THE FILM EDITOR IN NOLLYWOOD: TECO BENSON'S *WAR FRONT* AS PARADIGM

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Abstract

This paper is motivated by the need to look behind the scene in the filmmaking process, to establish the very important role played by the Editor in the final film released to the viewing public. The study is anchored on the work of Teco Benson, one of Nigeria's film Director/Editors who has left an indelible foot print in the practice of filmmaking. A critical assessment of War Front reveals the very important position of the Editor in the process of filmmaking in Nigeria. The major contribution of the study is the repositioning of the Editor's importance in the process of filmmaking using Teco Benson's work.

Introduction

The Nigerian Film Industry, popularly known as Nollywood has witnessed tremendous growth after the epochal release of Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* in 1992. While many scholars rank Nollywood third largest film industry in the world after American Hollywood and Indian Bollywood, Femi Shaka (2011:1) notes that the most recent survey of United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization UNESCO ranks it second after Bollywood. Nollywood has however become a global issue of topical discourse. In Nigeria, many scholars have contributed immensely to the development of the Film. A research into film scholarship in Nigeria has revealed a far-fetching contribution especially from the perspectives of directing, acting, costume, marketing

and ideological theories amongst others. As Nwafor (2012:4) rightly observes:

> Nigerian film critics have done so much trying to sustain film practice by way of maintaining constant appraisal of the industry. Ekwuazi, Opubo, Nwuneli, Haynes, Okome, Ukadike, Shaka, Ayakoroma Ogunleye, all concentrate on history, development, uses, distributions, challenges and prospects of the cinema in Nigeria.

Studies have revealed that while film is a function of collaborative efforts, the contributions of some collaborators in Nigerian film Industry are yet to secure serious attention in scholarship. Such technical subjects as cinematography, editing, special effects, light and sound which constitute the core of film art appear passive and grossly underdeveloped in Nigeria. This has kept both the area and its practitioners in abject obscurity. Bordwell and Thompson (2008:1) have argued that since film is a technologically based art, the interactions between man and machine is an inevitable means to its success.

This is a clear indication that film productions can be functional only when man interacts with machine. They have observed that "since 1920s when film scholars began to realize what editing can achieve, it has been the most widely discussed film technique". Supportively, Zettl (2006:384) maintains that "almost every programme you see on television has been edited in some way or the other". Dancygar (2007,.361) is therefore right to conclude that; "the art of film is editing". To edit is to structure, structure is live, beauty, harmony and meaning in creative works. It is what Aristotle refers to as "the soul of drama" (p.16) and "what makes meaning to emerge". (

Bartens, 2001:55). It is the logical arrangement of parts into whole out of which meaning is actualized. This is an exclusive task of editing in film narratives. To appreciate the impacts of editing in Nigerian video films therefore, an examination from a structural point of view is essential. According to Barry (2002:39) "the essence of structuralism is the belief that things cannot be understood in isolation, they have to be seen in the context of larger structures they are part of". Like the human language which is structured from separate phonetic sounds to achieve holistic meaning, the Nigerian video film is a function of integrated parts. Kolker (1999:51) has identified shot, sound, title and cut as basic building blocks of film. The proper harnessing of these separate parts to generate the meaning we find in Nigerian films is an achievement of editing.

Apart from structural organization of films, editing also plays a corrective role on Nigerian Video films. The elimination of unwanted footages by discarding all and allowing only the best takes of each shot is exclusively an editorial function. All superfluous shots such as the ones containing directorial comments, clapperboards and other unnecessary footages are also removed through editing. One fabulous thing about Nigerian Video Films is how the disjointed, superfluous and ambiguous shots are aesthetically unified as one in such a way that audience becomes unaware of the patches. Zettl (p.308) has pointed that; "much editing time is spent correcting mistakes, either by eliminating unacceptable portions of a scene or by replacing them with better ones. This kind of editing can be simple, merely cutting out the part during which the talent coughed and replacing it with a retake." Although, as audience we might not notice the corrected mistakes, the fact that Nigerian Video Films are edited suggests that so many mistakes may have been corrected.

From correcting erroneous images, editing also corrects faulty sounds through many devices including Automatic Dialogue Replacement (ADR). Automatic Dialogue Replacement is a device where recorded audio from another source other than the one in the film is superimposed to replace faulty audio of characters in such a way that viewers do not notice the tricks. This paper is an attempt at exposing the unavoidable position of the editor in the practice of filmmaking in Nigeria using *War Front* edited by Teco Benson.

Continuity Editing: Historical Overview
Research has shown that Motion pictures were first created around 1895, it is however noted that editing was not a goal and as such nonexistent as the mere sight of moving pictures on screen impacted overwhelmingly on viewership. (Dancygar 2007:3). The need for editing however arose as a result of the American filmmakers' quest to transit from the practice of merely showing images to the utilization of those images by way of telling stories. Continuity editing is therefore demarcated into three significant historical phases; early period, studio era and digital age. The early Period (1903-1924) is also referred to as silent period because of its precedence of sound technology was very significant in the development of film editing. The hallmark of which was the gradual institution of many editing techniques geared towards fulfilling narrative objectives. Some of these include; "Consideration for visual continuity, deconstruction of scenes into shots, development of parallel editing replacement of real time by dramatic sense of time and poetic editing styles: (Dancygar,2007:35). Although, this period witnessed the rise of many filmmakers, the contributions of Edwin Porter and W.D Griffith are pivotal.

Edwin S. Porter (1869-1941) was a great trendsetter to the development of editing. His major contribution was the arrangement of shots to represent narrative continuity. His works demonstrate that when films are broken into pieces and joined together to become one, they create greater impacts than using a single shot (Bordwell and Thompson p.445). Kariel Reisz and Garvin Miller have also noted that; "Porter has demonstrated that a single shot recording an incomplete piece of action is the unit of which films must be constructed and thereby established the basic principles of editing". (qtd in Dancygar p.4). Unlike the earlier films which were produced in single takes of shot, Porter's works where constructed together from different pieces of broken shots and the result was fascinating. His works include; The Great Train Robbery (1903), Life of an American Firearm (1903). Although, Porter established the basic principles of continuity editing, his works did not pay attention to physical length of shots, shot variations, logic of temporal relations in cutting and dramatic construction (Dancygar p.4), (Bordwell and Thompson p.445). These shortcomings were however improved upon by D.W Griffith.

Griffith, (1875-1948), another ground-breaking figure to the development of editing established new standard for motion pictures, Porter attempted to clarify film narratives in his works, his successor went some steps further by making his shots impact more dramatically on audience. His major contributions were the use of shot variations for effectiveness, replacement of real time with screen time and experimentation with lengthy films. Such variable shots as close up, cut away, and tracking shots were experimented and used for dramatic impacts.. The movement of camera very close to the points of action and fragmentation of shots into scenes were prominent.

One can therefore, imagine the dramatic orchestration that could result from the interconnectivity of these variable shots. Griffith also experimented with time management. He attempted to create a clear demarcation between real time and screen time. Griffith's works demonstrate that "complete actions needn't be shown to achieve realism. Because of the intercutting, scenes could be fragmented and only those parts of scenes that were most effective needed to be shown. Dramatic time thus began to replace real time as a criteria for edit decision". (Dancygar P.7). The Birth of a Nation (1915 and Intolerance (1916) however established Griffith as the leading motion picture producer of his time.

In these films, Griffith, experimenting with lengthy films, integrated all editorial techniques he had successfully experimented with in the past. The studio era (1929-1950) period witnessed another exciting dimension in the historical development of continuity editing. The hallmark of which was a breakthrough in the new challenge of integrating sound and visuals and the establishment of cinematic illusions of realism as one of the aesthetic principles of film editing. As suggested by Corrigan and White (2010:141):

> With the coming of sound and the full development of Hollywood Studio System, film editing expanded and refined the storytelling technique known as continuity editing. While integrating the new demands of simultaneously editing sound and image tracks, indeed, the complexity of editing with sound track initially resulted in fewer camera movements and fewer cuts, but by the early 1930s, editing succeeded in establishing an

integrated editing style that extended the continuity system through a more expansive sense of film realism.

Although the coming of sound in the late 1920s was a welcomed development, the challenge of integrating the emerging technology into the mainstream of film narrative became eminent. The successful experimentation with sound in Alfred Hitchcock's Blackmail (1929), Fritz Lang's M. (1931), and Rouben Mamolian's Applause (1929) were known to be so remarkable that sound became viewed as another unique element that along with visuals, could help to create wonderful experience in film narratives.

The representation of life as realistic as possible became another prime concern of continuity editing. There is no gainsaying that foreign influence contributed greatly in shaping continuity editing during this period. Corrigan and White (p.141) note that Italian neo-realism was a major influence on new realisms in Hollywood films, especially with the use of fewer cuts, depth and actual locations to capture the integrity of stories of ordinary people. Similarly, Boardwell and Thompson (p.459) note that; "A new realism was needed, some critics found it in French films of the 1930s, especially works by Jean Renoir." Jean Renoir is a French veteran whose cinematic techniques reflected the ideals of perspective painting and became eloquent in revolutionizing the soviet montage introduced by Sergei Eisenstein.

Perspective painting was a popular technique of the renaissance period. Its major concern was to recreate a real world that looks quite natural especially with the use of space and natural locations. It rejected the formalized style of medieval painting in which images were presented in static and expressionless two dimensions. (Microsoft Encarta, 2009).

Renoir's Major contribution was the introduction of an alternative narrative technique which sort to de-emphasize montage editing that was already making wave in the world. Emphasizing on depth, Renoir relied on mis-en scene to achieve his goal. Mis-en scene is a French word literally meaning "put on stage" Corrigan and White (p.550). Nochimson (p.411) describes it as "the creation of effect and tone in the film through the composition of the frame rather than through montage". Renoir upholds that the frontal and shallow focus, being the genius of montage does not give considerations to space and sufficient time. He observes that the movement of viewer's eye is limited to tightly controlled areas such that the information at the background is completely out of visual range. Besides, time allotted to each shot is inadequate for the eye to consume and comprehend. To him, what makes film pleasurable are the realistic and naturalistic representations of scene in such a way that depth, long takes and wide range of camera movements are prominent.

Nochimson (2010:26) suggests, Renoir believes that "The pleasure of watching involves the freedom of the viewer's eye to roam through the deep space in frame composition and the freedom of the planning movements of the camera. That is, the sweep of the camera across the scene". In Rule of the Game (1937) Jean Renoir displays a technique of multi-leveled visual field called "Deep Focus" to create illusion of immense depth on the flat surface of a television screen. Deep Focus photography is a technique of filmmaking which shows objects in front, middle and back of the frame with equal clarity. Reacting on the impact of this Renoir's work, Andre Bazin, one of the greatest French film critics opines;

Technically, Renoir's conception of the screen assumes

what I shall call Lateral depth of field and the almost total disappearance of montage. Since what we are shown in cinema is only significant in terms of what Is hidden from us… the Mis-en scene cannot limit itself to what is Presented on the screen. The rest of the scene while effectively hidde Should not cease to exit. The action is not bounded by the screen but Merely passes through it. And a person who enters the camera's field of vision is coming from other areas of the action and not from some Limbo, some imaginary "backstage". (qtd in Nochimson, 2010:25)

Renoir's realistic approach of visual narrative became a prime influence on cinematic realism in the world. Affirming this on Italian neorealism,David Boardwell and Kristin Thompson (p.459) note that; "A new realism was needed, some critics found it in French films of the 1930s, especially works by Jean Renoir". Similarly, Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White (p.141) note that Italian neorealism was a major influence on ne realisms, especially with the use of fewer cuts, depth and actual locations to capture the integrity of stories of ordinary people. The technique became dominant in films of this period. The praise worthy works of Hollywood filmmakers like Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Ray Nicholas, among others were produced using depth, longer takes, real locations, fewer cutting, and camera movements. (Kolker 2006:57).

The digital era (1990 - Present) witnessed the emergence of digital technology in the world and film is not an exemption. In terms of cinematography, the period witnessed a transition from analog to digital video cameras. The most astonishing revolution in terms of editing was the emergence of Non Linear Editing System, a system which stores film footage on digital format using high capacity computer hard drives and RAM.

This system is user friendly and provides a limitless array of possibilities for filmmakers; the system allows selection and arrangement of shots rather than copying. It also provides editors with random shot assessment. One can jump straight to shot ninety five without following the linear progression of shots one, two, three and going through the preceding ninety four shots like the linear system. The emergence of this new technology made editing very easy. Shot and sound waves are visibly displayed and can be positioned at exact positions of choice.

The Editing of *War Front* 1&2 by Teco Benson
Film Title: *War Front* 1&2
Director/Editor: Teco Benson
Duration: 4 Hours, 59 Minutes
Format: Video
Production Company: Reemy Jes Productions (RJP)

A notorious terrorist group has just murdered one of Nigeria's most reputable Judges, Justice Hinga in cold blood for sentencing their leader to death by hanging. Dorika, Kenyan ambassador's daughter who is an eye witness to the heinous crime escapes attempt on her life by same group. Brigadier John Castro, a dismissed officer in Nigerian army and sponsor of the terrorist group orders Bruce, his deadliest assassin to flush her away in order to avert her revelation of their identity. Salvaging the diplomatic ties between Nigerian and Kenyan governments, coupled with the dual needs to uncover the culprits and save Dorika's life becomes the topmost priority of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Amidst the tragic situations surrounding FBI during the several arrests of members of the terrorist group and subsequent jail breaks, the FBI remains committed to the struggles.

At last, in the deadliest and bloodiest shootout between the groups, FBI overpowers the group, leaving all her enemies, including Bruce, dead. This triumph of justice over injustice which is a dominant technique in Teco Benson's films, however gives the film the beautiful aura of tragic-comedy. Teco Benson is a multitalented film practitioner whose skill in other creative units of film production has added so much aesthetic value to the overall quality of Nollywood. His ability to use editing in telling fascinating stories in a clear and most effective manner as exemplified in his famous *War Front* is the central focus of this section. Benson does not just tell stories like every other storyteller; he is an orator who craftily weaves his images in a comparative manner with the poet's use of words. He has a way of sweetly compelling his audience to glue tight to their Seats with a never blinking eye just to be part of his story. With a prudent use of fewer words and more actions as archetypal of Hollywood's action films, Benson demonstrates a fantastic gamut of technical Know-How in the narrative of the film. Known as a track record maintaining director within the genres of action films,

In terms of shot assemblage, Benson uses coherent, smooth flowing and logically related shot sequences in a cause and effect order to create an illusion of verisimilitude. He uses suspense and a complete demonstration of cinematic realism to logically assemble sequence of shots that reveal the tragic death of Agent Harold, the troop leader of FBI during a major fire exchange between FBI and members of the terrorist gang. This sequence logically tells the story of how FBI bombs the terrorists' vehicle, a counter attack on FBI's aircraft, ambulance in total control of FBI with an unidentified casualty, a corpse carried by FBI in a full military display and a telephone call by the FBI boss reveals detail of the tragedy.

This sequence of shot is so connected and related that the full colors of a well told story are spotlighted.

Furthermore, Benson attempts to provide adequate visual information on each event of the film. Each of his scenes contains varieties of shots that reveal the narrative details of the work from different points of view following a tip-tap order. With his consistent display and skillful integration of long, medium, close up, reaction, cutaway, tracking and panning shots amongst others in his sequences, Benson uses editing to present all the narrative details required for the easiest understanding of his story.He also uses a gallery of shots to properly inform his viewers about the security strength of the hospital where Dorika is receiving treatment. Here we see a seemingly wounded patient who indeed is a terrorist entering into the hospital, a security electronic device detects his unrealistic injury, He attempts to escape by jumping through a high fence but shot and apprehended by the security operatives. This demonstration of story-made-easy is a dominant technique used by Benson in virtually all the scenes of this film.

Again, Benson's use of editing in providing adequate geographical and time information about the action is prominent in the film. With a full display of visual aids, he attempts to situate each action to a geographical setting through the use of establishment shots. At every point of his narrative, his viewers are informed about the exact place of action. The mastery of Benson's skill in this regards also extends to the provision of information on the specific time of action. His constant use of moonlight and sunlight respectively to establish night and day scenes is dominant and highly plausible We see shots that establish place and time of action in his films. Benson attempts to achieve verisimilitude by creating a coherent relationship of actions despite changes in

shots. A careful study of *War Front* reveals that at every sequence, he strives to sustain each action in such a logical manner that looks so real and natural. He presents a medium shot of Brigadier Castro pulling out the hat of one of his gang members, a reverse shot of same action continues from the exact point where the first terminates. The terminal point of Brigadier Castro's departure in the first shot is the exact point where the action continues from in the next shot by logically connecting the dots in his story; Benson deliberately attempts to prevent his viewers from being confused is controlled with editing is deliberate.

Benson's use of special effects to achieve realism is also prominent. He and his co special effect editor, Sola Akimbo achieve complete illusions of flying bullet and bombings of vehicle and aircraft. An illusion that looks so real and natural. This demonstration is an exemplification of the concept of cinematic illusions of realism, typical of continuity editing during the studio era as established earlier. This tantalizing scene is so significant about the film because it marks a turning point in the history of Nigerian Films since the illusion of the bombing of aircrafts is quite alien in Nollywood. Justifying the possibility of this kind of illusion through editing, Kolker (p119) notes that;

> Many films are invented during editing. The violent stunts of action films are constructed by editing sequences in which people knock each other. The falling down of buildings, bashing of cars into each other are constructed out of shot themselves, manufactured out of various image elements clearly cut together to create the illusion of fists meeting faces and bodies falling through glass doors.

Although, it is not within the scope of this research to discuss the processes whereby this illusion is achieved, from the foregoing however, it is indicative that this special effect is made possible through the editor's skillful manipulations of the effect control icons within the non linear editing program used in the studio. Such professional editing programs as Adobe Premiere and Cinema Series CS, Apple Cut, Canopus and the likes contain varieties of effects in the effect palettes which can be administered appropriately on video clips designed for effects. These programs also accept third party programs where diverse forms of effects can be built and imported from.

Furthermore, with good choice of music and sound effects and excellent synchronization with images, Benson creates an exciting mood that adds additional narrative value to the film. The matching of gun sounds with images of gunshots, use of horrible and terrific sounds effects in moody scenes to heighten emotions, use of dirge to depict mourning, use of triumphant beat to represent victory and off course, brilliant use of onomatopoeia to conjure images and heighten mood. These are good examples of cinematic illusions of realisms. Indeed, an examination of war front proves the elegant use of poetic and punctuating editing techniques to condense real time to filmic time. Ordinarily the entire story in the film could be told in several hours, Benson however, like Griffith demonstrate that real time need not to be shown and so he uses several techniques ranging from fragmentation of scenes into shots, parallel editing and pace to minimize time. A critical study of the film shows that the shots are carefully presented in a punchy, racy and rhythmical order with each as brief as about ten seconds in most cases, he adopts the trans-cutting technique where shots from two or more scenes interchangeably cut. The overall impacts of this punchy editing technique on viewership

are suspense and stimulation of interest.

Deep focus is another important area which Benson's *War Front* is a genius of. Like the works of Jean Renoir as exemplified in *The Rule of the Game* (1937) and Orson Welle's *Citizen Kane*. (1941). Teco Benson uses depth to give allowance for viewers' eyes to roam deep from the foreground to the background of the frame. This technique which was developed during the studio era of editing as discussed earlier gives the film a deep sense of realism.Although, Teco Benson has made spirited efforts in using editing to give a detailed narrative account of war against terrorism in Nigeria as seen in *War Front*, a critical study of this work however reveals his inconsistency with the principles of continuity editing. These incongruities are prominent especially in the areas of preservation of screen direction, spatial relationship of shots and verisimilitude.

Benson is not consistent with the preservation of screen direction in editing. Some of his shots reveal unsystematic arrangements of images in such a contrasting screen direction that readily becomes confusing. Viewers' inability to identify the real direction out of the contrast poses a question mark on the integrity of continuity. A long shot of agent Harold opening a car that is facing screen right direction is shown. The medium shot action of same action shows the car facing a juxtaposing left direction. Again, a long shot of FBI members facing screen right direction while in a shootout against the terrorist squad, surprisingly, is followed by a cut which is a medium shot of same action showing them facing a conflicting screen direction. Thirdly, agent Duke driving towards a screen right direction; the next cut shows him facing the opposite direction. It is not logical that an instantaneous change from one shot to another in the same scene should result in a change of screen direction from left to right or right to left as portrayed. The resultant effect of this kind of contrasting and disjunctive shot assemblage on viewership is complete confusion. It is no longer clear to determine whether these characters are still travelling ahead or returning from their journeys. Secondly, Benson does not pay obstinate attention to spatial relationship of subjects. He presents most of his shots in such a way that the logic of smooth flowing narrative arising from appropriate utilization of space is violated. The composition of his visual reveals a mismatch in the relationship between characters. A critical study reveals that a character B eats up the entire interactive screen space which is within the believable range that character A also exists. The editor's choice of another take with better visual composition would have been ideal.

Furthermore, the gigantic gun which Bruce uses in the hospital after breaking the security by pretending to be an accident victim appears to be shown from a vacuum. No previous establishment shot of it is revealed. What appears to be the concealment of the gun from the eagle shot eyes of the agile security operatives within the hospital is quite incongruous and as such, raises serious questions on verisimilitude. The gun is too big to be hidden with as much ease as the film presents. The use of smaller guns like pistols would have been more realistic. Conclusively, this study has identified editing as an important aspect of film studies that has been underdeveloped in scholarship in Nigeria, hence the need for this study. The work also identifies with the theoretical framework of continuity editing whose hallmark is to tell stories as smooth as possible.

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THE MEDIA AND AFRICAN CHILD FORMATION: AN ETHICAL REFLECTION

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Abstract
The child occupies a very crucial place in every family, community and the entire human society. Among the cardinal African values, the child is highly ranked. Thus, offspring remains an essential aspect of African marriages. As the primary agent of socialization, the family plays a pivotal role in child formation. Apart from the general educational contents, African child formation importantly involves the inculcation of the effective African values that aid individual and societal integral developments. Within the platforms of both informal and formal education, the reality and place of the media in child formation is indubitable. As an important vehicle of information transmission, the media is pivotally positioned to provide platforms of exposures. Thus, with the activities of the media, the child is exposed to information that could add either positive or negative values to his/her process of formation. In the contemporary age of Information Communication Technology (ICT), the African child is faced with media realities that pose greater challenges to his/her human formation. The present piece approaches the place of the media in African child formation from the ethical perspective with a view to determining the moral problems and prospects therein. With the philosophical tools of exposition, critical analysis and appraisal, it could be submitted that African child formation is both advanced and hampered by the recent media activities, thereby eliciting measures towards promoting the advantages and disparaging the disadvantages.