



Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

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ABSTRACT

Since its emergence, the Nigerian movie industry “Nollywood”¹ or “Naijawood” has had a profound influence on African and world cultures – through the transmission of the distinctly Nigerian accents, idiomatic expressions, style of dress, and behavioral idiosyncrasies as images worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

According to Jenks Okwori in “A Dramatized Society: Representing Rituals of Human Sacrifice as Efficacious Action in Nigerian Home-Video Movies”, “there is also in these Nigeria video films a kind of romance between ritual and secularity, between traditionalism and modernity. This romance represents an interface, which captures the present dichotomized consciousness of an average audience: a belief in rituals, juju and witchcraft while at the same time admitting that such belief is superstition” (9). The interface Okwori speaks of suggests that cultures are the creation of human interaction or something that is learned. Therefore, changes in human society reflect the dynamism of that culture or those who come in contact with it. To analyze this and other trends emanating from Nigerian Home-Video Movies (NH-VM) I will employ the symbolic convergence theory [SCT]. SCT offers a possible explanation for similarities between movie “myths” and opinion trends. The SCT, often known as fantasy-theme analysis, is a well-developed theory by Ernest Bormann, John Cragan, and Donald Shields dealing with the use of narrative in communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2005).

Using SCT, it is easy to see how repeated exposure to the myths and themes of NH-VM on Nigerian cultures can influence an individual's perception of Nigerians - and about time too. Depending on social level, perspective and exposure, the mention of the word “Nigeria” conjures up three images in the mind of many non-Nigerians; (1) a rich oil-producing nation (2) a nation of fraudsters (3) a great footballing nation. However, very

Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

interestingly, in the last couple of years, the nation has added another image i.e. it is an emerging movie-producing nation, for this, we must say “to God be the glory”. “Emerging” is somewhat misleading because Adesanya (2000: 43) puts the total production based on submissions to the Nigerian Film Censors Board put annual video film production in Nigeria in the mid-1990s at about 250 films. A later estimate also based on submissions to the Nigerian Film Censors Board found that by 2004 an average of 3 new films were being submitted every day and annual production had risen to at least a thousand films per annum (Barrot 12, 40). However, Moradewun Adejunmobi [2007: 3] argues that since this figure does not take into consideration the films that are not submitted to the Censors Board, and since the Censors Board, like other Nigerian government parastatals, does not really have the means to fully monitor the activities supposedly within its purview, the total number of films produced in Nigeria is likely to be even higher, making the Nigerian movie industry, the third-largest in the world.

The key to the success of this booming Nigerian movie industry, according to Dixon, “lies in part in the hands of small children with lightning bolts shooting from their palms, or the superimposed image of a dog spirit crudely rising from the body of a possessed witch, as in the Nollywood film *End of the Wicked*, or, in the same film, demon people morphing into a variety of animals by way of an exceedingly hokey special effect”. These clips, he says, can be difficult to watch in all their sensational, ultra-low-budget crudeness. But as shown in the Canadian documentary *Nollywood Babylon*, which played in January [2009] at the Sundance Film Festival, getting caught up in this kind of aesthetic judgment is exactly why Nigerian films aren't meant for a wider global audience.

But for these films, laced with crude special effects, their popularity lies in the depiction of traditional superstitions and beliefs hence the use of SCT in this paper. The SCT is a relevant theoretical framework that is deeply rooted in Nigerian cultural traditions and social texts and a comprehensive methodology that focuses on the intervening mediations between community life and representation. According to Griffin (1991), “Through symbolic convergence, individuals build a sense of community or a group consciousness” (34). Since it is difficult to make a causal link between the fantasy themes of the movies and the parallel trends in public opinion, the symbolic convergence theory offers a potential explication with at least face validity (Littlejohn & Foss:158). The repetition of a fantasy theme makes it easily recognizable to the extent that such themes to a ‘knowledgeable’ audience no longer require the telling of an entire episode, rather an abbreviation or just a “trigger” or symbolic cue suffices. For instance, the repeated depiction of juju in NH-VM should eventually influence individual perception of Nigerians as diabolic and superstitious. Is this the trend the producers of NH-VM intended to export to the world? Or should we evaluate these fantasy themes in their artistry, their creativity, their novelty, and the acumen with which they are used, combined, and formed into visions?

F. K. Omoregie

Before any analysis is possible we need to first understand why Nigerian movie production shifted from celluloid to videofilm. A primary reason, according to Faris (2002) of Time International was concern for safety. He notes that "With cities plagued by armed robbers, few wanted to risk a nighttime outing just to see a movie" (1). Ojo-Rasaki confirms this and two more reasons for this shift:

First, is the ever-increasing popularity of television medium? Second, is the fact that nightlife has become very unsafe in Nigeria due to criminal activities and also the cinema halls have become rough and unsafe. Third, is the effect of capitalism which keeps parents away from their kids most of time? Such kids, who find solace in the video film, stay glued to the screen and become video –addicted (2001).

Faris and Ojo-Rasaki's argument though correct, lay emphasis on social reasons for the upsurge. However, there were economic reasons that were equally compelling. According to Ekwuazi (2003):

With the Structural Adjustment Program (S A P), things fell apart and the centre (the cine film) could no longer hold. For with lack luster performance of the Naira in the international marketplace, films, rawstock and the rest could no longer come into the country: Like a pack of cards, cinema theatre started tumbling into closure. A yawning vacuum was thus created – which the practitioners of the Yoruba travelling theatre, who had made transition via television to film, through the pioneering works of Ola Balogun and Bankole Bello, rushed to fill-with the reversal film. And so, through the reversal to the home video, was almost in a natural progression.

Nwabuzor (2001), agreeing with Ekwuazi, contends that: With the advent of time, monopoly, lack of adequate funds and high production costs combined to drive producers into the search for an alternative. The result was reliance on reversal film stock and video cassette format (2001).

WORLD-VIEW AND THEMES:

In the preface to the play 'Opera Wonyosi' (1977), Wole Soyinka's argues that art should "expose, reflect, indeed magnify the decadent, rotten underbelly of a society that has lost its directions, jettisoned all sense of values and is careering down a precipice as fast as the latest artificial boom can take it" cannot be more appropriate to our situation than in the present day Nigeria. The impression NH-VM leave the average consumer of these movies is that Nigeria is the way it is depicted in these NH-VM. The themes vary from power and politics, to communal clashes and conflicts amongst ethnic nationalities. From early missionary activities and the killing of twins in pre-colonial societies to military adventurism, prostitution, drug abuse and the dreaded HIV/AIDS scourge. From child labor, abuse and slavery to the Osu cast system. From widowhood practices, witchcraft, female genital mutilation, religious values system, cultism and occult activities, adventures,

Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

comedy love and romance, ritual murder for monetary gain, treachery in the extended family, infertility and the plight of the barren woman, child abuse, and prostitution, and to, of late, same sex relationships in films like “Last Wedding” [1 and 2] “The Preacher's Wife”, “Emotional Crack”.

The most dominant in NH-VM are religious and supernatural themes involving the clash of modern religion with African Traditional Religion which form the premise of movies such as *Christian Marriage* (2002) and *Pestilence* (2004). Responding to this dominance of ritual/occult themes, Segun Fajemisin is rather scolding. He writes that “The worst culprits of the latter generation are those hovering around supernatural themes. Most of these lack substance in the storylines while the thematic concerns are often shallow, ill-conceived and consequently, ill-treated. They merely catalogue series of uninteresting and wacky episodes of charm-fighting spiced with a generous recitation of gibberish incantations”. While this is true, a close look at the Igbo movies reveals that the expression of an aggressive commercial mentality, whose field of activity is Nigeria's cities-and not only the Igbo cities dominate. There is attention paid to sources of wealth and change as is the case in *Ikuku*² where the village is fully caught up in the processes of change. But having said this, even when commercial mentality forms the basis of the movies, they somewhat eventually resort to the ritualistic and occult.

So, it is quite correct to note that most NH-VM thrive on what is now a familiar terrain of the portrayal of ritualized practices. Such NH-VM feature grotesque depictions of spirits or human beings whose normal behavior has been disturbed. According to Okwori, “these rituals and grotesque characters are used to generate contexts in which wealth and riches transport the characters from a normal reality to a world of fantasy” (8), with the intention of denouncing this practice and/or belief as morally wrong. However, “the desired objective of the rituals - the putative 'reality' - is one that derives mainly from 'fabu” (8), a term to which I return to later in this paper but first let's explore the connection between wealth, riches and the occult in the movie living in *Bondage*.

Living in Bondage: The story takes place in Lagos. Andy, the main character, who has been drifting from job to job without entering the fast lane where he so desperately wants to be, gets entangled with a group of dubious Igbo business men. He is avaricious, gullible, and envious of them. He seeks to join their group, and is gradually let into their secret world. Finally they demand the real price of membership of him: he must present for sacrifice in a money ritual, his wife Merit, the allegorically named moral anchor of his drama of greed and selfishness. So far immersed in their world, he cannot opt out. He substitutes a prostitute for his wife, Merit, but when this fails they kill his wife in a bizarre ritual scene, and he immediately begins to prosper. We watch as Andy quickly accumulates the markers of his new social position: women, cars, more women, and more cars, a huge house, a cell phone, and

F. K. Omoregie

inter-national business deals while philandering in bars, frequenting hotels. But even as it records the lifestyle of these dubious and thieving elite, the story turns towards teaching a moral, as it must do. Andy's problems start when he tries to marry a new wife, Ego. The spirit of his first wife begins to haunt him as a nightmarish apparition. The news of his scandalous impending remarriage (before the traditional period of mourning for Merit has passed) gets to his village, where a family council is summoned and a delegation sent to demand an explanation; he angrily rejects them, but the apparition of his murdered wife upsets the marriage. In part 2, Ego has fled and is replaced by another woman, Chi, who in turn, unable to stand the continuing apparitions and Andy's psychological deterioration, steals a great deal of Andy's money but is poisoned by her best friend as she tries to travel abroad. Merit's ghost drives Andy completely mad as he is signing a big contract with representatives of an important company. Andy ends up living on the streets, raving and picking morsels from rubbish heaps in downtown Lagos. The rest is a story of rehabilitation. Tina, the prostitute Andy tried to sacrifice in place of his wife, discovers him; the previous experience has turned her into a born-again Christian. She rushes back to his home and returns with his mother, and then has him taken into the custody of her Pentecostal church, where exorcisms are performed and Andy regains his sanity after he confesses his sins. The story ends with him in church, stripped of all urban sophistication.

The threads of the story which are left unexplored are revealing. The movie touches upon many social issues that are immediately dropped, such as the options open to Andy as he initially faces the problems of unemployment and coping with the city and its attractions, or the episode in which his wife is fired because she will not sleep with her boss. How the killing of his wife actually produces the money-making technique is shrouded in mystery because the actual devices or strategies for becoming rich are never explicated in the movies. Merit's death does not lead to a criminal case, and the fortunes of the other members of the group of ritual killers are not investigated. When Andy goes mad he is not sent to a modern asylum for the mentally ill, but to a church.

Having confessed to the crime of murdering his wife, one might expect that the law would take its course and that Andy would be arrested and prosecuted for murder. But nothing happens. There is no retribution for Andy beyond the inconveniences of madness suffered earlier. There is no confiscation of property, no evidence of the earlier loss of property. Above all, the public is expected to overlook these oversights, to tolerate and condone the negative things portrayed in the movies. The message seems to be if Andy has found deliverance in the church then everything is okay, because "he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

Does the film living in Bondage prove that rituals do not pay? The answer is an emphatic NO. Firstly, whilst Andy is initially singled out for punishment via the loss of his high status earning position, the other cultists

Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

are unaffected. The source of their wealth and their cultic lifestyle are neither questioned nor investigated. Andy's punishment comes about not because he is in the cult, nor even because he sacrificed his wife, but because he broke a social convention of the wider, non-cultic world. What then was Andy's 'crime'? Andy's transgression is neither the murder of his wife nor the subsequent corruption and theft which enriched him materially, but his choice of taking another wife while the mandatory period of mourning for his late wife has not expired. If he had simply remained prodigious in his sexual exploitation and appetite, he could have continued to enjoy his wealth like his other colleagues in the cult. It is the clash between normal behavior (remarrying) and its inappropriate application (before the set time) in a non-cultic, normal world that precipitates punishment for Andy. Nevertheless, his punishment, though dramatic, is brief, not permanent. To crown it all, the film asserts that no matter the sins and no matter the extent of the crime, all retribution - even spiritual retribution - can be cleansed, 'washed away' and anyone can be restored to normality once the plunge into Pentecostalism is taken.

The reasons for resorting to traditional means in *Living in Bondage*, as in most NH-VM, need some clarification. According to Jonathan Haynes in *Nigerian Videos Films*, "We are then not really dealing with a polarized opposition where modernity and the urban scene are on one side, and tradition, magic, and the rural village are on the other, and serve as the answer to all problems. Andy's story does not intersect with modern legitimate institutions that would solve problems of mental health, missing persons, sexual harassment, or unemployment, because such institutions are not available to the mass popular audience, which has only family, traditional healers, and churches to fall back on when the city overwhelms them" (81). Very much a product of the city, Andy's story has recourse to his village of origin and its moral values at crucial moments, but the ultimate spiritual anchor proves to be the modern Pentecostal church. Such miracle churches and healing places are multiplying every day, as refuges for the spiritually broken urban masses.

Nigerian poet and writer Odia Ofeimun says in the documentary, *Nollywood Babylon*, "The poorer people get and the less hopeful they are, the more they wish for that extraordinary power that will take them out of doldrums, out of penury," Films perform that function, but so does the church, he says. Increasingly, the message of the huge growth of evangelical megachurches in Nigeria and the messages of Nollywood films are the same. Ofeimun goes on to describe a relationship between the two. That because socio-economic problems are still everywhere in Nigeria, and despite the promise of the church, religion is not actually improving conditions, he argues. Instead, like films, churches are just giving temporary relief. "They are therapeutic agencies, not religious or moral in intent," he says. Yet since such a large portion of the population is turning to churches, Ofeimun says filmmakers have to show stories of religious redemption, otherwise they "will be throwing away the source of their income."

IMAGES OF NIGERIA IN MOVIES

Motion picture is often used to directly or indirectly recreate past or present events and show what may happen in the future. Motion picture is a very powerful way to show the cultures, beliefs, achievements, hopes, problems and behaviors of people in a particular society. It is one of the ways the image of the citizens of a country is shown to the outside world and it could be positive or negative³. Orewere [2006. 206] agrees with Okaa when he notes that, “we are often reminded that film is a powerful medium of entertainment and the transmission of cultural values”.

Whereas the film industry in Nigeria gives Nigeria a good image different from the image non-Nigerians have of Nigeria, it also, unfortunately, often portray:

1. Nigerians as a carefree, dishonest, wicked, unintelligent and lazy people.
2. Nigerian women as people that marry only rich men.
3. Nigerians as a people who don't like change and are not innovative. For instance, when a particular movie is popular other movie production companies rush to produce movies with the same theme as is the case with Remmy Jes Nigeria Limited's romance movie, 'The Mistress'.
4. Nigerians as a people lacking in innovation and ideas because the same set of people write, direct and produce the same type of movies all the time.
5. Wealthy Nigerians as people who indulge in senseless display of wealth as we see in 'The Grandmasters' produced by Ossy Affason Industries Nigeria Limited.
6. Nigerian youths, especially university students, as people who are violent, and have an affinity for secret cults and prostitution. We see this, for instance, 'Executive Mess' produced by P Collins Productions Limited.

Apart from upholding cultural values and transmitting same to generations coming, the educative and entertaining values of NH-VM can never be in doubt, more especially the didactic motif. A passionate submission to uphold standard should therefore not be called to question⁴. The image of Nigeria portrayed by NH-VM does not necessarily deliver a full, accurate, and analytical description of social reality; rather it reflects the productive forces of the nation - both economic and cultural.

TRENDS

A starting point in discussing trends in NH-VM is the format. Having discovered the near impossibility of catching up with the internationally acceptable format of the 35mm utilized by the rest of the world, Nigerian film practitioners have stumbled on a novel format: the Direct-to-Video model. Reportedly, according to York Times, other local and foreign media, the model is the most prolific in the world⁵. It is routine to make them in two parts, as this doubles the profits while production costs remain basically the same. (This is true if the two parts are shot at the same time; if they are not, actors who felt underpaid for their work in the first part and who are indispensable to the second have the producer over a barrel). The basic format, then, is three to four hours long, rather than the international standard of 90 minutes for a feature film; generically the video films are closer to serial television forms than to the Aristotelian form of the feature film (as codified in Hollywood), with its emphasis on unity and one clear emotional trajectory. According to Haynes and Okome [1997: 26], "The videos, subplot-filled, sprawling, rhizomatic plot structures have affinities with oral narrative patterns and with indigenous conceptions of fate and destiny". The talky character and low-budget domestic settings of the vast majority of the films suggest the influence of soap operas, as the judges of the 1997 THEMA awards commented: "They generally lacked the grandeur of movies and at best remained within the genre of TV plays or soaps. Mastery of the use of imagery was lacking--too much reliance on dialogue rather than images!" ("From the College" 11).

We also have to acknowledge the fact that the growing appeal among African film audiences of NH-VM function more and more as a regional equivalent of what Hamid Naficy calls "unaccented cinema" (4).⁶ It has reached the point where any African film that does not borrow from the aesthetics and narrative format of NH-VM is likely to be perceived as "accented" or unusual by African and worldwide audiences. Also, filmmakers from other African countries seeking commercial success with a national or regional audience are now under pressure to tell the kinds of stories associated with Nigerian NH-VM. Thus, for example, many Ghanaian film directors, including Vera Mensah, Kofi Yirenkyi, and Dugbartey Nanor, among others, have expressed concerns about the growing influence of Nigerian video films on Ghanaian filmmaking.

The questions at this point are how was a thriving film industry able to emerge without government subsidies and in a country with relatively low per capita income facing such severe economic crises? How was a thriving film industry able to emerge in this location given the widespread availability of cheaper and supposedly higher quality films from Hollywood, India and

F. K. Omoregie

Hong Kong? [Pirated copies of films from Hollywood and Bollywood actually sell cheaper than the NVF]. And finally, to what extent does the productivity of this particular film industry represent a transnational cultural practice? I will start by responding to the last question.

NH-VM enjoy a transnational radius of distribution because they are made in a variety of languages, at the moment - English, Yoruba, and Hausa. Speakers of Hausa and Yoruba, for instance, extend well beyond the borders of Nigeria: Hausa is spoken in parts of Cameroun, Chad, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Cote D'ivoire, Niger, and Togo; Yoruba is spoken in parts of Benin, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Therefore, NH-VM in Yoruba and Hausa have become a popular source of entertainment for Yoruba and Hausa speakers within and beyond the borders of Nigeria (Barrot 12; Larkin 302). Let's not forget that Yoruba is spoken in Brazil, Cuba, and Jamaica. The English language films have an even more extensive geographic reach within Nigeria itself and across the continent. Several publications in the past few years have reported on the presence and popularity of NH-VM in southern Africa, in east and central Africa as well as along the West African coast. For instance, Ofe Motiki (2006) of Mmegi Newspaper (Botswana) writes that many people love NH-VM and find them irresistible mostly because of their familiar story lines. He says that NH-VM are popular all over Botswana, and that "although the whole cinematography of the movies is not of the best quality, a lot of people are in love with them" (1). He notes that the common incorrect use of adjectives, nouns and verbs are all ignored and laughed at as in most homes people remain glued to their television sets when these movies are showing. Some say that the reason they love them is that they can easily relate to them.

Increasingly, these films are also to be found wherever there is a large African immigrant community around the world. Uchenna Onuzulike in "Nollywood: The Influence of the Nigerian Movie Industry on African Culture" documents his interview [in May 2006] with Ms. Vida Causey, a Ghanaian native, who resides in the United States. He writes that, according to Causey, Nigerian movies are fun and interesting, and that Nigerian traditional attire is very influential. "I like the elegance of it and I can relate to Nigerian culture". She further states that "100 percent of my friends are dying for the latest Nigerian movies. You call them on the phone that is what they have been watching". And she adds:

I'm concerned about my husband [who is not African] watching those Nigerian movies because he thinks that everything in the movies is real. Since my husband is from the United States and does not speak my native language, he thinks that watching Nigerian movies will teach him and help him connect with African cultures (V. Causey, personal communication, May 27, 2006).

The transnational dimension also resonates in the very production of the movies. For instance, in order to enhance sales in specific African countries and across the continent as a whole, some Nigerian video film directors have either co-opted non-Nigerian actors, and/or shot parts of the film in other

Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

African countries, including Ghana, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, South Africa, and the Congo etc. Sometimes, depending on the setting and plot, the movies are shot outside Africa, with Britain and the United States being the most frequently used locations. For instance, the highly successful comedy, *Osuofia in London*, was shot in the UK and Nigeria. Nkem Owoh, the star of *Osuofia in London*, then employed the same technique in a new comedy with a West African regional focus, *Bonjour*, *Osuofia speaks French*, shot in Nigeria and Benin with dialogue in both French and English. Till date more than 400,000 copies of *Osuofia in London* (2004) has been sold and this does not include the residual right sales, making it the highest selling comedy from the Nigerian videofilm production line. The story in Tunde Kelani's *Àbẹnì* similarly unfolds in Benin and Nigeria, with actors from both countries speaking Yoruba and French. Shooting films in diverse African locations and using actors from other African countries appears to be a growing trend among successful directors of NH-VM.

The storytelling technique in NH-VM is also trend-setting. The storytelling technique employed in these NH-VM is based on the philosophy expounded by Ofeimun that "it is better to re-tell your own stories even incompetently and badly than for it to be mistold by others." There is strong belief that stories about Africans have been mistold severally by foreigners; that a people whose stories are not told become invisible and disempowered, but those whose stories are badly told, suffer a worse fate because they will continuously carry an identity that is not theirs, but by which they are forever judged. Confirming this, Guy Dixon states that, "Beyond the thunderbolts and cheap effects, the films are a product not only of Nigerian storytelling traditions, but also a much larger cultural, social and economic shift taking place in the country and beyond. They create a running dialogue and visuals for the millions upon millions struggling to make it in the teeming megalopolis of Lagos, if not other African cities and beyond"⁷. The attraction in these films being the ability, according to writer and film historian Onookome Okome, to "touch base with the local poor people who aspire to become rich. So Nollywood identifies with the aspirations of this community of sufferers. It speaks to them directly." These films also have "storylines and themes that an urban African can relate to," says Ben Addelman, who co-directed Nollywood *Babylon* with Samir Mallal. And as Lancelot [a Nigerian director] says, he comes from an oral storytelling tradition and wants to let [audiences] "imagine what the imagery is going to be that's associated with that dialogue - as opposed to a Western paradigm of filmmaking, which is to create that impression for you."

Another technique employed in the NH-VM is MIXED GENRES. Larkin (2002) observes that in NH-VM it is the "mixing of melodrama with horror and magic and the linkage of financial with sexual and spiritual corruption that makes the melodrama of Nigerian and Ghanaian video film distinctively African". The representations of magic and the supernatural in

F. K. Omoregie

NH-VM are, therefore, not viewed as escapist fantasies but are believed by audiences to be part of the everyday world. The films draw on this existing belief and give it dramatic, narrative form by pulling together ideas of cosmopolitanism, westernization, wealth and magic that has made these and other Nigerian films strikingly successful.⁸ The same can be said of Ghanaian movies.

No discussion of trends in NH-VM will be complete without a look at *fabu*⁹. The videos are produced on several distinct bases, and have a variety of forms, styles, and themes, as well as languages of expression that reflect “the productive forces of the nation, both economic and cultural” (Haynes and Okome 1997: 21). This reflection of the economic and cultural productive forces is guided by beliefs - and 'superstition' - which thrive on the elaborate and intricate spinning of 'fabu'. According to F. Harding (2001) 'Fabu' is the word given to the stories circulating by word of mouth and sourced in a range of perceived events reconstructed to form a 'good yam'. These are then taken up and passed on only to become 'fact(ion)' in public media sources such as newspapers, television and radio news and features before being re-articulated as fiction. 'Fabu', as an elusive but ever-present genre of communication, record and offer a demotic 'explanation' of the mysteries of life. 'Fabu' focus on one mystery in particular: the changes in the lives of individuals which take them from poverty to wealth by 'unseen' methods i.e. not through openly trading or farming for example or by good husbandry, but by means of exchanges and dealings invisible to the ordinary person¹⁰.

According to Okwori, an elaborate usage and portrayal of 'fabu' is at the narrative heart of the home-video culture in Nigeria. Most of the stories depicted derive not from personal or lived experiences but from hearsay or rumors. John Mbiti (1969: 75) agrees with this noting that the belief in the efficacy of rituals and an accompanying 'superstition' has always been part of the indigenous people's attempt to come to terms with incomprehensible phenomena. As a result Nigeria (and every other society that watches the videos) has become a 'dramatized society', because the people's imagination and interest, their fears and tribulations occasioned by city life are captured by these movies. This has been made possible because the movies, writes Okwori, “thrive on rendering representations of 'fabu', and the economic fantasies putatively achieved via predominantly sacrificial ritual practices and conveyed through grotesque supernatural images or characters” (11).

INFLUENCE ON AFRICANS IN AFRICA

There is no denying the fact that the themes of NH-VM are for its regional audiences more topical and locally relevant than the themes of Hollywood or even Indian cinema. Whatever NH-VM may lack in technical quality, acting, and narrative style, they make up for in a high degree of localized immediacy. Hollywood may dazzle by its special effects, but it is NH-VM that dramatizes the challenges which appear most pressing to many urban African audiences, whether these relate to the pressures emanating from the extended family, the relevance of new and older forms of spirituality, or the struggle to escape poverty.¹¹

The appeal of NH-VM for national and regional audiences can also be traced in part to the determination of the financial backers and directors of NH-VM to remain responsive to the demands of local audiences. The fact that a successful film narrative quickly spawns imitations and spin offs is another indication of this responsiveness to local audiences on the part of directors and producers. In other words, and despite the fact that many NH-VM achieve circulation on a transnational scale, film directors and producers impelled both by professional and commercial considerations, work with national audiences in mind and create narratives crafted to respond first and foremost to the perceived interests and shifts in orientation of national publics.

Commenting on Nollywood's influence on African culture on BBC Focus on Africa magazine, Muchinba (2004) notes: Nollywood films are packed with simple but dramatic storylines "Ah, you want to kill me now!" - The woman yanks her hair wildly, her facial expression alive and contorted dramatically. "No, not me, not today!" Her body shudders and in seconds, she is transformed into a vicious sleek mongrel, emitting blood-curdling growls (p.12).

She goes on to say that this is a scene from a typical Nigerian movie - and in many sub-Saharan countries, their popularity is growing tremendously, leaving fans burning with a longing for more. Muchinba adds that the stories tend to be rather plain although very dramatic and full with emotions: the women wail and are covetous money lovers; the men are just as emotional and very revengeful:

Throw in a gibbering bone-rattling juju man and Bible-waving preacher and what you have is a brew of conflict, revenge, trials and tribulations - the likes of which are keeping most Zambians, especially in the capital city, Lusaka, glued to TV screens for hours on end (p.12).

Oliver Mbamara (2000), a native of Nigeria and an Administrative Law Judge with the State of New York, writes that a group of Nigeria actors and filmmakers including Fred Amata, Olu Jacobs, Genevieve Nnaji, and Omotola Jolade Ekeinde, visited Sierra Leone and were hosted by the President, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and the people of the country. It was the

country's way of showing appreciation for the role the Nigerian movie industry has played in helping the Sierra Leoneans heal from the scars of the civil war they went through in the past several years. Nigerian filmmakers are now extending their activities to Sierra Leone and other African countries in order to help build the film industry in any of these countries. Mbamara states: "Reports have it that the Nigerian film industry is the second highest revenue earner in Nigeria today" (3).

RECOMMENDATIONS/CONCLUSION

There is need to look at, by way of conclusion, some things that need improving or working on, or incorporating in future NH-VM. In "Yoruba pioneered films in Nigeria"¹² Prince Kosoko says "When you talk of Nigerian movies making waves outside the country, it is not just movies done in English. You need to go out and see Yoruba in the Diaspora to understand what I am saying. When you talk of Yoruba movies, it doesn't necessarily mean movies done in Yoruba language¹³. It could be done in English language, but with the rich tradition of the Yoruba people. For example, we have a special way of christening babies. We have our own way of marriage. All these we need to project to the world. We don't know how long this would go in helping the scientific development of the world." This may not help with "scientific development of the world" but it certainly will help in explaining the cultures of Nigeria to those who observe them from without, and definitely will be a welcome diversion from the "popular" but stereotypical themes that persist now.

The portrayal of women needs a rethink. In most NH-VM, women are negatively stereotyped as gold-diggers, troublesome, yet powerless, and helpless victims of men and society. For example, the Hausa movie *Kulba Na Barna* implies that girls should not be sent to secondary school but married off first. Similarly, *Wasila* and *Alhaki* portray women as treacherous and untrustworthy. In *Deadly Affair I and II*, a couple violates an incest taboo, the most severe sanctions are those leveled against the woman.

However, one must acknowledge that NH-VM is a medium with dual possibilities. As such, there are several films, such as *Beauty for Ashes*, that deal with the despicable treatment of women, especially widows in the name of culture.¹⁴ In essence, used properly and without distortions to please, NH-VM have the potential to export (out of Nigeria and Africa) some important public messages in popular styles to debunk several popular myths and stereotypes.

Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

This paper has argued that Nollywood has a great influence over African culture, and that such influence is reinforced by a massive consumption of Nigerian movies by Africans (and non-Africans) living in and outside of Africa. It has also argued that because many NH-VM are filled with religious overtones many consumers of NH-VM perceive Nigerians not only as juju-loving people, but also a people with many of the other negative attributes portrayed in these NH-VM. Using the SCT, it is very easy to see why the rest of the world believes that Nigerians are what are depicted in Nigerian movies. SCT explains that meanings, emotions, values, and the motives for action are in the rhetoric that is co-created by people trying to make sense out of a common experience. For instance, when university students talk about their lecturer, a rhetorical fantasy might chain out about the lecturer that will bring him/her into dramatic life acting in a classroom scene, often in humorous ways. For instance, in high school we christened one of our (British) teachers “39 Steps” after the Scot Richard Hannay in John Buchan’s novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, not only because of the way he walked, but also for his (to us then) “queer” English ways. For any Nigerian, therefore, it is not uncommon for consumers of NH-VM to assume all Nigerians are evil or crooked or lapse into the mannerisms of the Nigerians they see in the NH-VM when they relate to him/her. Non-Nigerians think that Nigerian movies are realistic and they assume that Nigerian movies depict what all of Nigeria really is like.

In most instances, it is very hard to argue against this – the solace usually being that NH-VM as a representation of Nigerian culture can have such great influence on an entire population of Africans due to similar cultural practices. SCT explains that such fantasy-chaining by people who watch NH-VM produces a rhetorical vision.¹⁵ Just as we as students co-create dramas of a ‘typical’ English man about our British High school teacher, so, too, do consumers of NH-VM. SCT argues that people inherently co-create their own symbolic reality (in the Lacanian sense) into a stable rhetorical form. These stable forms about Nigerians (that evolve through watching NH-VM and human talk), lead to the formation of rhetorical visions.

This paper has also discussed the necessity that occasioned the use, by Nigerian film producers of the Direct-to-Video model, the fact that NH-VM have become “unaccented cinema” yardstick for movies in Africa, the storytelling techniques that affords the film producers a forum for telling their story appropriately, the transnational appeal of these movies, and the consequent influence on the consumers of these movies. Finally, there is no denying the fact that these Nigerian Home-Video movies are helping to stitch the world together by providing critical important reference points. There is also no denying the fact that, given time, the vigorous and affirmative blend of production techniques and thematic concerns that are currently visible can be improved upon to supplement a wider platform or ideological base suitable for export out of Africa.

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Out of Africa: Trends and Themes of Nigerian Home Videos

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