvency of the protagonist, Troy Maxson. At the end of Act One, right after we are reminded of his competent baseball skills, the camera cuts from an eye-level of Troy to a high-angle on him as he glances at the broken window of his brother's home, where he and his family are lodgers. Through this fragmentation of the scene, motifs of Troy's poverty and vulnerability are projected via intercuts to the broken window, and the personality-minimising camera angle.

In *Selma* (2014), setting is employed as a metaphor via the storytelling technique of parallels. This technique is used to compare two events, locations or characters through the use of a narrative element or visual or sound device (Pramaggoire and Wallis 2005: 13, 14). It invites the viewer to consider how events, locations or characters who appear diametrically opposed actually share some striking similarities. The opening setting of *Selma* is a church stairway; there, a crowd of African-American kids are killed in a racist attack as they descend the stairs. The closing scene is set on the Edmund-Pettus Bridge with African-American adults and children, in the historic Selma-to-Montgomery march. Beyond race, another similarity between these seemingly different settings is the symbolic representation of the righteous yet extremely persecuted process, of the African-American, civil-rights' movement. In the *Godfather 1* (1972), the similarities in the character-complexities of Don Corleone and his son, Michael Corleone, are projected in motifs of a ring and kisses. In the first scene, loyalists kiss the Don's ring to signal his position as the godfather; in the last scene (after his death), his loyalists kiss the ring of the son indicating that he is the new godfather. In summary, the basis of filmic storytelling is that, unlike theatre, it relies on *showing rather than telling* by combining the far-reaching visual possibilities of the mise en scène and dramaturgy.

Samples of "Telling" in Our Cinema:

The foregoing set the tone for deconstructing selected scenes from the sample film texts: *30 Days in Atlanta* (2014), *Chief Daddy* (2018) and *Mugabe* (forthcoming). The first two films have been selected for their clear neo-Nollywood delineators. As evidenced in several of its traits listed below, *Mugabe* has also been made after the model of neo-Nollywood. In reading *Mugabe*, the textual analysis will be accompanied by excerpts from an interview Rogers Ofime the producer of the film. The dialogue provides an added layer of analysis, one that is borne out of the need to balance any bias from myself as the screenwriter of the film with views of a key member of the production team.

30 Days in Atlanta (2014):

This comedy follows the holiday experiences of uncouth Akpors, upon his winning an all-expense-paid trip to Atlanta Georgia, North America. To showcase the dramaturgical issues in its plot and *mise en scène*, this reading is drawn from Act Two, which focuses on Akpors and his cousin Richard on their first sight-seeing outing. Strengths of the film lie in location and costume. In several regards, the holiday apartment is posh and located in an upscale gated community, thus affirming that the holiday sponsor has kept its promise of giving the duo a “luxurious” time. It is not a created set perhaps due to budgetary constraints, the choice of the location appears to have been critically considered but there is an obvious oversight on this ‘set’. The security lamp above the front doorway of the holiday apartment remains is left on without any apparent directorial reason, since the time of the scene remains unspecified.

To some extent, the costumes also reflect the premise of the story and culture of the characters meticulously. Akpors and Richard, are decked in the tinko embroidered tunics gifted them as part of their holiday package. As with the location, the costumes visually reinforce the inciting incident, being the holiday. They are also metaphors of the Nigerian heritage and age-bracket of the characters, since tinko tunics mark the fashion sense of the average Nigerian youth. The colours of burnt-orange and caramel in Akpors’ attire is in harmony with the white, brown, leaf-green and black colours of the background. So is the colour of Richard’s outfit which is midnight blue. When the two characters are seen together, the colour harmony is distorted, and projects a flaw in the choices from the colour palette; by extension, this is a flaw in the *mise en scène*.

A substantial disconnect between *mise en scène* and dramaturgy, is evident through an item of Akpors’ costume and its non-collocation with the plot. Akpors – who is not affluent - is clad in a pair of loafers designed by the upscale Italian designer, Louboutin. It is never signposted that these shoes are part of the holiday gifts or how Akpors is able to afford them. The character’s profile simply cannot justify the costume. This directorial oversight also casts some doubt on whether other elements of costume are a consciously designed metaphor of Nigerian youth-culture, or a fortunate coincidence.

Several other aspects of the *mise en scène* are also problematic. The scene is shot in natural light and colour-graded cold blue, thus symbolising a bleak mood which, for no signified reason, subverts the cinematic conventions of a light-hearted comedy. This mood is accentuated by foreboding skies, curiously accompanied by a cheerful soundtrack that match the strides of Akpors and Richard who remain oblivious to the dull skies, as they hurry excitedly to explore the city. The motive for planting this

contradiction between the mood music, characters' confidence and the dull skies is never explained in the course of the story. This illustrates gaps in the directorial attention to visual motifs.

The cinematography of *30 Days in Atlanta* employs a range of camera angles and movements that are sometimes employed to create visually pleasing frames. There are, however, moments where the angles fail to create three-dimensional frames because they lack attention to use of elements of the depth-of field - foreground, midground and background or parallax shots. An exemplar is in the shots featuring mother and child arguing. They are captured from an extreme off-side perspective so that the tarred road behind them appears to be a high wall against which both characters are directly placed. The frame is rendered flat by the indistinguishable distance between the actors and the road.

The absence of dramaturgical approach to plot design is made worse by the failure of the screenwriters to attend to the vestiges of colonial stereotype. Akpors is constructed as an arrogant primitive and rude youth. These offensive traits are, in many respects, celebrated and never successfully challenged. For instance, in this sequence when Akpors notices the child arguing with her mother, he expresses his displeasure at a permissive culture that tolerates children who disrespect their parents. In his view, Americans are degenerates and he would have them know. He marches over to the pair, and berates the child saying, "If you were my child, I would have sold you to purchase phone call cards" (translated from Pidgin English). Dramaturgically, these reactions are extremely offensive – particularly to the paying African-American audiences which the film targets. By such behaviour that betrays his ignorance of socio-cultural boundaries, disrespect for others; Akpors thus fits the stereotypical colonialist submission that the African is "sometimes savage in his rage" and "not a remarkable logician" (Stewart 1903: 364).

Chief Daddy (2018):

This comedy is a satire on familial tensions regarding the estate of late Chief Beecroft, a philandering patriarch who in his lifetime had fathered several children and kept a string of mistresses. The final scene of the film has been selected for analysis based on its relevance; it is the point where the tensions are all resolved. Although, in several ways, its attention to the dramaturgical is inadequate, the *mise en scène* is a marked improvement on typical neo-Nollywood films. Some key sequences are written with metaphoric juxtapositions of life and death. One is the moment where Chief Beecroft slumps while eating. As his domestic staff attempt to resuscitate him, there in the background from a life-size photo, Beecroft seems to stare at them and his corpse, as though in resignation to the finality of death. This particular poetic conversation between mortality and immortality remains throughout the story.

Regardless of this motif, the story suffers a lack of dramaturgical elements of surprise (Stutterheim 2019: 24). The absence of this in the denouement renders the story unrealistic – not reflecting traits of human emotions. In this scene, the protracted messy and hurtful fallouts of late Beecroft’s philandering are suddenly completely resolved. For instance, forgiveness is offered and promptly received, without nuances of the healing processes that accompany reconciliations sequel to bitter familial tensions – particularly those occasioned by marital infidelity discovered after the spouse’s demise. What makes this occurrence unconvincing is that reconciliation happens the moment each member of the family receives some tangible portion of the estate as their inheritance. Even in a comedy genre, the denouement is that point of the story when character traits are causally reiterated because it is the moment where the results of choices made based on character strengths and weaknesses are confronted. Therefore, the film makes little causal linkages - individual defining traits are merely replaced by a blanket of joyous contentment. Lady Beecroft is no longer the widow embittered by the humiliation of her discovery - the opportunistic concubines and secret children of her late husband. Her step-daughters suddenly no longer despise her for wedding their father while he was still married to their late mother. The money-grabbing concubines are no longer greedy. Unnaturally, everyone is ecstatic and content with their inheritance.

The cinematography sometimes captures the *mise en scène* via a “primitive” non-immersive approach. Composition of pictures for significant aesthetics or metaphoric purpose is not consistent; characters are very often captured against bland backgrounds. Natural lighting is accompanied by what appears to be a basic three-point lighting, which bleaches out some aspects in the frame. This is compounded by a bland colour scheme. The poor colour grading is mostly revealed in close-ups, as the actors’ skin-tones appear ashen. Some intercuts between characters also entail continuity breaks. In the typical nature of (neo -) Nollywood directing, the characters are all seated and there is no particular aesthetic or narratorial motivations behind the blocking. Every crucial information for plot progression is rendered in dialogue; some of them are patronising in their directness. An example is the preachy dialogue delivered by Beecroft’s accountant whilst she enlightens the family on Initial Public Offering. The same style of on-the-nose lines in this scene characterise Shoffa Donatus’s jokes, and Damilare’s apology. In summary, despite its poetic attempts, *Chief Daddy*, slips into the typical style of Nollywood storytelling.

So far, I have attempted to unpack the *mise en scène* of these films; I will now turn attention to my practice, as I conclude.

Mugabe (forthcoming):

This Nigerian-Zimbabwe production, *Mugabe* (forthcoming), is based on the tyrannical rule of former President Robert Mugabe. To give some insight into the overall directorial treatment of the screenplay, I will reflect on its mise en scène. Using a selected scene, I argue that the directorial vision is unaware of the visual clues and beats interwoven in the screenplay to create a narrative primed for *showing* rather than *telling*. The scene for analysis is taken from the second act, and selected because it is a crucial turning point. It is the scene where Mugabe plans to extend his dictatorship.

The scenic objective is that he uses news of the booming Zimbabwe economy to convince an unsuspecting Canaan Banana, the Ceremonial Head-of-State, to facilitate a meeting with his political rival, Joshua Nkomo. A documented graph of Zimbabwe's economic growth is the plant; it is the clue to Mugabe's thirst for absolute control of the state apparatus of power. The desperation introduced is confirmed in the subsequent scene where Mugabe would again use the same graph to justify why the Zimbabwe Government must move from communism to becoming a socialist government, adopt a presidential system which he leads. This technique of plant and payoff (Batty and Waldeback 2013: 78) is employed to build this intrigue; the graph is a crucial prop in this scene.

In the scene which I will analyse, this graph is used to plant Mugabe's agenda. The planting pays off with a revelation in the following scene (which will not be reviewed). I have laid out this background to emphasise why the graph is indispensable to the story, and how its absence upsets the dramaturgical balance. At the time of writing, the producing team had decided to replace the actual names to avoid political persecution. Following is the excerpt of the screenplay:

INT. PRESIDENTIAL RESIDENCE; PARLOUR - SAME NIGHT

ZIGOLA³, grim-faced, watches as BUTLER serves BROOKS⁴ & CAINE BANABAS⁵ drinks,

BROOKS

If we stop, the Ndebeles will plan a reprisal.

ZIGOLA

I said shut it down.

BROOKS backs down, picks his drink for a sip.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

ZIGOLA (Cont'd)

Good night, Brooks.

Embarrassed, BROOKS leaves. Over the rim of his drink, CAINE BANABAS cautiously watches the erratic man. A BEAT, then ZIGOLA indicates to an elegant table:

ZIGOLA (cont'd)

I kept something for you.

CAINE BANABAS, unsure, heads for the table. You see what he sees: a large GDP graph plot with the heading "GDP GROWTH ANNUAL %" **(NOTE TO PRODUCTION DESIGNER: I have this graph, if you need it)**⁶.

You follow CAINE BANABAS' eyes to the summary beneath the labyrinth of graphs, to read the following: "*Selected Countries and Economies 1980 - 1985: U.S 4.239, Azusa 6.944, U.K 4.195.*" The ceremonial president smiles, unsure what it means:

CAINE BANABAS

Nothing new...and no problem –

ZIGOLA

Yes AND NO!

ZIGOLA is suddenly smiling, friendly - shocking his guest.

ZIGOLA

You need to make a trip!

ZIGOLA, ushering the surprised man into a sofa.

CAINE BANABAS

What -

ZIGOLA

Patience, Mr. President.

CAINE BANABAS

It's 3am -

ZIGOLA

Don't you want to be President? In the true sense? In a Federal system?

ZIGOLA softly asks, BANABAS mouth widens in disbelief - yet believing every word of it.

CAINE BANABAS

And - And -

ZIGOLA

⁶ Note that the words highlighted in blue are notes to the production designer included in the actual screenplay.

Me?

(BANABAS woodenly nods)

It's more interesting on the outside. King-maker?
I'm getting old, Banabas.

CAINE BANABAS

But -

ZIGOLA

Yes we're age-mates but I have tasted this office.
You should too

ZIGOLA's smile is convincing. He goes to pour some water from a decanter.
As he drinks, BANABAS inches closer - interested, afraid, excited:

CAINE BANABAS

What would you have me do?

ZIGOLA turns, staring directly at the eager man:

ZIGOLA

Ntokozo.

BANABAS is gobsmacked. ZIGOLA'S evil smile rests on his guest.

FADE TO

As seen above, the screenplay subtly unfolds intrigues with blocking, character-gestures and the prop of a graph. Through these, characters' states of mind are exposed. On the one hand Robert is seen deflecting attention from his manipulative proposition in the friendly smile, sprightly steps, warm hospitality - ushering him to sit, serving him drinks – and then promising him a shot at the apex office. On the other hand, Caine is seen sitting, standing, inching closer to Robert – all these revealing his conflicted excitement. Thus, the story as written, is told by props, human gestures and movements, complemented by sparse and suspenseful dialogue but much of this is ignored in the mise en scène, as will now be shown.

While the screenplay indicates that the graph is "large", the film uses what looks like an A4 sized paper. The screenplay says the viewer is invited to see what Canaan Banana reads on the paper, but the film does not avail the viewer of this view. There is no indication that this omission is borne of a conscious directorial decision. Since the graph is crucial information regarding the protagonist's sleight of hand, the director's inattentiveness to that detail undermines the use of the planting-and-payoff technique employed in the screenplay to show causality in the story. Absence of that prop leads to a stark disconnect between the first and second act of the film - one

signalling Mugabe’s intrigues, the second being the build-up to the major turning-point of the story. Consequently, in the filmic interpretation, the plot is driven *mainly* by dialogue and theatrical voice-tones. Similarly, for no apparent dramatic reason, the entire scene is shot with characters seating around an almost bare dining-table, and this blocking choice stifles performance. These, coupled with bland set-design, and poor composition of shots and basic lighting reduces the scene to mainly talking heads captured in non-immersive camera angles.

Editor’s Note

Figures below show the World Bank Data on Zimbabwe referred to in the film *Mugabe*. The screenshots reveal the bare set. The author argues that the graph is a crucial prop and it could have been presented in more visually appealing ways. Considering that the film is set in the 1980s, how the graph might be inserted into the scene

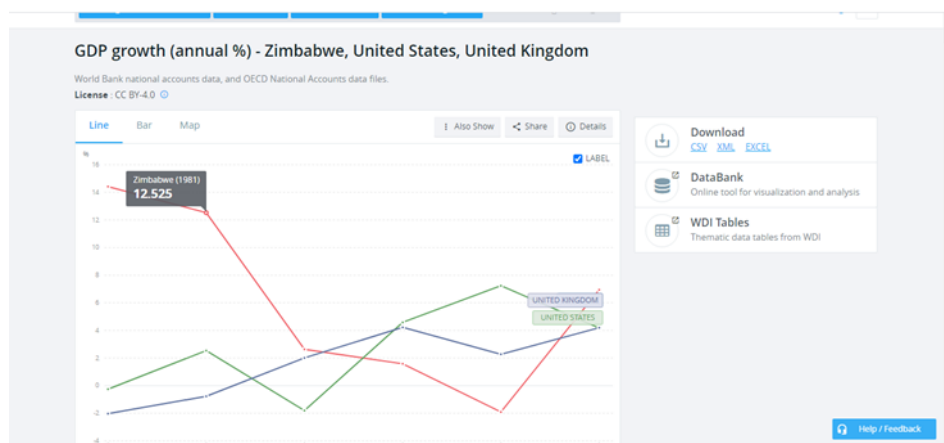


Figure 1 – Line graph GDP growth (1981) for Zimbabwe in red, compared to UK and USA

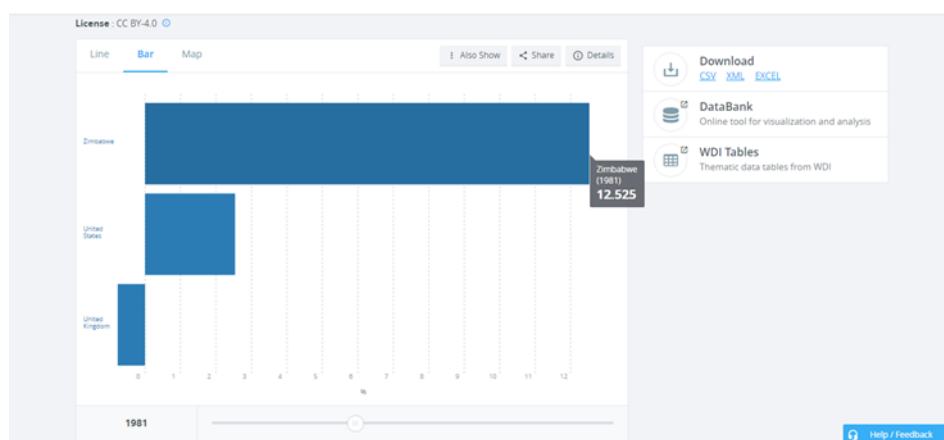


Figure 2 Bar chart GDP growth (1981) for Zimbabwe (topmost), compared to USA (middle) and UK (lowest).

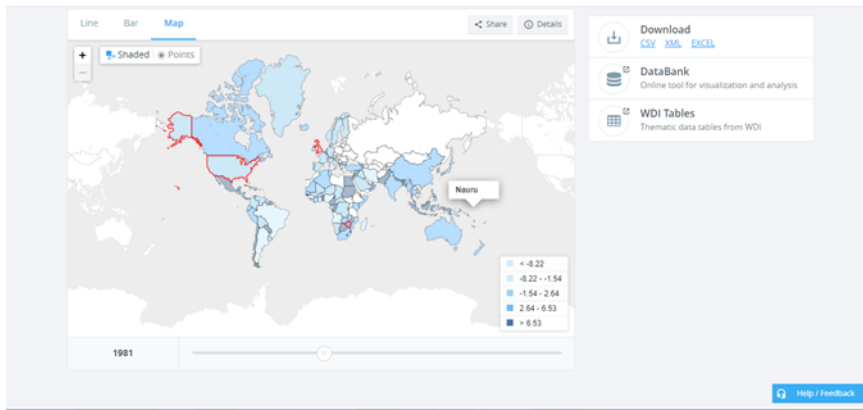


Figure 3 – Colour indexed map GDP growth (1981) for Zimbabwe, UK and USA





Screenshots from the selected scene in *Mugabe*, showing the need for an enhanced mise en scène and a missed opportunity for the plant technique discussed in the paper.

The producer Rogers Ofime has a directorial and dramaturgical background. His view of my observations above is that they are based on an unfinished work of art:

Don't forget that there is a place of grading, sound design and special effects. In the place where performance is lacking, sound and special effects make up for it...where sound is included [for instance] you tend to forget the flaws in performance.

...

I understand the problem just as you have stated it, and this is why one of the things I am doing now is going to South Africa to see if I can get a chance to partner with a filmmaker at the Durban Festival. The elements which have not been included in the film will be included ... If I don't shoot these then your fears will be correct.

Evidently, Ofime agrees that the film has several scenes which lack certain dramaturgical elements. These "incomplete" scenes require more than "grading, sound design and special effects". In the case of the graft for instance, it cannot be corrected without ensuring the contents of the graft are revealed to the viewer, *along with corresponding characters' reactions to it*. It is my view that surely, this calls for a reshoot and Ofime acquiesces: "I think that, just as you have said, the major problem [which] Nollywood has is that rather than focus on the intricate part – the dramaturgy – they [the directors] completely deviate..." He, however disagrees that the deviation stems from the absence of a cinematic directorial vision, saying "there probably was an *apropos*" between the story and its directorial interpretation. To my mind, this

directorial deviation is evidence of a significant lack of awareness of the cinematic principle, “show-don’t-tell”.

While it is true as Ofime maintains, that the observations were based on the reading of a draft of the film (albeit the third and I have seen all three), I submit that the issues of blocking and non-immersive visual storytelling remain *because* there is rather little which postproduction can do, about these. For this reason, I maintain that my observations are not premature. Were there additional budget, Ofime could be right to expect that the *mise en scène* problems of *Mugabe* can be corrected. In my experience of filmmaking, though, this is a substantial cost which could be avoided if in preproduction stages, the directorial vision had employed dramaturgical guidance. Minor reshoots which do not require major financial investments are one matter, but major corrections (as *Mugabe* may require) is another.

The discussion here has focused on just a few of many examples from neo-Nollywood where film dramaturgy has been disregarded to the detriment of stories told. We cannot insist that our stories are well articulated, since the results of our current efforts show that by not using universal film vocabulary such as audio-visual metaphors, we remain self-muted in the cinema world. Nollywood cannot insist on “primitive” modes of cinema which fail to take cognisance of elements in the *mise en scène*, yet expect to compete in the same market as films employing sophisticated cinema techniques. The industry does a great disservice to itself and African cultures by ignoring the abundant culture of metaphors, which characterises the traditions and art forms from the African continent. Indeed, customary performances of life in various rites of passage like weddings, childbirth, education, age-grade initiation, festivals, and death, are largely communicated via metaphors. Through its visual representations, neo-Nollywood is well placed to foster appreciation of such nuanced cultural heritage.

The last words of this paper belong to Ofime who, regardless of his opposition to my hard stance on *Mugabe*, concludes thus:

Neo-Nollywood can only go global if we understand the global standards of filmmaking. Gratuitously using film techniques without properly understanding such techniques smacks of mediocrity and we must evolve from mediocrity.

Bibliography

Books and Journal Articles:

- Achebe, C. (1997). "English and the African Writer", *The Anniversary Issue: Selections from Transition 1961 – 1976*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, pp. 342–349.
- Ajibade, B. (2013). "Nigerian Videos and their Imagined Western Audiences: The Limits of Nollywood's Transnationality", in Okome, O., and Kriggs, M., (Eds.), *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*. U.S.A: Indiana University Press, pp. 264-284.
- Baldyga, N. (2019). "Missions, Misunderstandings, and Mythologies: The Relationship Between the Hamburg Dramaturgy and the Hamburg National Theater", in (Eds.) Baldyga, N., *The Hamburg Dramaturgy by GE Lessing: A New and Complete Annotated English Translation*. London: Routledge, pp. 1-12.
- Barnwell, J. (2004). *Production Design: Architects of the Screen*. London: Wallflower.
- Barrot, P. (2011). "Cinema in Africa: A Clean Art and Renewal?" In *Global*. Available Online: <http://www.inaglobal.fr/en/cinema/article/cinema-africa-clean-start-and-renewal> [18th July, 2014].
- Batty, C., and Waldenback, Z. (2012). *The Creative Screenwriter: Exercises to Expand your Craft*. UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Becker, H. (2013). "Nollywood in Urban Southern Africa: Nigeria Video Films and their Audiences in Cape Town and Winhoek", *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, Krings, M. and Okome, O. (Eds.). Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 179 - 198.
- Bryce, J. (2013). "African Movies in Barbados: Proximate Experiences of Fear and Desire", in Krings, M. and Okome, O. (Eds.), *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, pp. 223-244. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Burch, N. (1979). "Film's Institutional Mode of Representation and the Soviet Response". *October*, 11, pp.77-96.
- Cornelissen, J. (2008). *Corporate Communication: A Guide to Theory and Practice*. U.K: Sage Publishers.
- Dancyger, K. (2014). *The Technique of Film and Video Editing: History, Theory, and Practice*. MA: Routledge.
- Eisenstein, S. (1949). *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*. U.S.A: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.
- Fielding, R. (1967). *A Technological History of Motion Pictures and Television: An Anthology from the Pages of the Journal of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers*. California: University of California Press.
- Gibbs, J. (2002). *Mise en Scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. London: Wallflower.
- Gibson, C. (1974). *Cinematic Techniques in the Prose Fiction of Beatriz Guido*. U.S.A: Universal-Publishers.
- Haynes, J. (2006). "Political Critique in Nigerian Video Films", *African Affairs*. 105 (421), pp. 511–33.

- Haynes, J. (2007a). "Nollywood in Lagos and Lagos in Nollywood Films". *Africa Today*, 54 (2), pp131-150.
- Haynes, J. (2007b). 'Video Boom: Nigeria and Ghana', *Post-Colonial Text*, 3 (2).
- Haynes, J. (2011). "African Cinema and Nollywood: Contradictions", *Situations: Project of the Radical Imagination*, 4 (1), pp. 67-90.
- Hochscherf, T., & Vande, R. (2016). *Third Reich Cinema and Film Theory*. *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, 36 (2), pp. 190-213.
- Iwowo, S. (2015). *Oloibiri* [Screenplay]. U.S.A, Canada, Nigeria: Greyhouse Films, Theatron Media Inc, and Right-Angle Productions.
- Iwowo, S. (Forthcoming). *Mugabe* [Screenplay]. Nigeria: Native Media.
- Nilsen, V. (1930). *The Cinema as a Graphic Art*. London: Newness.
- Novia, C. (2012). *Nollywood Till November: Memoirs of a Nollywood Insider*. Nigeria: Author House.
- Obiaya, I. (2011). "A Break with the Past: The Nigerian Video-film Industry in the Context of Colonial Filmmaking. *Film History*". *An International Journal*, 23, (2), pp. 129 -146.
- Okhai, V. (2008). "Emerging Talents: Nollywood and the Future of African Cinema". Paper Presented at The BOB TV 5th African Film and Television Programmes Expo, FCT: Abuja.
- Okome, O. (2007a). "Nollywood: Spectatorship, Audience and the Sites of Consumption." *Post-Colonial Text*, 3, (2).
- Okome, O. (2007b). "Introducing the Special Issue on West African Cinema: Africa at the Movies". *Post-Colonial Text*, 3, (2), pp. 1 – 17.
- Pavis, P. (1998). *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Pramaggiore, M., & Wallis, T. (2005). *Film: A Critical Introduction*. UK: Laurence King Publishing.
- Pype, K. (2013). "Religion, Migration and Media Aesthetics: Notes on the Circulation and Reception of Nigerian Films in Kinshasa", in Krings, M. and Okome, O. (Eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, pp. 199 - 222.
- Romanska, M. (2015). "Introduction" in Romanska, M. (ed.,). *The Routledge Companion to Dramaturgy*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1 – 17.
- Stewart, J. (1903). *Dawn in the Dark Continent: Or, Africa and its Missions*. Oliphant Edinburgh: Anderson & Ferrier.
- Stutterheim, K. (2019). *Modern Film Dramaturgy: An Introduction*. UK: Peterlang.
- Waldeback, Z. and Batty, C. (2012). *The Creative Screenwriter: Exercises to Expand Your Craft*. UK: Bloomsbury.

Filmography:

- 30 Days in Atlanta. (2015). [Film] Directed by Robert Peters. Nigeria: CWE films.
- Amazing Grace. (2006). [Film] Directed by Jeta Amata. Worldwide: Jeta amata Concepts.
- Birth of a Nation. (2016). [Film] Directed by Nate Parker. U.S.A: 20th Century Fox.
- Chief Daddy. (2018). [Film] Directed by Niyi Akinmolayan. Nigeria: FilmOne Entertainment.

- City of God (original title: Cidade de Deus). (2002). [Film] Directed by Fernando Meirelles. Brazil: 02 Films.
- Eastern Promises. (2007). [Film] Directed David Cronenberg. UK: Kudos Pictures.
- Fences. 2017. [Film] Directed by Denzel Washington. U.S.A: Bron Creative and Paramount Pictures.
- Game of Thrones. (2011-2019). [Series] Created by David Benioff and D.B Weiss. U.S.A: HBO.
- Godfather 1. (1972). [Film] Directed by Francis Ford Coppola. U.S.A: Paramount Picutres.
- Half of a Yellow Sun. (2013). [Film] Directed by Biyi Bandele. Nigeria/UK: Shareman Media; Slate Films.
- Man with a Movie Camera. (1929). [Film] Directed by Dziga Vertov. Russia: All-Ukrainian Photo Cinema Administration.
- Mugabe. (forthcoming). [Film] Directed Robert Peters.
- Oloibiri (renamed Blood and Oil for the North American Market). (2015). [Film] Directed by Curtis Graham. Nigeria, Canada and U.S.A: Right Angle Productions, Theatron Media and GreyHouse Films.
- Selma. (2014). [Film] Directed by Ava Duvernay. U.S.A: Pathé Films and Harpo Films.
- The Departed. (2006). [Film] Directed by Martin Scorsese. U.S.A: Warner Bros.
- The Visit. (2015). [Film] Directed by Funke Fayoyin. Nigeria: Koga Studios.
- The Wedding Party, Part 1. (2016). [Film] Directed by Kemi Adetiba. Nigeria: Ebony Life.

Interviews:

- Ajogwu, J. (2017, September 29). Personal Interview.
- Ofime, R. (2019, July 11). Personal Interview.
- Odugbemi, F. (2019, June 17). Personal Interview.
- Makun, A. (2019, Mar 16). Personal Interview.
- Ajai-Lycett, T. (2017, October 3). Personal Interview.
- Ajakaiye, D. (2017, September 29). Personal Interview.
- Odugbemi, F. (2017, September 25). Personal Interview.
- Joseph, K. (2017, September 13). Personal Interview.
- Odutola, K. (2017, April 12). Personal Communication.
- Graham, C. (2016, November 26). Mail Correspondence.
- Mkparu, K. (2016, October 1). Personal Interview.
- Ofime, R. (2014, February 6). Personal Interview.
- Ofime, R. (2013, November 6). Personal Interview.

Newspapers, Blogs and Online Videos:

- Abudu, M. (2017). "Mo Abudu: Being Bold in Entrepreneurship", Talk at Google [YouTube Video], 3 April. Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2yRd5bgPYvw> [Accessed 5 May, 2017].
- Bradshaw, P. (2014). Half of a Yellow Sun review – 'Well-intentioned and Heartfelt', The Guardian, 24 April. Available Online:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/apr/10/half-of-a-yellow-sun-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-film-review> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- CEAN (2019). "Top Twenty Film Releases: 7 Day", CEAN. Available Online: <http://ceanigeria.com/box-office/47-top-20-films-22nd-28th-mar-2019> [Accessed 15 June, 2019].
- Dalton, S. (2016). "76 Film Review: TIFF 2016", Hollywood Reporter, 17th September. Available Online: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/76-review-929856> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- Izuzu, C. (2016). "Pulse Movie Review: "Oloibiri" Creatively Encapsulates the Plight of the Niger Delta Region", Pulse Ng, 24 November. Available Online: <https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/amp.pulse.ng/entertainment/movies/pulse-movie-review-oloibiri-creatively-encapsulates-the-plight-of-the-niger-delta-region-id5646772.html> [Accessed 13 September, 2017].
- Jury, L. (2007). "Film Gives Nigeria's Side of the Slave Trade", Evening Standard, 9 May. Available Online: <http://www.standard.co.uk/goingout/film/film-gives-nigerias-side-of-the-slave-trade-6581194.html> [Accessed 15 July, 2014].
- Kareem, T. (2016). "Read Kareem Tolu's Take on Oloibiri: A Tale of Blood and Oil", Xplore Nollywood, 11 November. Available Online: <http://xplorenollywood.com/read-tolu-kareems-take-on-oloibiri-a-tale-of-blood-oil/> [Accessed 13 September, 2017].
- Kenigsberg, B. (2014). "In Nigeria, the Personal and the Political Clash Chiwetel Ejiofor Stars in 'Half of a Yellow Sun'", New York Times, 15 May. Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/16/movies/chiwetel-ejiofor-stars-in-half-of-a-yellow-sun.html?mcubz=1> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- Lodge, G. (2015). "Film Review: 'Black November'", Variety, 9 January. Available Online: <http://variety.com/2015/film/reviews/film-review-black-november-1201396672/> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- NAN. (2016). "Minister Lauds AFRIFF For Revolutionising Africa", Guardian, 14 November. Available Online: <https://guardian.ng/life/film/minister-lauds-afriff-for-revolutionising-africa/> [Accessed 11 December, 2016].
- Nelson, H. (2007). "The Fabulous Picture Show: Half Nelson", Al Jazeera (Doha - Qatar). Available Online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/fps/2007/05/200852517275170339.html> [Accessed 20 April, 2014].
- Ogunjiofor, O. (2012). "Interview with Okey Ogunjiofor, Living in Bondage", Nollywooddk Channel [YouTube Video]. 24 August. Available Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3uxV2IHleg> [Accessed 11 December, 2013].
- Ovwe, M. (2011). "Excitement as Mirror Boy Arrives", Daily Independent, 21 July. Available online at: <http://allafrica.com/stories/201107220589> [Accessed 21 March, 2014].
- Parkinson, D. (2009). "Hooray for Nollywood?", Focus Features.com, 8 December, Available Online: http://www.focusfeatures.com/article/hooray_for_nollywood_/print [Accessed 13 July, 2014].
- Provost, C. (2014). "Nigeria Becomes Africa's Largest Economy – Get the Data", The Guardian, 7 April. Available Online: <http://www.theguardian.com/global->

- development/datablog/2014/apr/07/nigeria-becomes-africa-largest-economy-get-data [Accessed 28 August, 2014].
- Quirke, A. (2014). "Half of a Yellow Sun – Film Review", *Financial Times*, 10 April. Available Online: <https://www.ft.com/content/3459d6f2-c0b2-11e3-a74d-00144feabdc0> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- Rapold, N. (2015). "Challenging Corruption in the Niger Delta 'Black November' Delves into an African Oil Disaster", *New York Times*, 8 January. Available Online: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/09/movies/black-november-delves-into-an-african-oil-disaster.html?referrer=google_kp [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- Reuters. (2007). "United Kingdom: Nigeria's First Major International Feature Film, 'The Amazing Grace' to be Released in USA and UK", *Reuters*. Available Online: <http://www.itnsource.com/en/shotlist/RTV/2007/05/18/RTV744007/?v=1> [Accessed 11, July, 2014].
- Romney, J. (2016). "'76': London Review", *ScreenDaily*, 17 October. Available Online: <https://www.screendaily.com/reviews/76-london-review/5110410.article> [Accessed 20 September, 2017].
- Sembene, O. (2005). "Guardian Interviews at the BFI", in Interview with Greer, B., for *Guardian*, 5 June. Available Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2005/jun/05/features> [Accessed 4 July, 2019].
- Sharf, Z. (2019). "George R.R. Martin Says the 'Internet s Toxic', in Aftermath of 'Game of Thrones' Season 8 Outrage", *Indiewire*. 29 June. Available Online: <https://www.indiewire.com/2019/06/george-r-r-martin-internet-toxic-game-of-thrones-outrage-1202154382/> [Accessed 20 June, 2019].
- Soffel, J. (2013). "'Half of a Yellow Sun': Thandie Newton, Typhoid and a Tale of Civil War", *CNN Inside Africa*, 21 October. Available Online: <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/21/showbiz/half-of-a-yellow-sun/> [Accessed 21 December, 2014].
- Stutterheim, K. (2019). "Game of Thrones 8 - Finale –Stoppage", *Glaz*, 22 March. Available Online: <http://www.kino-glaz.de/archives/1906> [Accessed 20 June, 2019].
- Tsai, M. (2015). "Well-Intentioned 'Black November' Tends to Overreach", *L.A Times*, 9 January. Available Online: <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/la-et-mn-black-november-movie-review-20150113-story.html> [Accessed 28 August, 2017].
- Trencsényi, K. (2014). "Dramaturgy and Mise en Scène", (Eds.) Pavis, P., *Mise en scène* [Special Topic], in *The IATC Web Journal*, 10. Available Online: <http://www.critical-stages.org/10/dramaturgy-and-mise-en-scene/> [Accessed 30, December, 2019].
- Uzor, B. (2012). "Jeta Amata", *Nollywood Blog*, 9 June. Available Online: <http://nollywoodblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/06/jeta-amata.html> [Accessed 20 April, 2014].
- Vineyard, J. (2019). "Still Pondering the End of Game of Thrones? Here's What to Read About it", *New York Times*, 27 March. Available Online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/27/arts/television/game-of-thrones-final-season-theories.html> [Accessed 20 June, 2019].