

**Nigerian filmmakers and their construction of a political past
(1967-1998)**

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**Nigerian Filmmakers and their Construction of a Political
Past (1967-1998)**

AÑULIKA AGINA

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Conducting this research has put me in the debt of many, which I fear I may not adequately make good. As the Igbo of Nigeria say, she who is without wealth must have words of praise. Here, I turn my indebtedness to words of praise.

I thank my funders, the School of Media and Communication SMC, Pan-Atlantic University (formerly Pan-African), under the leadership of Emevwo Biakolo, who granted the financial resources to begin and complete my doctoral studies at the University of Westminster.

My first film teacher, Hyginus Ekwuazi, deserves a special thank you for his commitment to this discipline, and for the enthusiasm with which he transmits knowledge. Colleagues at SMC have also been supportive during the difficult years of this task. I thank Mike Okolo, Ike Obiaya, Ken Esere, James Tsaaio, Richard Ikiebe, Angel Alilonu and several other colleagues and friends with whom I shared aspects of my work in friendly conversations. Jonathan Haynes, Françoise Ugochukwu, Moradewun Adejunmobi, Adeyinka Lanahun, Ola Ogunyemi, Regina Kessy and Onookome Okome did provide some direction regarding this study at its various stages. For their time and support, I can only offer more praises to offset my debt.

Lindiwe Dovey was helpful at the onset, with useful suggestions that guided me, and so were colleagues at Westminster. How can I forget to thank Fauzia Ahmed, Anthony McNicholas, Ranita Chatterjee and Roza Tsagarousianou for helping me in various not-too-small ways? There were some whose comments and questions at conferences (particularly ASAUK 2012 & 2014) helped shape my thoughts, and I owe them a ton of gratitude as well, even though their identities elude me now.

I cannot thank my families enough: wonderful parents, extraordinary siblings and extended family members, too many to mention, but no less supportive. Their dedication has as yet been unmatched. Lola and family, Pilar and Elena helped me a lot when I first arrived London. Maria Paz and her shifting family lavished their unalloyed support, providing the space, time, food and warmth that tided me over.

Those who shared ideas on the film industry with me deserve praises as well. How could I have conducted the interviews without the leads they offered? Worthy of

mention are Shaibu Husseini, who, I am sure got very tired of my numerous requests; Oge Ekeanyanwu and Amara Iwuala. Those academics, filmmakers and journalists who turned down my requests also need to be thanked because they forced me to think of alternatives.

Special thanks go to my supervisors, Winston Mano and Jane Thorburn. I am grateful for all the resources they assisted me with, particularly their time and Winston's books. Even if I had the means of paying the debt owed the aforementioned, I could not possibly pay this one without a hefty loan.

I should add that whatever blemishes found in this thesis are solely mine.

DECLARATION

I declare that the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

Añulika Agina

4 May 2015

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABN	Association for Better Nigeria
AMP	Association of Movie Producers
BOI	Bank of Industry
CDC	Constitution Drafting Committee
CFU	Colonial Film Unit
CFU	Crown Film Unit
CONGA	Coalition of Nollywood Guilds and Associations
CSO	Chief Security Officer
FEDECO	Federal Electoral Commission
FESTAC	Festival of Arts and Culture
FMG	Federal Military Government
GNPP	Great Nigeria Peoples Party
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MAMSER	Mass Mobilization for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery
MOPICON	Motion Picture Practitioners Council of Nigeria
NA	Nigerian Army
NADECO	National Democratic Coalition
NCAC	National Council for Arts and Culture
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NEXIM	Nigerian Export Import Bank
NFC	Nigerian Film Corporation
NFVCB	National Film and Video Censors Board
NLC	Nigerian Labour Congress
NNPC	Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
NPF	Nigeria Police Force
NPN	National Party of Nigeria
NPP	Nigerian Peoples Party
NRC	National Republican Convention
NTA	Nigerian Television Authority
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Countries
OMPADEC	Oil Minerals Producing and Development Commission

OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PRP	Peoples Redemption Party
SDP	Social Democratic Party
SSS	State Security Service
UPN	Unity Party of Nigeria
WAI	War Against Indiscipline
YEAA	Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha

TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
Acknowledgements	1
Declaration	3
List of Abbreviations	4
Abstract	10
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Setting Out the Agenda	11
1.2 Objectives of the Study	14
1.3 Research Questions	14
1.4 Originality and Justification for the Study	15
1.5 Theoretical Framework	17
1.6 Methodological Approach	20
1.7 Developing an Appropriate Research Design	22
1.8 Structure of the Thesis	26
 CHAPTER 2: CONTEXTUAL REVIEW OF 1967-1998 NIGERIA	
2.1 Introduction	27
2.2 Brief Introduction to the Period before 1967 (events that led to 1967)	27
2.3 Political Situation in Nigeria 1967-1976	30
2.4 Significant Events of 1977-1986	33
2.5 Socio-political Context of 1987-1998	35
2.6 Key Political Factors during the Period as Constructed in the Films	38
 CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW	
3.1 Representing History and the Past in Film	40
3.2 History and the Past: Brief Distinctions	41
3.3 The Past on Screen: An Introduction	45
3.4 African Past on Film	48
3.5 Indigenous Filmmaking Prior to 1992: Nigerians Filming the Past	53
3.6 Nollywood 1992-	55
3.7 Nollywood and History?	57

3.8	On Popular Arts in Africa	62
3.9	Popular Arts in Nigeria	68

CHAPTER 4: HISTORY OF POLITICAL FILMMAKING IN NIGERIA

4.1	Introduction	79
4.2	Cultural Production in Nigeria	80
4.3	The Early Political Films	85
4.4	Motivation of Early Filmmakers	88
4.5	Narrative Content of Early Political Films	90
4.6	Cultural Ideology in the Early Films	91
4.7	Reception of the Films	92
4.8	Alternative Constructions of the Political Past: Cultural Epics	94

CHAPTER 5: REPRESENTING THE PAST:MOTIVATORS AND DE-MOTIVATORS

5.1	Introduction	98
5.2	Background Information on Individual Filmmakers	101
5.2.1	Tunde Kelani	101
5.2.2	Kingsley Ogoro	102
5.2.3	Sam Onwuka	103
5.2.4	Izu Ojukwu	105
5.2.5	Henry Legemah	106
5.2.6	Fred Amata	108
5.2.7	Kalu Anya	110
5.3	Motivation	112
5.3.1	Economic Factors	112
5.3.2	Social Factors – Audience Preferences	116
5.3.3	Social Factors - Nollywood as Political Endorsers	120
5.3.4	Social Factors - Contesting Dominant Power	125
5.4	Demotivation	128
5.4.1	Censorship	128
5.4.2	Piracy	134

CHAPTER 6: NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN CONSTRUCTING THE PAST

6.1	Introduction	137
6.2	Discussions of Individual Films	140
6.3	<i>Anini</i> : Character and Genre	141
6.3.1	Setting and Plot	144
6.4	<i>Battle of Love</i> and <i>Across the Niger</i> : Character and Genre	150
6.4.1	Setting and Plot	152
6.5	<i>Oil Village</i> : Character and Genre	155
6.5.1	Setting and Plot	157
6.6	<i>Stubborn Grasshopper</i> : Character and Genre	160
6.6.1	Setting and Plot	163
6.7	<i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i> : Character and Genre	165
6.7.1	Setting and Plot	166

CHAPTER 7: IDEOLOGICAL READINGS OF THE FILMS

7.1	Introduction	169
7.2	Films 1-3: <i>Battle of Love</i> , <i>Across the Niger</i> and <i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>	172
7.2.1	Ethnicity, War and the Quest for National Unity	172
7.2.2	Intra-ethnic Conflict	177
7.3	Film 4: <i>Anini</i>	179
7.3.1	Ideological Positions in <i>Anini</i> : The Environment vs. the Individual	179
7.3.2	The Politics of Policing Crime in a Post-colonial State	181
7.3.3	Probing the Past against Present Realities	185
7.4	Film 5: <i>Oil Village</i>	187
7.4.1	Filming the Saro-Wiwa Story: A tip of the Iceberg	187
7.4.2	The Filmmaker's Lament of Delta Spills, Inequality and Injustice	190
7.4.3	Explaining Violence and Militancy in the Delta	191
7.5	Film 6: <i>Stubborn Grasshopper</i>	193
7.5.1	The Metaphor of the Grasshopper & 'Wahala' in Onwuka's Artistic Vision	193
7.5.2	Babangida, Abacha and the Rhetoric of Democracy in <i>Stubborn Grasshopper</i>	194
7.5.3	<i>Stubborn Grasshopper</i> : Political Violence, Corruption and the Military	196
7.6	In Conversation with One Another	199

CHAPTER 8: JOURNALISTS' RECEPTION OF FILMS

8.1	Introduction	205
8.2	Journalists as Unique Audiences	208
8.3	What 'History'?	210
8.4	"Na wetin people wan see"	217
8.5	The Future of Nollywood	220

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1	Wrapping Up	226
9.2	Key Findings of the Research and Original Contribution to Knowledge	228
9.3	Suggestions for Further Studies	232

Select Filmography	233
--------------------	-----

Bibliography	236
--------------	-----

Appendices	255
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Appendix A: Filmmakers' Interview Questions	255
---	-----

Appendix B: Journalists' Interview Questions	258
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Appendix C: List of Interviewees	261
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Abstract

Once criticised as ‘seemingly’ oblivious of the political and historical concerns of the state (Osofisan, 2007; Adesokan, 2009b; Alamu, 2010; Okome, 2010; Mistry & Ellapen, 2013), some southern Nigerian filmmakers have begun reversing such critical narratives through negotiated images of the country’s political history. In spite of that, academic attention to such videos remains on the margins of textual or isolated audience analyses. This research questions the motivations, narrative techniques, underlying ideologies and reception of video films that construct Nigeria’s political past between 1967 and 1998, two significant moments in the country’s postcolonial history. This is achieved through contextual and post-structuralist readings of the films as popular art as well as semi-structured interviews of filmmakers and film journalists. The study found that historicizing an ethnically-diverse postcolonial state such as Nigeria through the agency of film is fraught with potential dangers, most of which cannot be mitigated by the filmmakers. Each stage of the production/consumption process is compounded by societal factors including filmmaker’s background, finance, audience and censorship. Also evident from the findings is that popular Nigerian videos sustain and subvert the dominant narratives on popular arts to gain economic advantage. Whereas some filmmakers endorse politicians’ practices, others subvert authoritarian regimes through metaphoric filmic codes (negotiated images) intelligible to audiences and deployed by the producers in order to circumvent censorship. Interrogating film journalists in addition to filmmakers served as an antidote to film producers’ self-reporting. By examining the reception of films through the lens of journalists, this study makes no generalisable claims on audiences, but delivers an original methodological approach to understanding films made in the past, about the past. Thus, the study proposes opening up the methodological approaches to Nollywood to accommodate film texts, producers and audiences rather than lone textual analyses that silence creators and consumers.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Setting out the Agenda

This chapter describes the rationale, contextual, theoretical and design framework that guided the research. It attends to the objectives, questions and the development of the research method particularly that related to the fourth research question. As discussed below and in subsequent chapters, the subject of constructing a political past in Nigeria is seldom approached by filmmakers and consequently by scholars. The research therefore provides plausible reasons for electing or ignoring historical and political filmic representations.

Since the 1990s, the growth of the southern Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) has attracted vibrant debates and scholarship on the popular video culture in English-speaking West Africa. One of such debates is the apolitical nature of the video narratives (Haynes, 2006; Adesokan, 2009b; Okome, 2010; Mistry & Ellapen, 2013), which sets them in sharp contrast to the 1970s/80s films, and to the wider context of African cinema. In the Nigerian film literature of the period, Hyginus Ekwuazi (1991) and Jonathan Haynes (1995) hinted at the political critiques of Wole Soyinka (*Kongi's Harvest*, 1970) and the overt political messages in several of Eddie Ugbomah's celluloid films made before 1990. But the culture of political commentary in and through films was broken in the 1990s due to military dictatorship (Haynes, 2006). While describing the filmmakers as "sticking to known subjects and formulae, which does not include political matters" (2006: 513), Haynes traced the trajectory that a selection of new politically informed films followed. The new path, Haynes noted, was the result of the end of Nigeria's military rule, which meant that artistic repression was arguably a thing of the past. This qualitative study contributes to the literature on Nigerian films as political critiques by identifying few but specific examples of the filmmaker's 'voice' in re-telling 'actual' events of Nigeria's political history from 1967 to 1998. As discussed below, representation, the system by which meaning is constructed is important in understanding how images and sounds symbolise reality. And it is the politics of representation with specific reference to history that is the focus of this research.

Video film scholars have often adopted a holistic or selective approach in espousing the operations and productions of the Nigerian film industry with a few examinations of political critiques and representation of history within film. Indeed, only Haynes (1999, 2003, 2006), Garritano (2000), Okoye (2007a), Adesokan (2009b), and Ugochukwu (2014) are the most prominent examples of research effort on filmmakers' foray into political representations of the past. These forerunners have left out some of the video films that depict critical landmarks in Nigeria's political history namely the 1967-70 Civil War and the end of violent military rule with the death of General Sani Abacha in 1998, hence the choice of the temporal boundaries. Also absent in existing literature are the motivations and reception of such political commentaries as evidenced by Haynes' (2006) assertion that "the effects of the video films on their audiences and the motivations of their makers are effectively unknowable" (p. 530). By these absences, the debate on Nigerian film and political constructions is incomplete and requires updating, a task of the present study.

This qualitative study seeks specifically to establish the motivation, narrative techniques, ideologies and reception of Nigerian video films engaging with a national and political past (1967-1998). It analyzes the facets of representation in (semi) indigenous films: *Battle of Love* (2001), *Across the Niger* (2004), *Oil Village* (2001), *Anini* (2005), *Stubborn Grasshopper 1&2* (2001), and *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013). A close examination of these films which portray the filmmakers' views of the Nigerian Civil War in *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, the Ken Saro-Wiwa story in *Oil Village*, Lawrence Anini's robbery escapade in *Anini*, General Abacha's ascent to power and exit thereof in *Stubborn Grasshopper*, and the Nigerian-British portrayal of the Nigerian Civil War in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the primary concern of this research. The rationale for selecting narratives of national political events and public figures from Nigeria's Civil War to the end of oppressive military rule owes to the fact that they have been documented in other media and traditional history texts (Obi, 1994; Haynes, 2006; Falola & Heaton, 2008), and can be readily referenced. But they have been notoriously absent from popular video films. The reasons for this absence are well documented in the fifth chapter below.

To be clear, the scope of this study encompasses English-language video films depicting postcolonial Nigerian government's actions, and reactions traceable to

successive military regimes (1967 onwards) as well as activities performed by institutions set up by the country's successive governments such as the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) or the Nigerian Army (NA). Also within this study's purview are films that deal with the explicit and oblique treatment and references to the business of governance, state security and national integration. This includes, for instance, the Federal Military Government's (FMG) decision to go to war with a secessionist southeastern group of Nigeria in 1967 (the details of which are provided in chapter two), the military directives and policies of the Heads of State between 1967 and 1998 (also in the second chapter), especially as portrayed in the films. Of course, the selective approaches of filmmakers reveal that some cases of governance are privileged, leaving out of the filmic gaze such figures as General Obasanjo, Shehu Yar'Adua, Shehu Shagari and Muhammed Buhari, who were at the helm of affairs from 1975-1985. Coincidentally, the period in question is dominated by military regimes with six out of eight Heads of State rising to political power through coup d'états. The filmmakers' conception of the political past reflects "a concern with good governance and ethical conduct in civil matters that cuts across ethnic and other cultural boundaries" (Adesokan 2009b: 601).

The study focuses on films made in the southern part of Nigeria. Ostensibly absent from the research design are Hausa films. Two reasons are responsible for this. First, the civil unrest in northern Nigeria in recent years caused by Muslim fundamentalists makes travel and movement within the region imprudent. Efforts to secure assistance from officials at the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) without travelling to the northern city of Jos were futile. Second, the filmmaking practice of southerners differs from that of the northerners who are heavily influenced by Indian melodramatic films (Larkin, 2008). Therefore, even though the study is aware of the increasing importance of political films from other parts of the country, its main focus is on the films from the south western part of Nigeria (Lagos).

The southern Nigerian films are fascinating in how they combine official and unofficial versions of the political past. They are set between 2001 and 2013, and adopt a contemporariness that, arguably challenges the notion of historical films. While they may not fit the descriptions of western historical films as theorized by Robert Rosenstone (1995), they do depict recognizable and verifiable periods and people,

whose footprints remain in the political arena of contemporary Nigeria. This research will analyse the representation of ‘history’ in such Nigerian films.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The present study engages with the debate and representation of history – and their implications for social transformation – as produced in postcolonial Nigerian films in a retrospective manner. The rewritten past can best be understood in terms of motivations, attitudes, feelings and reactions uttered by the protagonists themselves (Schwandt, 2000), hence the choice of qualitative research methods further explained below.

The immediate objectives of this research are as follows:

1. to investigate the motivation of filmmakers’ construction of 1967-1998 Nigeria in their video films;
2. to identify and evaluate the narrative techniques evident in select video-films’ historical representations;
3. to critically examine the ideology promoted or subverted in the video films representing the past;
4. to evaluate film journalists’ reception of fictionalized narratives of historically significant events and people

The objectives stated above are pertinent to the discussions of video films and historical constructions and they directly informed the formulation of the research questions below.

1.3 Research Questions

In this research, I am interested in the question: why and how have Nigerian filmmakers represented the country’s key historical and political moments? The research question, with its various implications for social change, is sub-divided as follows:

- 1) What factors have motivated Nigerian filmmakers in representing national events from 1967-1998, and why?
- 2) What narrative techniques have Nigerian filmmakers used to reconstruct the historical processes under study?
- 3) In what ways do the films promote or subvert the dominant ideology of the historical period they represent?
- 4) What reception do film journalists give to the fictionalized narratives of historically significant events and people?

1.4 Originality and Justification for the Study

The constructions of the past on film have been the subject of academic debate for several decades now. Robert Rosenstone and Robert Brent Toplin amongst others have devoted their academic endeavours to justifying historical films as legitimate ways of doing history. Although this project is not designed to tow the lines of the two historians mentioned above, their works have laid the foundation for reflecting, even if mildly, on the nature and properties of representing the past on screen. In Africa, the subject is gaining grounds at least within the last two and a half decades. Written from historians' perspectives, the aptly titled *African History on Screen* (2007) provides relevant information, based on Rosenstone's (2006) ground-laying work, on the extent of historical depictions of Africa and its people with no mention of Nigerian history and Nigerian film. The contributors to the volume focused on the celluloid filmmaking practice of Francophone Africa and on films made by Europeans on African subjects. In the light of this omission, Nollywood's attempt at representing the past ought to be brought to the fore, and will be achieved through the prism of popular cinema.

Nichols (2001) and Shafik (2007) have provided justification for the study of popular cinema. Nichols made a distinction between the documentary (social representation films) and the feature film (fictionalized portrayals of wishes, dreams, nightmares and dreads). The latter he claimed, "gives a sense of what we wish, or fear, reality itself might be or become" (Nichols, 2001: 1) as opposed to what it already is. Similarly, Shafik observed:

No wonder popular cinema, contrary to the individualist and sophisticated art house film, is characterized by its strong appeal to the masses, due to ...its recurrent dramatic patterns, ritualized performances and some almost archetypal, yet contradictory stereotypes. Being the products of its producers' and consumers' inner reality...it offers seemingly trivial, but also blatant and dismissive representations that seem constantly to oscillate between realist referentiality and symbolical, metaphorical, and allegorical codings...(2007: 2)

Both authors made a case for researching the portrayal of reality in feature films and popular cinema, not necessarily the representation of the past. But Shafik's point makes reference to the various ways by which reality can be represented or mediated as in the case of the filmmaker. The important consideration is that the seemingly trivial nature of popular cinema has produced a tendency to disregard it, but this study takes up Nichols', Shafik's and other scholars' calls to engage with popular cinema.

As highlighted in the opening statements, there have been two approaches to the study of Nollywood. First, scholars such as Haynes and Okome (2000) Haynes (2000, 2007c), Barrot (2008), Hugo (2009) have presented holistic examinations of the video-film industry, analyzing the themes, geography, setting, iconography, criticisms and even the socio-political contexts of production. This is what is referred to as holistic in the sense that such scholars' intellectual 'camera' pans the entire spectrum of the emerging industry. Second, others including Adejunmobi (2002), Akpabio (2007), Ayakaroma (2007), Okome (2007), Wendl (2007), Esan (2008), Chowdhury et al (2008), Alamu (2010), Lobato (2010) and Sereda (2010) have been selective in their analyses of Nollywood, paying more attention to one of genres, iconography, audiences, economics or creative technology rather than bits of everything in one essay like the first group. However, little attention has been directed at examining and analyzing the political past as represented in Nollywood. It is this gap that the present study seeks to fill bearing in mind that African historical films reflect the spirit with which filmmakers of early African cinema sought to reconnect with the past, and their implications for the present.

The identified gap in academic literature is partly the result of Nigerian filmmakers' preference for melodramatic genre, which largely reflects the daily concerns and aspirations of the people. Although Nigerian filmmakers have reflected on politics (*Death of a Black President*, 1983), slave trade (*Sitanda*, 2007), political

corruption (*Arugba* 2008), the Niger Delta crises (*Liquid Black Gold*, 2008) for instance, few have dealt with specific national and historical moments from 1967-1998. Even so, those few have yet to be analyzed and documented in any scholarly fashion, hence the scant literature on films representing the past.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

There are many theoretical persuasions that can be brought in to guide the study of Nigerian filmmakers and how they re-enact their national political past? What is crucial though is that African and specifically, Nigerian films ought to be examined on their own terms rather than imposing western film theories or drawing parallels and comparisons with Hollywood (Ukadike, 2014; Petty, 2012; Haynes, 2000; Schmidt, 1997). That is why the study of Nigerian video films has been fittingly subsumed in studies of African popular arts drawing from Karin Barber's (1987, 1997a, 2014) essays on the subject, and extended by several scholars including but not limited to Haynes (2000), Haynes and Okome (2000) and Abah (2009). The reflections on African popular arts as sites of power, acceptance, resistance and regulation will be revisited in the course of this work. According to Barber (1987), "if we are now trying to see history and politics from the other side of the African social tapestry, popular art forms are vital to this endeavour" (pp. 3-4). This "other side" is that occupied by the majority of Africans, who have neither access nor control of the official channels of public communication.

The conceptual model of this research is based on the need to interrogate the generative and interpretative properties of popular video films that represent history. By generative is meant the dynamics and politics of representing the past on video with the possibilities inherent in the medium, whereas the interpretative properties are the tools that make them capable of signifying (Hall, 2013). This suggests the relationship between producers and consumers of video films (popular arts), which according to Barber (2014) emerges from a "common repertoire" (p. xx) of knowledge. These works of art are "created in order to be commented upon, interpreted and re-created" (p. xxi). The relationship between producers and consumers, between generation and interpretation is neither straightforward nor static. It is negotiated through material signs

and objects, and inflected by each one's 'frameworks of knowledge' (Hall 2001, 2013). One relies on the other, yet each is distinct. These relatively new artistic expressions of political history, which Atton (2002) refers to as 'alternative media', bear special traits that make them capable of expressing (signifying) the conflicts and assumptions inherent in depicting a political past. Barber's (1987) reference to sub-texts and imagery in popular arts reinforces the special traits employed by their producers to communicate in ways that the audience understands.

In examining the generative properties of historical representation, I examine first the motivation and second the techniques of narration. The first enables the agency of the cultural producer, which is much neglected, subtly implied or treated in isolation in academic discourse, to emerge strongly. The second permits an interpretation that fuses with ideological critique and consumers' readings of the films. This allows the researcher to address the questions of motivation, narratives, ideology and reception in an original way. It eschews the textual analyses that focus on products or works in the way that Barber (1987) does because of its marginal attention to the people who produce and consume such products. The latter, she examines elsewhere, but there is a range of benefits derivable from the combination of texts, filmmakers and audiences, which this study engages in.

Recent studies on political history in film such as Hesling (2001) and Ebbrecht (2007) uncover the narrative structure of historical films. They present interesting comparisons of German, American and British techniques in the depictions of historical figures, locations and events. On the one hand, Hesling asserted that films interrogate the past with their own questions and strategies, which has direct implications for the answers and explanations that such films produce. On the other hand, Ebbrecht pointed out that in Germany, television historical documentaries were fusing properties of documentaries with feature films to make them more accessible to popular taste and imagination. This idea has been extended to other parts of the world including Africa, and particularly in the work of Francoise Pfaff. From inception, Franco-phone African filmmakers have been involved in enacting historical events on film. Pfaff (1992) identified a number of films which represent history from an African perspective as opposed to the European and American examples discussed by Hesling. Cham (2004) also noted that "historicizing African [...] events has emerged a prominent trait of

African film culture” (p.49). Pfaff’s (2004) later work draws examples from African films such as *Emitai* (1971), *Ceddo* (1976), *Sarraounia* (1986), *Heritage...Africa* (1987) and *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988).

For the purposes of this study, insights from post-colonial theory will be merged with theories of African popular arts to provide the basis of discussion. In discussing theories of African film, Murphy (2000) has insightfully questioned various theories of African cinema beginning with issues of authenticity, orality, cultural materialism and ending in the domains of postcolonial theory. He advocates the position of the latter as providing the most effective framework for appreciating African film given the similar colonial histories of African states and the various ideological standpoints of African cineastes. However, postcolonial theory alone cannot provide a determinate foundation for discussing Nigerian video films although it will certainly shed light on the social and political contexts of video-film production in Britain’s former colony.

Murphy’s (2000) case for the usefulness of postcolonial theory in unpacking the commonalities existent in African arts and culture recognises the differences inherent in various African states and cultures. He observes that “post-colonialism explores links between African cultures in the light of their shared history of colonial exploitation and their rebellion against this oppression (without assuming that this shared experience is identical in every African state)” (p.248). Nigerian filmmakers were not motivated by a decolonization agenda (which postcolonial theories largely examine) as were their counterparts in the Francophone African countries. What perhaps they sought to resist through their political films is their own government’s repression, corruption and lack of accountability. Murphy’s position is in harmony with Bhabha’s (1994) view, which states that “postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order” (p. 171). These positions require further comments on postcolonialism, which will be reflected on in subsequent sections of this study.

African cinema has also been classified as Third World cinema (Russell, 1998, Sholat and Stam, 1994; Gabriel, 1991) but the Nigerian filmmaking model does not sit well within that paradigm because it has not been concerned with rewriting colonial history. Unlike their literary counterparts, Nigerian filmmakers initially concerned themselves with the daily aspirations, anxieties and modes of contemporary existence in

rural and urban spaces of Nigeria (Haynes 2000), and sought to portray the daily lived experiences of the masses (Abah 2009; Okome 2010).

Textual analyses and ideology critique will draw on the contextual and post-structuralist views which, as Kellner (n.d.) notes, expresses a “multiplicity of voices rather than as the enunciation of one single ideological voice which is then to be specified and attacked” (p. 12). This approach is useful because films emerge from social contexts that might influence the representation of images and sounds (and consequently their interpretation) even when the producers are ignorant of such influences as Barber (1987) affirms, and as is shown below.

1.6 Methodological Approach

Qualitative research enables the in-depth interrogation of social activities and interactions in their natural – or constructed – settings. Marshall and Rossman (1999) follow the ‘natural settings’ thought, contrasting it with research undertaken in laboratories. According to them, the qualitative form of research is not only carried out with people where they live; it is also “pragmatic, interpretive and grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2). The idea that qualitative research belongs to natural settings may be problematised when using interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and other methods of data collection. Except in impromptu situations, the mere notice of interview served to a prospective interviewee causes a number of reactions that may interfere with the ‘naturalness’ of the setting (McQueen & Knussen (2002). Besides, Shipman (1972: xi) noted that the research situation “is necessarily artificial”. For the purposes of this study, natural settings refer to places where people normally are, live, work and recreate.

Copies of the six films reviewed in this study were obtained from film markets in Lagos, Nigeria after efforts to secure comprehensive lists of films from the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) and the National Film and Video Census Board (NFVCB) failed. It was envisaged that a list from these film agencies would provide the basis for sampling. As yet, such comprehensive catalogues of video films depicting the period under study from which the researcher could draw a sample is non-existent. The selection of the films was, therefore, based on: 1) availability of copies in the film

markets (sadly, a strong preservation culture in Nigeria is non-existent; some of the films made in the early 1990s have gone into extinction and not even the producers of such works can provide them); 2) their portrayals of the social and political events of 1967-1998; 3) produced or directed by Nigerian filmmakers. Preliminary research and interviews helped to ascertain the choices made.

The past can be represented based on available data and representations in other media. To probe the research questions stated above, two main techniques will be deployed: textual analysis and semi-structured interviews. Stuart Hall (1997) refers to textuality as a source of meaning and as that from which the multiplicity and heterogeneity of meaning can be deduced. This calls for a post-structuralist approach to unpacking the meanings in the film texts. As a legitimate means of interrogating film texts, textual analyses have been performed by Haynes (1995-2014), Okome (2007), Mushengyezi (2009), Austin (2010), Cieplak (2010) in which they analysed representations of fundamentalist ideology, memory, genocide, femininity and identity in African and non-African films to reveal the multiple layers of meanings inherent in them.

Because interpreting media productions is a complex task due to the multiple meanings that a film text may carry, interviews with the film directors and producers will enrich the discussions of the films. Besides, it will enable the researcher overcome the dominant text-based readings of such texts as most of the literature on Nigerian films reveal. The political economy of representation and production, the prospects and challenges they had to contend with are variables, which can be obtained through in-depth interviews. Film scholars like Pfaff (1992), Ukadike (2002), Esonwanne (2008) and McCluskey (2009) have equally interviewed filmmakers on their art to provide nuanced readings that transcend the interpretation of images on the screen. A total of thirty-five 50-minute recorded interviews with film directors, producers and ancillary members of the crew whose contributions are note-worthy were conducted. The interviews comprised a minimum of 20 open-ended questions derived from the research questions stated above. The researcher also raised follow up questions based on initial responses from the filmmakers on the production and distribution of the films.

The reception of the films will also be assessed through interviews with Nigerian journalists selected on the basis of the snowball sampling method. According

to Miles and Huberman (1994), the snowball or chain sampling “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (p. 28). This is similar to Marshall and Rossman’s (1999) term ‘elite interviewing’ (p. 113). Elite here is not necessarily the best educated or wealthiest intellectuals but individuals who could be referred to as experts because of the work they do or have been doing. Such interviews are conducted with “individuals considered to be ... well-informed people in an organisation or community; they are selected for interviews on the basis of their expertise in areas relevant to the research” Marshall and Rossman (ibid) and they are identified by the researcher through referrals. A different set of thirteen 60-minute interviews were conducted with film journalists/arts and culture editors of major newspapers in Lagos – the nation’s commercial centre and birthplace of Nollywood.

In the following sections, further rationale for adopting journalists as audiences in this study is provided. It suffices to state here that the information obtained from journalists will also provide useful data for exhaustively discussing films, most of which were made in the past and whose far-flung spectators are now inaccessible. The members of the viewing audience who are closest to the film industry are journalists. As such, they possess a wealth of information about the selected films that the general audience lacks. The journalists maintain weekly columns in the newspapers on the operations of the industry, and get invited to film premieres and awards ceremonies. These journalists write in national daily newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Punch*, *This Day*, *Vanguard*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Business Day*, *Entertainment Express*, *The Nation*, *National Mirror* and *Saturday Independent*, having covered the arts and creative industries for a minimum of 5 years. Although journalists’ views usually reflect those of the institutions they work for, research triangulation allows the researcher to mitigate the biases of a single method.

1.7 Developing an Appropriate Research Design

The necessity of this section arose from the critical comments by scholars attending conferences in which preliminary findings of this research were presented. Studying the reception of films made between 2001 and 2005 in the absence of substantial documentary evidence posed a challenge. It was therefore considered crucial to

demonstrate how the voice of journalists might be a legitimate response to a methodological impasse in doing qualitative research.

David Silverman (2005) noted that, “[A]n insistence that any research...should follow a purely quantitative logic would simply rule out the study of many interesting phenomena relating to what people actually do in their day-to-day lives...and private places” (p. 6). In comparison to the annual output of video-films, the historically themed ones are almost negligible which suggests that a qualitative reading and analysis of film texts, and interviews will appropriately respond to the research questions above. As noted by Marshall and Rossman (1999), qualitative researchers fare better with small sizes of participants. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2000:10) cited in Silverman (2005) argue that:

qualitative investigators...get closer to the actor’s perspective through detailed interviewing and observation...quantitative researchers are seldom able to capture their subjects’ perspectives because they have to rely on more remote, inferential empirical methods and materials. (p. 10)

In determining the research methodology, a **pilot study** was conducted in February 2012. The study entailed reading six historically themed films, analysing them, screening them before groups of graduate and undergraduate students, interviewing the film directors, and conducting focus group discussions on the films. An unsuccessful attempt was also made to generate interest in the six films with the use of Facebook in 2012. First, there was a general wall post and there was no response from friends I asked for comments because of a lack of interest in the films. Second, I posted the comments on films on other people’s walls with the intention of attracting responses from their friends. That also failed. The alternative was to write individual mails to acquaintances to invite them to screenings and discussions. The aim of the pilot was to test the suitability of the proposed qualitative research methods and to identify their weaknesses with the hope of mitigating them (Shipman 1972, Silverman 2010).

Students between the ages of 20 and 40 were chosen for the pilot because this group of people constitute the bulk of today’s movie going population. Besides, it was convenient for the researcher to engage with an already ‘formed’ group since the common purpose of obtaining a 1st or 2nd degree brought them together. The level of familiarity among the student-participants encouraged unhindered discussion about the

films, which was beneficial to the research agenda. Three-quarters described themselves as Yorubas (one of the major Nigerian ethnic groups) and the other quarter were a mix of Hausa, Urhobo, Igbo and Efik. There were screenings and discussions (open to all) of:

Afonja (2002) – 9 MSc students

Liquid Black Gold (2008) – 12 MSc students

Anini (2005) – 26 undergraduate students

The recruitment for this exercise was based on the invitees' professional relationship with the film industry. At two focus group discussions, snapshots of scenes from the films above were projected to the group and discussions were held afterwards. It was observed that snapshots of films are poor substitutes for a viewing experience, which had implications for the kinds of responses the participants made.

Group one: 10 people (screenwriter, screenwriting students, film reporter/critic, business man with an interest in film production, aspiring film director, three PhD candidates researching Nollywood)

Group two: three people (business man, two film aficionados)

Although the pilot study yielded insights to the understanding of what 'historical films' mean to young Nigerians, revealed the disenchantment of youth viewers who disdain Nollywood video films, and showed up the enthusiasm of film directors, the pilot emphasized the limitations of the method. Assembling participants for film screenings and group interviews, thereafter, proved to be problematic, because both viewing and discussion of a film required a minimum of three hours which some of the MSc students could not afford. The result was a drop in the number who started viewing from 15 to nine and less. Even though they were properly briefed on the nature of the research and my expectations in an e-mail, participants strolled in minutes after the film had started; they walked in and out of the room during screening, sometimes noisily. Because it was a constructed setting, some participants were cautious of my presence and even enquired as to what sort of responses they should make. I simply informed them to watch as if they were at home. Observations were made during the viewing, and verbal as well as non-verbal communicative practices were recorded.

At the screening of *Afonja*, a Yoruba language film, the spectators were pleased with the setting, the props and the war costume. They disagreed on the particular version of the story seen, noting that the 19th century narrative of the takeover of the Yoruba kingdom as depicted in *Afonja* was not entirely accurate. The non-Yoruba members of the audience were more sympathetic to the story which they described as being rich in Yoruba culture and language. While the *Liquid Black Gold* screened, the viewers laughed often at the corrupt practices exhibited by the community chiefs, scowled at the opening lecture between the protagonist and his wife as well as at the anachronism that placed militants in a military-controlled Niger Delta. Compared to *Afonja*, the *Liquid Black Gold* was strongly criticised for what the viewers called “insufficient research and trivialization of the complexities of the Niger Delta conflict” (post-screening discussion). This was not the case with *Anini*, which was warmly received by the students. They were pleased with the sound track, the pidgin (a combination of English and indigenous language) and the acting which was described as believable and representative of the real story. Majority of the students who saw *Anini* did not witness the actual 1986/7 events in Benin City, but they confirmed having heard the stories about the armed robbery in the past.

After each screening, the researcher asked questions about themes, acting, dialogue, points of view and the political undertones of the films. Throughout the discussion, I was perceived as a Nollywood emissary because of my perceived sympathy towards the filmmakers. As a result of my interactions with the filmmakers, which I made known to the participants, I was often asked to “tell them to make better films”. Emphasis was laid on the participants’ understanding of a political/historical film and whether they would call the ones before them by that title. The responses always tried to draw a comparison with Hollywood (with *Titanic* as the classic historical genre), or referred to *Sango* or dismissed the films as being talky and documentary-like. More importantly, fewer people agreed to stay on to discuss the films, which suggested that too much demands on their time had been made. The alternative of asking participants to see the films at their convenience before attending a focus group discussion was not viable due to the unavailability of the films. This sent me back to the drawing board to re-plan the data collection procedures as well as learn to ask questions in the ‘language’ of the interviewees as is suggested by Silverman (2010). Finally, individual interviews of filmmakers and journalists (representing the viewing audience)

seemed more realistic and achievable. Further justification on the inclusion of journalists' perspective in this study – an original contribution to a methodological question – is provided in the seventh chapter.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

After an introductory chapter that lays out the research agenda with its contextual and theoretical framework, amongst other sub- but no less important elements, the second and third chapters follow. Both chapters are extended discussions of concepts and theories guiding the research. Technically, they constitute the literature review and provide further guidance to the reader on the subsequent chapters. The fourth chapter identified early political and historical filmmaking in Nigeria by examining the motivation, narrative techniques, ideology and reception of the films. It was considered necessary to structure chapters five to eight around the research questions. Chapter five deals the first research question, six with the second and so on. This was to ensure accountability to such an extent that questions raised in the first chapter were sufficiently discussed in later chapters. The last chapter, nine, ties up discussions, provides areas for further interrogation and reiterates the academic contribution made in this work.

To avoid repetitive entries of interview locations, it is important to state that all the interviews reported in this study were carried out in Lagos by the researcher. There were also email, telephone, Skype and Whatsapp interviews. These alternatives to face-to-face, most of which the interviews are, arose at the request of the interviewees who were travelling, had pressing deadlines to meet, were ill or were not based in Lagos at the time the information was sought. I use the term 'personal communication' to denote all interview entries.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUAL REVIEW OF 1967-1998 NIGERIA

2.1 Introduction

The political history of Nigeria is well documented in an astonishing number of history books and policy documents. It is pertinent to repeat certain relevant aspects of it here, and thus situate the reader in the contexts depicted in the films. This chapter therefore seeks to provide the national context of the period between 1967 and 1998. What Nigeria was like as a post-colonial state in that span of 32 years is of importance to the overall objectives of the study. It is believed that such an understanding will shed light on the filmmakers' representations in their films. Brief examinations of the political, economic and socio-cultural situations follow.

2.2 Brief Introduction to the Period before 1967 (events that led to 1967)

The role of the British colonial government is often emphasized in the structuring of the Nigerian State, often in disapproving terms. It is a commonly held belief that the British, upon their exit from Nigeria, gave power to the northerners, who in turn would serve the former's interests. Achebe wrote, "it is now widely known that Sir James Robertson played an important role in overseeing the elections (or lack of) at independence, throwing his weight behind Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who had been tapped to become Nigeria's first prime minister" (2012: 50). This northern prominence might not have been a direct cause of the Nigerian Civil War, but it contributed to the ethnic problems, fears, nepotism and corruption perpetuated in the north, and which the 'Igbo coup plotters' resisted. Llyod (1970) and Atofarati (1992) highlight the blame Nigerians impose on Britain for the present socio-political order of the country. As noted by the latter:

The former colonial master decided to keep the country one in order to effectively control her vital resources for their economic interests. Thus, for administrative convenience the Northern and Southern Nigeria were amalgamated in 1914. Thereafter the only thing this people had in common was the name of their country since each side had different administrative set - up. This alone was an insufficient basis for true unity. (Atofarati, 1992: para 3)

Nationalist sentiments grew on the basis of ethnic and tribal lines rather than on national interests and unity. In the 1950s, both British and Nigerians imagined that the western-type multi-party system of governance was feasible in Nigeria, but Isichei (1981) observed that the system broke down with “amazing rapidity” (p. 468) due to ethnic affiliations and the winner-take-all theory (ibid). However, I argue that ethnicity and one of its offspring, namely nepotism was primarily responsible for the state of affairs in Nigerian politics prior to 1967. Since the 1958 constitution regionalised the country, citizens held onto their regional identity as the national creed. At the same time, the ugly embers of tribalism and sectionalism had been fanned into a deadly flame by all the political leaders. These leaders rode on the crest of this cancerous tribalism and ignorance of the people to power, at the expense of national unity and the nation. Chinua Achebe in his last memories of the war remembered this:

The structure of the country was such that there was an inbuilt power struggle among the ethnic groups, and of course those who were in power wanted to stay in power. The easiest and simplest way to retain it, even in a limited area, was to appeal to tribal sentiments, so they were egregiously exploited in the 1950s and 1960s. (Achebe, 2012: 51)

Nigeria had a federal system of government with northern, southern and western regions being governed separately, but accountable to the central government. Several factors coalesced to usher the young independent nation that Nigeria was into her first military coup in January 1966. After gaining independence from British Colonial rule in October 1960, Nigeria’s First Republic (1960-1966) was characterised by factors such as political instability, fear of domination and its consequent marginalisation. Toyin Falola and Matthew Heaton in their book, *A History of Nigeria*, provide a fairly detailed account of the political, economic and social factors that led the military to intervene. They wrote:

The fear that emerged in the 1960s was that of “domination”. Southerners feared that an NPC-controlled government representing the interests of the Northern Region would divert resources to the north, cut southerners out of their position in the administration and the military and gradually Islamise the country. Northerners feared that southern “domination” by Awolowo’s Action Group and Azikiwe’s newly renamed National Convention of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) would allocate resources to the more developed Western and Eastern Regions, which would prevent the north from ever developing in a competitive way. (Falola and Heaton 2008: 165)

These fears, together with uneven ethnic representations in the army, doctored census figures, heavily rigged or boycotted elections, insincere political affiliations and the reduction in the price of cocoa in the Western region led to riots. This infuriated the Igbos who, by then, were “tired of the inability of the federal system to keep the peace and work in the best interests of all Nigerians...” (Falola and Heaton 2008: 172). Besides, on assumption of office after Nzeogwu’s coup, Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi, through a decree in 1966, abolished the political parties and the regions and unified the civil service. This, in addition to Ironsi’s heavy association with Igbo officers, escalated the fears of the northerners who believed in the federal system because it guaranteed their protection. Elizabeth Isichei, in an earlier account of Nigerian history, also provides a record of ethnic fears within Nigeria that gave rise to the Igbo-Hausa attacks. Quoting the northerners according to A. Kirk-Greene (1966), she observed:

We all have our fears of one another. Some fear that opportunities in their own areas are limited and they would therefore wish to expand and venture unhampered in other parts. Some fear the sheer weight of numbers of other parts which they feel could be used to the detriment of their own interests. Some fear the sheer weight of skills and the aggressive drive of other groups (Isichei 1983: 469)

In 1967 when the two-and-half-year Nigerian Civil War (6 July 1967 – 15 January 1970) broke out, Nigeria was under the military rule of General Yakubu Gowon who ascended to power on August 1, 1966 following a July counter-coup d’état. That coup was a response to the January 15, 1966 coup that eliminated the civilian Hausas from power. Gowon took over the reins of power from General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi (January – July 1966) and was himself later ousted by northerners who gave power to Murtala Mohammed in July 1975. A point which is never omitted in the discourse of the January and July 1966 coup is ethnicity, tribalism and corruption. Successive coup plotters justify their motivation by claiming to rid the nation from tribalism, disunity and widespread corruption. Whereas the southern Igbos spearheaded the first coup, the northern Hausas masterminded the latter to rein in the powers of the southern Igbos in a revenge coup (Achebe, 2012). The January coup was largely executed by young Igbo soldiers, popularly known as the “five majors” (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 172) namely Nzeogwu, Ifeajuna, Okafor, Anuforo, all Igbos and Ademoyega, a Yoruba man while the July coup had behind it a number of northern soldiers, chief among them, General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma.

On May 24, 1966, the Federal Government under Aguiyi-Ironsi announced the abolishment of the federal system, a ban on political parties and the unification of the civil service. The consequence of this is best understood in the words of Enwefah:

Aguiyi-Ironsi's decrees and his intended civil service reform strikes fear among aggrieved northerners. During May, June and July, hundreds of Igbos are beaten and murdered in the northern cities of Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Sokoto, Zaria and Bauchi amidst serious agitations for the ouster of Aguiyi-Ironsi and the return of federalism. Ibos flee the north for their eastern region homeland (2012: 63)

Although the decree was rescinded, the killing of the Ibos continued till September and October, during which a massacre that claimed over 30,000 Ibo lives ensued. Achebe (2012) pointed out that the “northerners turned on Igbo civilians living in the North and unleashed waves of brutal massacres that...was describe[d] as a pogrom” (p. 82). At the same time, the Ibos unleashed a vengeance on the northerners who resided in the eastern region. A government intervention was sorely needed at this point to assuage tensions and restore peace to the regions. But that did not happen until a meeting of the Supreme Military Council of Nigeria was convened in a neutral territory in neighbouring Aburi, Ghana in January 1967. Achebe (2012: 85-86) documents the topics discussed at the meeting, some of the resolutions that were reached following deliberations by the FMG and the Eastern Government, particularly that of “emerging from these deliberations with Nigeria intact as a confederation of the regions” (p. 86), and the subsequent failure to implement resolutions two months after the meeting. When Gowon called for a constitutional reform in compliance with the Aburi agreement, “members of the federal civil service galvanised themselves in energetic opposition to the agreements of the Aburi Accord” (Achebe 2012: 86). The perceived or actual resistance to implementing the Aburi Accord, with the multiple interpretations that such an (in)action received contributed to the Civil War.

2.3 Political Situation in Nigeria 1967-1976

The history of Nigeria since independence is rife with ethnic and regional cleavages, and this was manifested in the civil war. About 40 years later, it would take on religious undertones led by the Boko Haram group. In January 1967, the then Head of the FMG,

Gen. Yakubu Gowon, Gen. Odimegwu Ojukwu, Governor of the Eastern Region and other members of the Supreme Military Council met in Aburi, Ghana. The meeting was led by the Chairman of the Ghana National Liberation Council, Lt. Gen. J.A. Ankrah. As stated above, the agreements reached at the meeting were given different interpretations by the FMG and the eastern region leader, Ojukwu (Atofarati, 1992).

Enraged by the assassinations of the Igbos in northern Nigeria, the non-compliance of Gowon to the Ibo demands, and particularly by the creation of a 12-state federal structure on May 27, 1967, General Odimegwu Ojukwu declared an independent Biafran State on May 30, 1967 and led a secessionist movement. This was intended to separate the southern parts of the country from the north. Ojukwu instructed the Igbos in the north to emigrate southwards and vice versa. The Federal Military Government (FMG) frowned at such a move and under the directives of the Head of State fought back to re-unite the country. Gen. Gowon's creation of new states in which the three regions and the capital territory were divided into twelve new states was a move to placate the minority regions and weaken Ojukwu's hold on the south easterners. During the war, there were casualties on each side even though the Nigerian army was ostensibly stronger than their Biafran counterpart. The FMG took strategic political and economic steps including blockades and currency change to force a re-integration of the Biafrans to Nigeria. In 1968, "Nigeria introduced newly designed currency notes in a move to stop Biafra's use of the Nigerian pounds to buy arms abroad. By January 30, the Biafran government issued its own currency, the Biafran Pound and postage stamps as well in response to Nigeria's abolition of its old currency" (Enwefah, 2012: 92). The areas around the country that were cordoned off made import and export of food and requisite war items impossible for the Biafrans while the currency change rendered Biafrans' money useless. Thus, they were deprived of even the most basic needs.

The Biafrans called out to the international community, claiming that "Gowon's policies were proof of his genocidal conspiracy among the Igbo" (Falola and Heaton 2008: 177). The cries of genocide drew the attention of the previously aloof African, European and Asian countries. Help came although the countries that intervened did not lose sight of their own political interests and position in global leadership. According to Falola and Heaton, the then USSR supported the FMG and "China, seeing a chance to challenge the USSR for leadership of the communist world, also expressed its sympathy

for Biafra...” (2008: 178). Aid also came in the form of food and medicines through the Catholic Church and the International Red Cross.

On October 1, 1969, FG released from prison, Soyinka who openly supported Biafra (Enwefah 2012:132). January 9, 1970, Ojukwu responding to his advisers flees Biafra through the Uli airstrip to exile in Ivory Coast. He leaves Major Gen. Phillip Effiong in charge of the Biafrans. The next day, Effiong broadcasts Biafrans peaceful negotiation with Nigeria, desiring a resolution of the Civil War. Six days later, January 15, Gowon broadcasts his ‘no victor, no vanquished’ speech, grants amnesty to Biafrans and in the following months, the Biafran region is reinstated as the East Central State on an equal standing with the other 11 states. Ukpabi Asika continues being the administrator as was in 1967.

Several other significant events occurred within this period such as the release of the first indigenous film, an adaptation of Wole Soyinka’s *Kongi’s Harvest* as well as Nigeria’s belonging to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). But it is necessary to limit these accounts to the political events that have a bearing on the films under study. The construction for the National Theatre, one of the expected sites for the Second Festival of Black Arts and Culture began in June 1973.

Gowon was severely criticised for flagrant government expenditure for the national census whose results were eventually repealed and for the cement scandal and corruption among other practices that ran contrary to his nine-point programme upon assumption of office (Isichei 1983, Falola and Heaton 2008).

In July 1975, Gowon was eliminated in a bloodless coup while he was attending the Organisation of African Unity Summit in Uganda. That brought 37-year old Gen. Murtala Mohammed to power and ushered in the third military regime in Nigeria’s history. Amongst other political efforts, Gen. Mohammed dismissed several senior officers who served in the Gowon regime and replaced them with supposedly loyal military officers. He also repealed the 1973 census figures and, for national planning purposes, reverted to the 1963 results. Mohammed announced plans to return to civilian rule by October 1, 1979. His government was short-lived because in February 1976, he was assassinated by Lt. Col. Buka Dimka on his way to his office in Dodan Barracks, Lagos and power went to the Chief of Staff, Olusegun Obasanjo. Mohammed’s

assassination was partly a result of the announcement he made to demobilise the enormous army formed during the civil war. Even though he was high-handed in his operations and strategy, Gen. Murtala Mohammed enjoyed widespread popularity among Nigerians including his adversaries. Isichei (1983) observes that he “was more popular than any earlier Nigerian Head of State... and was mourned as no other Nigerian leader had as yet been mourned” (p. 476). The local and international airports in Lagos are named after him. His assassination also inspired Eddie Igboma’s celluloid film *Death of a Black President* (1983).

2.4 Significant Events of 1977-1986

The death of Gen. Murtala Mohammed led to the country’s fourth military regime headed by Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo. He towed the path of his predecessor and continued to push for the return to civilian rule in 1979. This government recorded a number of successes including hosting the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in January 1977, the establishment of a public broadcaster, the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), the incorporation of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in April 1977, a prominent role in other African entities’ liberation struggle. This period witnessed oil boom, heavy petroleum income and its squandering.

In September 1978, the FG lifted the ban on politics. The Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) registered five political parties in preparation for the coming year’s elections. These were the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP). A new constitution is also adopted to pave the way for the second republic (Enwefah 2012: 179). In 1979, apart from taking over British Petroleum then operating in Nigeria, and thus stabilising the economy, presidential elections were held on August 11 with Alhaji Shehu Shagari of the NPN emerging the winner. Although Chief Obafemi Awolowo of UPN contested the results in court, a decision was taken in favour of Shagari (Isichei 1983: 479). In his inaugural speech, Shagari infused hope with the ‘One Nation, One Destiny, One Nigeria’ mantra

(Enwefah 2012: 187). During Shagari's reign, in 1980, an NNPC scandal involving Gulf, Mobil and Shell was uncovered, and sanctions are imposed on the oil companies.

A number of ethnic, regional or religious riots undermined national security during this period. In December 1980, *Maitatsine*, a Muslim fundamentalist sect which drew membership from Cameroon, Chad and Niger provoked religious riots in Kano. Not even the governor's residence could withstand the protests, which claims thousands of lives. Maitatsine, named after its founder, was an extremist group that rejected reading any book other than the Quran. Equally dreadful was the Ife/Modakeke crisis in south-west Nigeria, which erupted in April 1981 leaving several hundreds dead and property destroyed. In October of the same year, the Maitatsine uprising had reached Maiduguri in Borno State. Even in the following years, this group did not relent, but kept on rioting in Yola and other parts of the north. There was also widespread violence in parts of Ondo State in western Nigeria brought on by electoral machinations in August 1983.

At midnight on December 31, 1983, soldiers struck again, displacing Shagari in another coup, thus marking the end of the Second Republic. The military claimed that they acted out of national interests. There were mixed feelings of relief and joy as well as fears of the future. Major General Mohammed Buhari became the next Head of State having served as Petroleum Minister in the Obasanjo military regime. Buhari was said to be high-handed in the promulgation of decrees, and in punishing wrongdoing sometimes in disproportionate measures (Enwefah 2012: 208-210). His regime sent journalists (Tunde Thompson and Nduka Irabor) to jail for offences against Decree 4, which forbade 'false reporting'. It was not long before General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, a northerner ousted Buhari in yet another bloodless coup. Achieved on August 27, 1985, Enwefah wrote of the coup, "it brings relief to rising tension over escalating political repression and deteriorating economic conditions" (p. 211). Babangida had to declare a state of national economic emergency during which the importation of rice was banned for a period of time. His government unraveled a coup attempt led by Major Gen. Mamman Vasta who was later executed with his accomplices.

January 1 saw the removal of 80 percent of petroleum subsidy, an action which was to recur several times in the economic life of the state. The regime of Babangida

continued in a very characteristic military fashion with arbitrary and unilateral decision making, heightened media control and even political assassinations. He is said to have made the most radical economic policy reforms (Enwefah, 2012). And, without any consultation, Nigeria became the 45th member of the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). Dele Giwa, editor in chief of *Newswatch* was killed in October through a letter bomb delivered to his house.

Also in 1986, a notorious armed robber, Lawrence Anini, emerged, and in Robin Hood-styled robbery aided the poor with his spoils. He belonged to a gang that also accommodated a son of the Benin royal family, Kingsley Eweka. The Anini episode is important for the unease it set President Babangida in, and more so because filmmaker Henry Legemah portrayed the events of that character in his 2005 film, *Anini*, which is reviewed in chapters five and six in this study. In December 1986, after several failed attempts and a disturbing record of criminal exploits, Anini was apprehended by the police. Never before in the history of Nigeria has an armed robber so confounded and intimidated the Police Force as did Lawrence Anini and his gang. He was executed in January 1987.

2.5 Socio-political Context of 1987-1998

In 1987, the Federal Government decided to inaugurate a Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), another socio-economic initiative towing the lines of previous governments. Apart from the 1978 Jaji Declaration by Obasanjo, the Ethical Revolution of Shagari and the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) by Buhari, the Babangida government spawned the Mass Mobilisation for Self Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER). It had as one objective the mobilisation of Nigerians to take the country to greater heights, whatever that meant.

To Babangida's credit, however, was the opening up of the polity to political debate, which Buhari abrogated as well as the establishment in 1989 of two political parties: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) with a view to returning the country to civilian rule in 1990. It is not certain if Babangida genuinely desired the exit of the military from political power since he remained in office till 1993 when pressure from the international community

heightened. Ajayi (2007) suggests that the military had other agenda, which were not in keeping with the handover to a civilian government. Furthermore, during Babangida's regime, the 1989 Constitution prepared under the chairmanship of Justice Anthony Aniagolu was promulgated. Amongst other provisions is the change of tenure of presidents and governors from one six-year term to two four-year terms.

For some time, the questions of ethnicity gave way to ambition and the quest for political power. On the morning of April 22, 1990, Major Gen. Gideon Orkar's coup attempt was foiled and together with his collaborators, was later executed. The following year, 1991, saw national instability in the April and October religious crises in Katsina and Kano respectively. In the south, state infrastructure developed (Third Mainland Bridge on June 29), oil income and expenditure were shrouded, and the British journalist, William Keeling, who attempted to uncover the whereabouts of the proceeds of oil sales was rapidly deported. Nearly every year was marked by fuel, religious and ethnic/regional riots, most of them occurring in the north and recording large numbers of casualties, deaths and loss of property. The Zango Kataf crisis in Kaduna State is a case in point (Maier, 2000).

To address development issues in the oil-rich regions of the Niger Delta, the Oil Minerals Producing and Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established in October 1992. Substantial financial resources were allocated to the oil producing areas to cater to the problems of environmental degradation and speed up developmental initiatives, while reducing conflict at the same time. The establishment in 2000 of another agency, NDDC to replace OMPADEC implies unmet objectives. The Niger Delta Development Commission took over the affairs of OMPADEC and its performance is as contestable as its predecessor's. The persistence of the delta issues is now testimony to the idea that environmental problems and marginalization cannot be resolved in one fell swoop by the creation of an organisation; rather, assiduous and disinterested efforts by the government in collaboration with the affected group are necessary.

Babangida continued strategically delaying the hand-over to civilian rule to the extent that in November of 1992, Obasanjo wrote him a letter in which he enjoined him to leave office honourably and, prevent a looming violent eruption within the polity. Chief Arthur Nzeribe who was to become the leader of the Association for a Better

Nigeria (ABN), asked Babangida to retire from military service and contest the forthcoming elections, but he refused. Instead, he postponed the hand-over date a fourth time amidst rising political and civil unrest within the country. Although Babangida finally stepped aside on August 26, 1993, and had put in place the machinery for the successful conduct of presidential elections, he still coveted the presidency. Under the SDP and NRC, Moshood Abiola and Bashir Tofa respectively contested the elections which held on June 12: a memorable date in Nigeria's history. Abiola emerged the winner of the election, but to the utter surprise of Nigerians, Babangida annulled the election results on June 26, and in Abiola's place, deliberately handed over power to Chief Ernest Shonekan, who is Abiola's kinsman. Extremely violent riots erupted in several parts of Nigeria, notably Lagos, Ibadan and parts of the south-west region. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) went on sporadic strikes to protest the annulment. But the worst was yet to come.

On November 17, 1993, Major Gen. Sani Abacha forced the resignation of Chief Ernest Shonekan, Head of the Interim Government and ascended to power. Abacha became not only the seventh military ruler of Nigeria, but also the most brutal dictator that the country has ever known. Nobel Prize Winner, Wole Soyinka, challenged the legality of Gen. Abacha's government. He argued that if Ernest Shonekan's interim government was illegal, as declared by the Nigerian law courts, therefore, Abacha's so-called succession was "a claim in legal and constitutional void, a patently illegal enterprise" (Soyinka, 1996: 11).

Abacha abrogated and proscribed everything that smacked of democracy including the National Assembly, the state governments and political parties amongst others. Abacha's was the seventh military regime, a time during which rioters did not let up. A very unpopular regime, treason charges (including alleged coups) were brought against innocent citizens such as Wole Soyinka; Obasanjo, Shehu Yar'Adua, Dipo Diya, Abiola, who with several others were sent to prison. The National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), an opposition group led by Chief Anthony Enahoro had many of its members go into exile for accusing the Abacha administration of the murder of Kudirat Abiola, wife of the 1993 elections winner. The number of political murders grew in this period.

One of the most horrendous acts of this government occurred in 1995 when the Ogoni nine were hanged after being tried and found guilty of treason in a military tribunal which Abacha himself constituted. Soyinka quoting Chinua Achebe, another Nigerian literary figure in reference to the military execution of environmental activist, Saro-Wiwa, stated: “Ken Saro-Wiwa was not killed on the date announced by Sani Abacha’s regime, but on June 23, 1993, the day the nation’s democratic elections were annulled” (Soyinka 1996: 153). The nine men, led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, were pressing for accountability and the development of their native land where crude oil was being extracted. The oil operations by Royal Dutch Shell devastated their lands leaving them without compensation and basic amenities. The execution drew international fury and Nigeria was expelled from the Commonwealth of Nations as a result.

In January 1998, a 5-million man march was staged in Abuja, asking Abacha to leave office. Two months later, a counter-rally urging Abacha to contest the presidential elections was held under the auspices of youth groups one of which was Youth Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA). Abacha was said to be dishonest in his personal life and official functions. He looted the national treasury through fictitious corporate entities. At moments of fuel crises, he ordered the supply of fuel to neighbouring countries while motorists spent hours on end queuing at petrol stations for fuel. On June 8, 1998, 54-year old Gen. Abacha passed away, according to official records, due to a heart attack. This marked the end of forceful and authoritarian military governance in Nigeria, which was described by Ajayi (2007) as the military’s end of “political adventurism”

2.6 Key Political Factors during the Period as Constructed in the Films

The films *Battle of Love* (2001) and *Across the Niger* (2007) appear to evoke the period of the Nigerian Civil War. Without directly chronicling the events of the war, both films were set in the 1967-1970 time frames to underscore the ethnic tensions prevalent during the period and to relate it to current national instability.

Oil Village (2001) seemingly constructs the period in 1995 when owing to the late Gen. Sani Abacha’s disquietude over the Ogoni protests, erroneously indicts,

convicts and hangs Ken Saro Wiwa and 8 other protesters against oil-induced environmental degradation.

Stubborn Grasshopper (2001) is Sam Onwuka's version of Abacha's ascent to and exit by death from the highest political office in Nigeria. Abacha's predecessor, Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and Chief Ernest Sonekan are also featured in the film. One of the darkest episodes in Nigeria's pursuit of democracy, the annulment of the 1993 elections, and the key players of the period, were portrayed in that commentary.

Anini (2005) arguably highlighted the 1986-87 robbery operations that not only ground Benin City to a halt, but that also unnerved the police force and the military Head of State, Babangida, at that time. Popular and state reactions to the events are also portrayed.

Half of a Yellow Sun (2013), like *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, also appears to reflect on the Civil War and its consequences on the Igbo people.

To conclude this section, a very brief political history of Nigeria from 1967 to 1998 has been traced to aid the flow of the whole narrative in this study and to help the reader situate the context and events depicted in the films being studied. Only included were those details required to locate the periods and people whose stories are woven together in the video-film narratives. This means that several social and economic factors not considered relevant for this section were omitted. I do not attempt an actual comparison of the events mentioned above with their depictions in the films since the filmmakers' mode and motivations of telling the past are most assuredly different from those of historians (Hesling, 2001). Their narrative techniques as much as their ideological slant do not converge with those chroniclers of official versions of the past. Accuracy is, therefore, not the focus. Rather, it is an appreciation of the political consciousness of a filmmaker and what might be understood when he lends his filmic 'voice' to the re-construction of a country's political past, which undeniably have their footprints in the present.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Representing History and the Past in Film

Since the beginnings of dramatic film, narrativization of past events has been one of the most productive areas of filmmaking (Hannu Salmi, 1995).

In this research, the past comprises the time between 1967 and 1998. In 1998, the Nigerian military Head of State, General Sani Abacha died. His death was officially announced as being the result of a cardiac arrest. An attempt is made to continue the discussions begun in the first chapter. It begins by situating the political period which are reflected in the films under study. Such an effort is useful in locating the contextual background and literature. The chapter also examines the literature on history and the past, African past on screen and segues into popular arts in Africa since the latter adequately describes Nollywood productions today (Haynes, 2000).

The extended debates on Western history on screen, though recognised, have been unable to account for the specificities of African video production and consumption. This is simply because such an effort presupposes that a comparison between an American filmmaking model and that of Nigeria is legitimate. It is not. African cultural products have to be investigated on their own terms taking cognisance of their histories and the socio-political differences of the locations. In her review of African film literature, Nancy Schmidt notes Frank Ukadike's emphasis on adopting critical methodologies for analyzing African cultural products (including films) as well as the importance of eschewing inadequate western theories and myths that, for a long time, have informed the interpretation of African history and cinema. Schmidt reiterates Ukadike's call for new approaches to African film analysis, rather than appending African film analysis to dominant film discourse, and emphasizes the need for African-centered rather than Euro-American centered approaches (Schmidt 1997: 116).

3.2 History and the Past: Brief Distinctions

As already noted, this research proposes to read and analyse Nigerian films dealing with past public events – which could either be official or unofficial history – occurring between 1967 and 1998, historic people (public figures within the same time frame) and periods. Taken together, these three categories refer to the past as deployed in this project. In the following paragraph, a distinction is made between the ‘past’ and ‘history’. According to Keith Jenkins:

History is arguably a verbal artefact, a narrative prose discourse which ... is as much invented as found, and which is constructed by present-minded, ideologically positioned workers (historians and those acting as if they were historians) operating at various levels of reflexivity ... looking simultaneously towards the once real events and situations of the past and towards the narrative type ‘mythoi’ common – albeit it on a dominant marginal spectrum – in any given social formation (1995: 178).

Jenkins’ definition already draws a slight distinction between history and the past and the ideologically influenced position of the historian. The distinction notes that history is a selective and scientific account of the past. Scholars have identified the vastness of historical occurrences and the human incapability of accounting for or interpreting all. In particular, Scannell (2004) affirms, “History, as we all know full well, is always greater than, inevitably exceeds, our individual efforts because it is inexhaustible and keeps on going, projecting into a never ending future whereas mere mortal historiographers do not” (p. 138)

The distinction between history and the past, between official and unofficial history is crucial for obvious reasons. It deserves reiteration that this research will cover both categories of knowledge. There seems to be a tacit agreement among scholars on the synonymous nature of history to the past or the past to history. But it is not every past that is history. The renowned Polish philosopher, Leszek Kolakowski, explained that the past is “an ocean of events that once happened” (2005: 35). Therefore, unofficial, unwritten history refers to those accounts of the past which are not accounted for by the official versions of history. Without words (and images), the past would be perennially silent. Confusion occurs sometimes when we use – without clarification – the word ‘history’ to mean not just historical writing but as a synonym for the entirety of past happenings. So, if history is fundamentally a construction of and from the past,

then the processes of its construction must be equally if not more significant than the result. In outlining historical methods, Tosh (2006) recognises the role of oral history and argues that the first-hand conversation with people who lived through the period under investigation and witnessed the events may possess more useful approaches to the study of history. The argument is sufficient support for my inclusion of the past as that which is also drawn from collective memory (unofficial history).

Schudson (1992), quoted in Leavy (2005), defines collective memory as social memory, referring to the ways in which group, institutional and cultural recollections of the past shape people's action in the present. This definition corresponds to Leavy's who noted that "collective memory can be conceived as a repository of 'shared' cultural images, narratives and visions of the past." And, "it is a space where culture fuses with social power resulting in a dominant, although contested, historical narrative" (Leavy, 2005: 5). The notion of 'shared' does not denote uniformity in thought or interpretation, rather, it refers to the narratives as "permeating a given society and constituting a dominant discourse about the past" (p. 5). This demonstrates as Leavy further notes the social power, the conflict over meaning as well as the subjectivity that results in the process of writing or recalling historical events whether of journalistic (news media) or commercial (filmmakers) value.

History follows the past in the ontological order because it takes from what constitutes 'the past' to formulate its own account of that past. The past is the object of enquiry. All history is a subjective mediation of the past, but the past is an objective phenomenon existing before the scientific efforts of history scholars. Tuchman (1982) as well as Carr notes that "all historical judgements involve persons and points of view, one is as good as the other and there is no objective historical truth" (Carr, 1961: 4). According to Tuchman (1982), there is nothing as a neutral or objective historian. The writing of history is a process of highly selective reconstruction of features of the past (Kolakowski, 2005). Further, it states that "the past doesn't speak; it must be evoked, and that evocation is inescapably selective in the extreme." Carr states that "history consists of a corpus of ascertained facts" where "a fact is a datum of experience as distinct from conclusions ... the facts are available to the historian in documents, inscriptions and so on, like fish on the fishmonger's slab. Using his analogy, the historian collects them, takes them home, and cooks and serves them in whatever style

appeals to him” (1961: 6). That is why this research takes up the past therefore as: 1) history as written i.e. official history, and 2) unofficial history i.e. the entirety of past significant events, including the recent past some of which reside in collective memory. In both cases and arguably too, the filmmaker takes on the role of a ‘historian’ – professional or otherwise.

Historiography, therefore, is imagined and invented as found by historians or those, in the words of Keith Jenkins, “acting as if they were historians” (1995: 16) based on their conceptions of the past in a given context. That past is no longer present, but the evidence, the traces of it are and that is what historians deploy in their fabrication or narrativisation of events of the past. In his polemic account and rejection of Carr’s (1961) understanding of history, Jenkins (1995) synthesises the works of several historians and philosophers including T. Bennet, F. R. Ankersmit, and H. White to note that:

the past as constituted by its existing traces is always apprehended and appropriated textually through the sedimented layers of previous interpretations and through the reading habits and categories developed by previous/current methodological practices. Consequently, the status of historical knowledge is not based for its truth/accuracy on its correspondence with the past *per se* but on the various historicisations of it, so that historiography always stands in for the past, the only medium it has to affect a ‘historical’ presence (Jenkins, 1995: 18).

Further, Scannell writing about news (2004: 130) distinguishes historiography from historicity. The first he refers to as the “narrative of the presence in the world of human beings who are historical because they make history.” These subjects of history as envisioned by Scannell are individuals, institutions and the world. Historiography is writing the events of the past hence its retrospective nature while historicity has to do with the future as understood or interpreted in the present. Scannell also explores the retrospective and prospective dimensions of historical writing, the latter residing in the pluralities of media events coverage. He observes:

[B]ut with radio and television the time of the event and the time of its telling coincide. Both exist in the same phenomenal real time now... Broadcasting attends to the existential structure of days, thereby producing the phenomenal now in which past present and future encounter each other (Scannell, 2004: 132-133)

Scannell agrees with Schuarz (2004: 105) who notes that “the past itself can only be known in the present through its manifold representations – representations which in the contemporary world are profoundly, irretrievably, mediated.” It is worth emphasising that events make history and as Scannell put it, “no event, no history” (ibid.). If historiography is official written history, then unofficial history must be those events not accounted for by historians but which nevertheless occupy a position in the country’s lifespan – perhaps they could be referred to as histories in the collective memory, i.e. events whose historicity is undeniable.

The debate over what constitutes history is vast and seems unending, with historians and anthropologists claiming a small or large part of the historical terrain (Carr, 1961), Tosh (2009). Indeed, there are different and competing versions of historical accounts. Whereas Scannell (2004) affirms that past events inform the writing of history, Eckert and Jones (2002) document a historiography that looks to the quotidian (not necessarily a distant past) as sources, objects and methods of doing history. The essays summarised by Eckert and Jones reflect the ramifications of colonial and post-colonial African realities viz. the production of iron, oral narratives of slavery, photography, African festivals, objects, and the interplay of colonisers, missionaries and indigenous people in the ordinary (and to some extent extraordinary) game of life. They conclude that the analyses made possible by everyday life history shape an understanding of modern Africa while revealing the utility in accommodating multiple social and cultural accounts inevitably arising from historical writings.

If we follow Scannell’s (2004), and Eckert and Jones’ (2002) accounts in the essays, ‘Broadcasting historiography and historicity’ and ‘Historical writings about everyday life’ respectively, then the discovery of a niche in which filmic depictions of the past (as popular art expressions) find articulation is made possible. And that is a major concern of this project. The prevailing intelligence among Nigerian audiences – and indeed elsewhere – is that the daily events in the country provide a pool from which the filmmakers draw stories. For instance, soon after the inauguration of President Goodluck Jonathan in May 2007, a film titled *Jonathan* was released. During the eastern *Okija* crises, innumerable films were made to portray the disturbing events that amounted to the ‘fetishisation’ of politics in the south-eastern parts of Nigeria. The Niger Delta upshots have also found expressive outlets in films like *Militants* (2007),

Crude War (2011) and many others. So there is the reflection of the everyday, the quotidian character of the films which depict at a given moment, the socio-cultural realities of the people. There is also the historical property to the same films since their historicity is attested to by the ‘storyable’ events (Scannell) they portray, events which historians, journalists, sociologists or anthropologists narrate or investigate for the significance they bear. For indeed, we can all bear witness to historical truth. Such events are facts which, together with or like the historian, the filmmakers use as raw materials for the interpretation and representation of the society. This comparison recognises the significant differences in writing history and filmic storytelling.

3.3 The Past on Screen: An Introduction

Filmic representations of the past in the dominant filmmaking culture in the world, namely Hollywood, merit our attention. Arguably, filmic attempts at depicting a people’s history date back to the 1920s although Glancy (2005) argues that the phenomenon mushroomed between the 1930s and 1950s and was perfected in the American film industry (Hollywood). The literature on American and European historical films is extensive. Such films as those featuring official history on the world wars, slave trade and freedom, colonialism and politics, civil rights, immigration, racism, and past presidents of the United States have engaged historians’ attention for decades. Other events of the past – unofficial history – have also found their way to the audio-visual medium, but these are less interrogated by history scholars and more by film critics and academics in cultural studies. Leading historian and film scholar, Rosenstone (1995a, 2006), has contributed immensely to the debates over the acceptance of filmic-history as valid history. Hannu Salmi (1995) points out that film is not only a source for historical writing but also an end point i.e. an outlet for history.

With every reference to the past on screen, the scholar is invariably looking at what is more commonly referred to by scholars before him as the historical film. In this sense, it appears that the past is equated with history. When Rosenstone (1995a, 2006), Hesling (2001) and Bickford-Smith & Mendelsohn (2007), to mention a few, write about representing the past on screen, they are addressing historical films in the light of Rosenstone’s (1995a) definition. Rosenstone’s (2006: 47-48) understanding of the

depiction of the past, which is often a past that is unitary, closed and complete, “focuses on individuals, offers little room for doubt or provides the look of buildings, landscapes, costumes and artifacts.” Rosenstone asserts that, for a film to be labelled historical, it must submit to the prevailing historical narratives of the day. What about filmic constructions of past events that fail to fall under this rubric of historical films? Nollywood is inundated with such films. But what do scholars make of films that, without necessarily drawing from historical discourses, still construct a past that probably belongs to popular/collective memory as in the case of *Anini* (2005)? This question opens up the debate on how Nollywood constructs a national past. Without necessarily drawing from known historical text, but applying a mix of official and unofficial ‘history’, and in some cases popular wisdom and rumour, it develops narratives that Barber refers to as being inclusive, syncretic and hybrid. Nollywood, too, historicises political events.

Hesling (2001) asserts that historians have lost their monopoly on the past. Indeed, every discipline mediates the past albeit to varying degrees. Just as journalists (Scannell, 2004), sociologists, anthropologists, geologists, archaeologists and historians probe existing peoples, materials and events to make sense of the human condition, filmmakers also delve into the ocean of the past to mine stories. Obviously, those filmmaking attempts will also be selective. It is only when the past has been accounted for systematically, chronologically and empirically that official history surfaces. Zelizer explains that journalists have a special stake in using events as markers of collective memory. “Central players in the creation of collective memory, journalists assert their authority over history by determining what is socially significant and then constructing themselves as the objective authorities over what they deem newsworthy” (Zelizer 1992:191) in Leavy (2005). Historiography has developed owing to the numerous sources (including reportage) available to historians.

Hesling (2001) also argues that filmmakers engaging the past approach it with a different set of questions and strategies from historians, and so will necessarily arrive at different explanations, interpretations and constructions from their scientific counterparts. He underscores the difference between written history and ‘narrativised’ or filmic constructions of the same event in the following words:

Swearing allegiance to the powers of artistic imagination, rather than to the laws of scientific logic, they (filmmakers) use narration purely for dramaturgical reasons, thereby transforming the historical past into a symbolic space where, often to the historical profession's utter dismay, imaginary and factual events easily intermingle (2001: 3)

He further states that historical films, like other works of art, borrow from existing materials to produce stereotypical, inter-textual and cinematically coded depictions of a selective past. Evident in Hesling's work also is the incessant quibbles from historians "crying foul" (Rosenstone) about accurate and inaccurate constructions. His identification and espousal of the limitations of the audio-visual medium provide a valid argument and an invitation to historians, critics and viewers to re-consider their appreciation as well as interpretation of historical films.

As already noted, Hollywood's visions of history and politics gave rise to an avalanche of academic literature on history via the screen. Other film cultures too have been exhibiting comparable traits of projecting historical discourses on documentary and feature films. Notable examples emerge from Hollywood's contender in filmmaking, namely Bollywood. A remarkable analysis of history and film as practiced in Bollywood is Bhaskar Sarkar's book-length treatment of India's Partition, and its aftermath on the people of India titled *Mourning the Nation: Indian Cinema in the Wake of the Partition* (2009). Sarkar's invaluable contribution to the history and cinema discourse deploys documentaries, television serials and feature films, through textual and document analyses to interrogate complex questions of nationhood, civil war, identity, dislocation, loss and post-Partition trauma. He discusses, with the aid of interviews and archival materials, the dynamics, scope and limitations of media representation while locating the symbolic, visual and dialogic strands of "an Indian paradigm of cinematic mourning" (p. 26). In many ways, Sarkar's account is similar to the Holocaust films and their attendant academic debates (p. 13). Bollywood's treatment of the past also goes beyond the Partition narratives to awaken other aspects of British colonialism, albeit through a fictional account in *Lagaan* (2001), and more recently, a historical marital alliance between a Muslim Mughal emperor and a Rajput princess in *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008) among many others. Later additions to filming the past witnessed African efforts, much of which originated from contact and collaboration with Europeans.

3.4 African Past on Film

Much of what is required here to discuss the African past on screen has been laid out in the preceding chapter. The efforts by historians to interpret the past through filmic lens have been highlighted. Of primary importance though is not the historians' validation of such attempts but an overview of some of the prominent films beginning from the 1970s. Of course, the leading figure is Ousmane Sembene. Sembene did not only re-create the past on screen but he also took African language to the screen, shooting films in his native Senegalese *Wolof*. As already noted, his films were tailored towards activism and the rejection of Western imagination of the African continent. His was a distinctly African mode of narrative representation in which he utilised the perspective of popular masses, especially in *Ceddo*, (Rosen 2005: 721) and wherein African oral tradition is interrogated and problematised.

Below is a list of African films, made between 1970 and 2009, depicting various aspects of African history.

1970 – *Monangambee* is a parody on colonial ignorance shot in Algeria by Sarah Maldoror. It features the imprisonment of Angolan writer Luandino Vieira, by Portuguese colonial authorities in a labour camp in Cape Verde Islands

1971 – *Emitai* by Ousmane Sembene portrays the revolt against French colonial authority by the people of Diola, Senegal, for being forced into the French colonial army and the requisition of agricultural products by the colonisers

1972 – *Sambizanga* was shot in 1972 in Congo-Brazzaville and is a portrayal of the initial phase of Angola liberation struggle against Portuguese colonial administration

1977 – *Ceddo* (Sembene's 5th feature film) reveals Sembene's historical vision as he recasts the history of Islam, Christianity and slavery in the Senegambia region

1979 – *West Indies* by Med Hondo who translates complex political dialectics that deal with Africans and people of African descent, but which take place in Africa and West Indies

1983 – *Wend Kuuni* by Gaston Kabore about pre-colonial Burkina Faso

1986 – *Sarraounia* by Med Hondo, battle between Queen Sarraounia and French Colonial Forces, and based on a novel by Nigerien author Abdoulaye Mamani

1987/8 – *Camp de Thiaroye*, Sembene and Faty Sow re-tell the colonial story of how French-speaking West African soldiers who helped defend France during WWII are detained in a prison camp in Dakar before repatriation while those who protested half-pay were massacred

1988 – *Testament* by John Akomfrah chronicles the portrait of an African politician who is forced into exile following a coup d'état. It is a journalist's attempt to unravel the true story of Ghanaians' political lives in a post-colonial period

1988/9 – *Heritage Africa* by Ghanaian Kwah Ansah in which he explores the ravages of colonialism to African identity and engages a return-to-your-roots dialogue

1988/9 – *Mortu Nega* (The one whom death refused) is Flora Gomes' first feature that enacts Guinea-Bissau's war of independence in a blend of contemporary history and mythology

1993 – *Sankofa* (slave trade) by Haile Gerima is an Akan word that means "we must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward" and is a film about Maafa, the African holocaust

1997 – *Buud Yam* by Gaston Kabore is a Burkinabe historical drama about a young orphan accused of his sister's death. His effort to regain his reputation leads him to his roots

1999 – *La Genese* by Cheick Oumar Sissoko draws inspirations and lessons from the Bible in order to portray the conflict that ravage the African continent

2000 – *Adanggaman* by Ivorian-born director Roger Gnoan M'Bala is a film on war between Africans and European slave trade practices wherein the roles played by Africans in the 'human' trade is mirrored

2000 – *Daresalam* (Let there be peace) by Chadian Issa Serge Coelo on the ravages of the civil war and post-independence, in Chad between the 1960s and 1970s

2000 – *Lumumba* by Raoul Peck, a political thriller which follows the life of Patrice Lumumba of the DR Congo in the months before and after its independence from Belgium in 1960

2001 – *Little Senegal* was made by Algerian Rachid Bouchareb wherein he explored an African's search for his ancestors who he believed were sold to slavery

2004 – *The Hero* (O Heroi) by Angolan Zeze Gamboa used the background of the 3-decade war to weave a story of love and courage

2005 – *Sometimes in April* by Raoul Peck examined the 1994 Rwandan genocide during which close to a million minority Tutsis were systematically murdered

2009 – *Moloch Tropical* by Raoul Peck revisits political violence in Haiti. The film was partly inspired by Haitian revolutionary leader, Henri Christophe (1767 – 1820)

The list is by no means exhaustive, but it provides a glimpse of African efforts at portraying their history on screen. The first four chapters in the collection of essays edited by Françoise Pfaff (2004), *Focus on African Films*, provide more comprehensive material on African films and history. I would admit that to repeat the above for first generation Nigerian films, and then for Nollywood (popular culture) video films has proved problematic. The early Nigerian films made on celluloid have gone into extinction, and there is no single text that holistically discusses such films as the one just mentioned. This suggests that Nigerian film and history/the past has not received sufficient scholarly attention. The researcher has to rely on existing literature and oral communication with filmmakers in order to sift through the titles and themes of films.

In his introduction to *Nigerian Video Films*, Haynes (2000) observed in the following statements that African film criticism has been disconnected from the study of African popular arts:

This academic disconnection encourages a startling perception of how fundamentally African film has not been a popular art...it is capital intensive, it requires a high degree of technical and aesthetic education, which normally entails the ideologies and mentalities of the modern-elite sector, it is enmeshed with official bodies of various kinds, and, as African cineastes have been complaining from the beginning, they are forced to depend on international circuits because distribution problems inhibit their relationship with African audiences (p. 14)

These factors have huge implications for filmmaking practice and consumption on the continent, implications which invariably flow into the intellectual engagement with the films and videos. Haynes extended his comparative analysis of Nigerian and African cinema in a 2011 article in which he explains the origins of African cinema practice and Nollywood recognising the deep differences in production values, funding, distribution and consumption while identifying the similarities evident in both film cultures. The early African filmmakers were not commercial in nature whereas the Nigerian and Ghanaian (put together because of their marked similarities) were avidly so. These analyses shed light on the distinct categories that each film culture privileges.

Historians concern themselves with the historical film since it provides an alternative way of doing history. In this research, the focus is not so much on ‘another’ history, but on the analyses and interpretations of popular media’s engagement with the past. The difference between what historians do and what this research does is that while the former looks for facts – which Carr (1961) refers to as a duty, not a virtue – and (to borrow Rosenstone’s words) “true and false inventions” on the screen, my research examines the motivations, narrative techniques, ideologies and reception of films that mediate a known past. The focus of activity in this research is the African film. Whereas the film historian would not be concerned with ownership, the present study examines Nigerian films made by Nigerians in line with the African Film Charter and Pfaff (1986: 8) who noted that “what constitutes African cinema is not the fact that it is made with African actors or even directed by an African. African cinema has to contain imagery, symbols and values pertaining to African societies.” In the edited volume of Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn (2007), the collection of films investigated constitutes those made by Africans and non-Africans alike. It was sufficient for the subject to be historical to merit the contributors’ attention.

Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn (2007) quoting Rosenstone noted:

Accuracy (as in ‘facts alone’) was not the sole criterion, he argued, for good history, whether written or filmic. Instead, what we demand from history, in whatever medium, is to be told what to think about ‘the facts’. Historical filmic dramas, he insists, can, just as well as written histories, ‘recount, explain, interpret and make meaning out of people and events in the past (p. 2)

Similarly, Toplin's observation on the historical film's 'ability' to communicate important ideas about the past is useful, "the two-hour (or more) movie can arouse emotions, stir curiosity, and prompt viewers to consider significant questions." (Introduction *Black & White in History*, p. 3). If Nollywood tells us "what to think about the facts" of the past, i.e. if it re-enacts the past, can we deny it because, for reasons mentioned above, it fails to meet pre-conceived western ideas of the historical genre?

The concern of Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn as well as Toplin is noticeably history, and its advancement through various media in this case, film. This is indicated in their edited volume which combines works and films from Africans and non-Africans although the unifying element of the essays is the geographical character of the African continent. The contributors of the edited volume draw together films probing historical (pre-, colonial and post-colonial Africa, war, slave trade etc.) as well as contemporary subjects (war, genocide, ethnic and religious rivalry) of an African past. The editors are loyalists of the Rosenstone school, identifying the latter's descriptive categories: mainstream vs. innovative films, true vs. false inventions and recognising Sembene, in Rosenstone's words – as filmic historian (Introduction, *Black and White in History*). As historians, their quest is on complementary and alternative sources of historical studies. The utility of the films examined in Bickford-Smith and Mendelsohn's volume consists in etching history or events of the past (which may or may not have been aggregated by historians) on the minds of viewers in differing social spaces. Often, these films are subjected to criticisms of (non-) accuracy and in many cases, classified according to Rosenstone's (1995a) true and false invention(s) categories. Since then, history on film has taken on various dimensions and genres.

The historical film is a sub-genre of the epic. And there exist epics that are not historical (Nollywood has many of this). Other sub-genres which relate to historical depictions are the 'docudrama', a tentative description of films focusing on actual subjects and personalities and the documentary film. These categories of films represent efforts at portraying past and present events or people of various climes by semi-fictionalising characters, thus combining elements of the documentary film and drama.

Early African cinema did engage historical subjects in ways similar to the Hollywood practice, albeit designed to subvert western notions of the continent. Of the

representational modes deployed by Nollywood practitioners, the dynamics through which the practitioners mediate the past is discussed in the fifth chapter. The idea of dramatizing a public past is not only fascinating to viewers, but also revealing – giving clues to past customs, traditions, behaviours and attitudes. It reveals yet another interpretation of periods long gone or of the immediate past, known events or famous people while upholding certain ideologies over others.

Discussing South Africans' and Mozambicans' resistance to apartheid and Portuguese colonisation respectively, Cham (2002: 52) cited in Green (1997: 16) refers to films made within a short period of the actual events as “the present as history”. Such filmmakers, as Green notes, “charted the events of the day with an immediacy born of the almost instant recognition of their historical significance” (ibid.), a point which Scannell (2004) also made. Whether the filmic construction is ancient history, modern or contemporary, or a past belonging only to popular memory, and therefore not (yet) committed to historical texts, such constructions achieve similar objectives. They fuse the past with the present, aid public recollection and advance cultural and historical knowledge even if that knowledge is severely contested. For example, Yoruba history has several versions; Gen. Abacha's death has at least two plausible causes and Lawrence Anini (*The Law*) was not the only armed robber in Benin City, Nigeria in 1986. One can ask whether his notoriety was heightened by the involvement of royalty in his gang, by a state oppositional conspiracy or, as Marenin (1987) noted, by public opinion.

Africans have variously conceived notions and glimpses of the past in their filmic narratives. The first set of African films was characterised by decolonisation, and the reconstruction of an African past. They bore the historical film burden, and were not regarded as popular art. Such films were made by educated French-speaking West African men (and later women) on celluloid.

3.5 Indigenous Filmmaking Prior to 1992: Nigerians Filming the Past

Although the fourth chapter deals specifically with political filmmaking, this section is added here to contribute to the conversations on African filmmaking and specifically to show the differences between Nollywood and the filmmaking practice in the rest of the

continent. Filmmaking in Nigeria has undergone three significant stages. The first is the colonial or pre-independence stage; the second is the post-independence period while the third is the post-indigenization period (Ekwuazi 1991: 1). The first stage was characterised by propagandist films which were intended to educate the colonies as well as inform the world of the developments that resulted from British efforts. Britain established a Colonial Film Unit (CFU) through the Central Office of Information in London, The British Council and the Crown Film Unit to achieve its objectives. Church and missionary activities were also involved in deploying film to attain education and evangelisation. At the post-independence stage, the Federal Government had taken over at the helm of affairs through the Film Division in the Ministry of Information. There was also the State Government division which saw to the production and distribution of documentaries. With the Indigenization Decree of 1972 and Decree No. 61 of 1979, the Nigerian Film Corporation (NFC) was formed although it effectively became functional in 1982.

Ekwuazi's (1991) book *Film in Nigeria*, a substantial and an early contribution to the discourse of film specifically from a historical perspective, documents the political, economic and cultural environment in which film developed, policies that enabled indigenous productions, the influence of the Yoruba folkloric traditions on the industry. It also discusses societal influences on the films, censorship and reception of early Nigerian films. Undoubtedly, Ekwuazi's work is a significant starting point which also documents the earliest titles of some documentaries and feature films from the 1960s to the 1990s. What is missing in this work is the content or story lines of some of the key productions listed. The search for Nigerians' first attempts at depicting the past which would have set the trend for discussions in this work was partially futile. Without asking for too much, it leaves the reader wondering, if only from the titles, what such films might have explored given that most of them are no longer existent.

Another addition to Nigerian film scholarship is Françoise Balogun's *The Cinema in Nigeria* (1987). The missing element in Ekwuazi's book was to a reasonable extent delivered in Balogun's. She credits Francis Oladele as the pioneer of Nigerian filmmaking (p. 55) with the shooting of *Kongi's Harvest* in 1970. But Ekwuazi's account produces a conflicting report. He lists *Bound for Lagos* as an indigenous feature length film produced in Nigeria in 1962. In spite of the discrepancy, Balogun's work is

informative as it provides, not only brief biographical notes on filmmakers such as Francis Oladele, Sanya Dosunmu, Ola Balogun, Adamu Halilu, Jab Adu and Eddie Ugboma to mention a few, but also summaries of their films. While Kongi's Harvest was inspired by Nigeria's military coup d'états, *Bullfrog in the Sun* (based on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*) examines aspects of the Biafran war in what Balogun refers to as "a film of high technical quality and great political/historical interest" (p. 56).

In his *Cry Freedom* (1980/81), Ola Balogun depicts the conflicts arising from colonialism and liberation struggles. The film is mentioned here because of its treatment of colonialism and the nationalist tendencies that sought to overthrow it. Balogun (1987) notes that "intellectuals who enjoy abstractions in films praised it, but the popular audience who, above all, want a good story, rebuked it because spectators want a war film with battle scenes and blood and are indifferent to moral and political lessons" (p. 66). Apart from the numerous Yoruba films (Ekwuazi 1991: 16-18), Eddie Ugboma's films are of interest for their exploration of historic-contemporary themes. These films are discussed again in the fourth chapter in order to locate them within the history and discourse of political filmmaking in Nigeria.

The year 1992 is marked off as the period which brought about commercially successful video filmmaking. It was a boom period in the sense that, before then, film production and consumption had plunged in the late 1970s-1980s following a national economic downturn wherein the film enterprise was an incredibly expensive one.

3.6 Nollywood 1992-

The name Nollywood was coined in 2002, ten years after the release of the film, *Living in Bondage* (1992), that opened the floodgate to would-be producers and directors (See Haynes' *What's in a name?* (2007e). There is a growing number of scholarly texts that attempt to explore and theorise the video revolution as seen in Nigeria in the last twenty years. From the edited volume by Foluke Ogunleye *African Video Film Today*, Jonathan Haynes' *Nigerian Video Films*, Pierre Barrots's *Nollywood: The Video Film Phenomenon*, *Viewing African Films in the 21st Century* to the newest additions by Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (*Global Nollywood*). Critical academic

attention and interdisciplinary studies evident in the fairly large number of journal articles investigating various forms of Nollywood's cultural articulation in global contexts attest to the growth and significance of the Nigerian film industry. The texts mentioned above contain substantial details of Nollywood's origins; hence the film industry's genealogy will be omitted from this section.

Nigerian cinema, especially from 1992, did not engage directly in resistance or the reconstruction of Western versions of the African story. It simply keyed into the demands and aspirations of popular minds. Nollywood therefore provided an outlet for the identification, problematization and assuagement of Nigerian anxieties. This led to a vast collection of genres which question, satirize, glorify and allegorize the Nigerian socio-political terrain (see Haynes 2006 and Adesokan 2009b: 601 for titles).

In the 1980s, the Nigerian government made investments to develop the national television infrastructure from which several would-be Nollywood practitioners would emerge. There were also national media policies that required indigenous content which undeniably paved the way for Nollywood. On 6 November 2010, the Nigerian government under the leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan announced an entertainment fund intervention from which video film practitioners and other artists could access financial aid for their productions. The single-digit-interest-rate-loan is formally referred to as the Nigerian Creative and Entertainment Industry Stimulation Loan Scheme. President Jonathan announced:

Nollywood is getting set to take over the world. I recognise the role of entertainment in the Nigerian economy and this government will support an industry that makes Nigerians happy. I have given them direct order to make sure entertainers have \$200 million worth of loan to work with. Make more movies, write and produce more hit songs, provide jobs and give hope to our people... (*The Guardian*, July 19, 2012, p.22)

Since the inception of Nollywood in 1992, this is the first national support provided for the industry. There have been state collaboration in the financing of films, but never has there been a large one on a federal scale. The Nigerian Export-Import Bank (NEXIM) and Bank of Industry (BOI) are custodians and administrators of the entertainment fund. Both institutions require feasible business proposals and collaterals from film practitioners. This government intervention has received enormous press attention and analyses from filmmakers and media critics. Presently, only US-based Tony Abulu has

obtained a loan for his film *Dr. Bello*. A first generation filmmaker, Ola Balogun, Yinka Ogundaisi, former consultant to the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB), and Kenny Ogungbe have expressed misgivings on the effective management and allocation of the fund. Colleagues in the industry have also interrogated the rationale behind awarding financial support to a Nigerian emigrant when numerous filmmakers resident in the country are without aid. The reactions from Robert Orya, NEXIM bank chief, is that the “approved loan shall be disbursed in line with modalities structured during appraisal process... that the NEXIM Bank will soon be reaching an agreement with not just filmmakers but other segments of the creative industry like music, visual arts and others” (Osae-Brown, 2012). It can be gleaned from these comments that only those who meet specific lending criteria can access the loan.

Regarding the question on what scholars make of films that, without necessarily drawing from historical discourses, still construct a political past that with considerable certainty belongs to popular memory, the filmmakers’ engagement with such narratives has found expression among several scholars under titles different from the historical. In works like “political critiques” (Haynes, 2006), “practicing democracy” (Adesokan, 2009b), “socio-political commentator”, “juju and justice in the movies” (McCall, 2004) to mention a few, traces of Nigerian history in video films are evident, but the authors refrain from using the concept of ‘history’. Elsewhere, such films are labelled sociological documents reflecting the mood of a particular period, or ideological constructs, advancing particular political or moral values or myths, indigenous history, the way that colonized peoples conceptualize their own historical experience, popular memory, the repertoire of cultural scripts constructed by film, television. The prevalence of films dealing with Nigerian history and the past on screen is both denied and under-researched.

3.7 Nollywood and History?

Prior to the start of this study, preliminary interviews conducted with Nigerian film scholars revealed that history in Nollywood was impossible to research, was a problematic category and an elusive topic. Some scholars averred that as popular culture, Nollywood had no business with the past (O. Okome, personal communication,

August 2011). With the increasing number of Nigerian films dealing with traces of Nigerian history and past, why do scholars and filmmakers shy away from naming these films 'historical' and why have they refrained from treating them as such?

Four reasons are suggested. 1) The dominance of the Hollywood historical film model seemingly makes the non-western historical videos incongruous with the dominant paradigm in terms of verisimilitude and freedom of speech. Scholars claim that in Nigerian films, anachronisms abound, and the filmmakers are not entirely free to represent controversial subjects. 2) The fear of censorship prevents filmmakers from directly engaging historical subjects especially (as is often the norm) when the intention is to condemn the violation of democratic principles. The result of this fear is a deluge of political satires which includes, before the opening credits, a caveat to the viewer against the semblance of real persons, living or dead. 3) Bureaucracy and costs of accessing public facilities. Nigerian filmmaker, Chico Ejiro, once narrated the ordeal he was put through upon request to shoot a scene at the international airport in Lagos (personal communication, 2010). 4) The amount of research that a historical reconstruction demands is not economically attractive to the filmmakers given the low budgets available to them.

In an attempt to overcome these hitches, the filmmakers simply compromise the production experience while maintaining their historical leanings defiantly even if consciously anachronistic. Thus, accuracy is lost and what is left is referred to by elite Nigerians as a caricature of the past. Even the critically acclaimed Hollywood blockbuster, *Titanic* (1997) suffered its share of intolerance by historians (Saab, 2001). Regarding James Cameron's anachronisms in the film, Saab makes interesting points when she notes that, "movies made in the present, regardless of their historical subject matter, are always about the present" and "... historical periodization is not absolute, that cultural politics are always fluid, and that the relationship between history and popular culture is often uneasy and complicated" (p. 718) The assumption therefore, that Nollywood does not produce historical films merely because of anachronistic portrayals or that the themes are ahistorical requires validation.

Another argument against the notion of Nigerian historical films is that most Nollywood films are set in contemporary times. When films are set in pre-colonial or colonial times (e.g. *Sitanda*), anachronisms are inevitable, thus negating or ill-deserving

the title ‘history’ or the past. Admittedly anachronisms occur in many films even among those made by the best Nollywood directors (Barrot, 2008; Iyanda, personal communication, 2013). Whether or not they are the result of under-researched pre-production work, or intentional designs of the directors (who find themselves financially constrained, with little training and so have to compromise production values to make a film), film scholars and critics have come to learn to read the films under different labels from the ‘historical’. The argument here is that there are some Hollywood historical films widely acclaimed as such which were not set in the historical period. After all, historians recognise ancient, modern and contemporary periods in the narrativisation of the past (Falola and Heaton, 2008). Clint Eastwood’s 2009 film about 1995 South African events – *Invictus* – is an example. Eastwood portrayed the period in 1994 when, after release from prison, Nelson Mandela mobilised black and white South Africans to support the Springboks in the 1995 Rugby World Cup. Perhaps it would be stating the obvious to say that the history of South Africa is incomplete without the towering figure of Mandela. *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) is another illustration. The genocide from which the story was constructed occurred less than two decades ago. And a third representation is *Heart and Stone*, a 1995 documentary featuring Govan Mbeki, who played a major role in overthrowing apartheid in South Africa before his death in 2001.

Josef Gugler (2004) calls for the critic’s responsibility in assessing films that provide narratives of African history and its people. He identified the important ways by which fictional representations depart from reality, noting that any worthwhile assessment of fictionalised portrayal of Africa must take cognizance of the knowledge of Africa that is already known through other means (p. 81). Cham (2004) and Gadjigo (2004) note the prominence of Sembene, who “became the first Soviet-trained African filmmaker and the first writer-director and producer to bring images of the African past to the screen” (p. 38). Gadjigo (2004) explicates the motion picture thus: “...the power of the moving image is not limited to the way it mirrors our present; we also receive our ideas about the past from motion pictures and television in feature films, docudramas, miniseries, and network documentaries” (p. 35)

A notable feature of Gadjigo’s (2004) argument is the distinction he makes between Hollywood’s historical representation paradigm and that of Africans especially

in the figure of Sembene. According to Gadjigo, while American filmmakers portray the past as a “setting for action and romance” e.g. *Titanic* (1997), *Gone with the wind* (1939) without necessarily problematising that past (this position is arguable as Rosenstone (2006) has demonstrated the contrary), Sembene and other African cineastes used the audio-visual medium to subvert Western images of the African continent. Glancy (2005) keenly observes the politics of representation in *The Patriot* (2000) (self and other) evident in Hollywood films where careful selections and avoidances are made. Whereas Americans pander to public appeal and profit (p. 38), Africans re-tell their own stories which have long been misrepresented by and tilted to favour the Western world. Thus, the counter-hegemonic position of early African filmmakers drew the criticism, cynicism and politicization of the audio-visual medium. Sanctions were imposed; funding withdrawn and exhibition was delayed if not totally prohibited “...as the banning in France of *Emitai* and *Camp de Thiaroye*, the decade-long argument between Sembene and Senghor over *Ceddo*, and the stifling of Samori also imply, the field of African history itself has become a site of competing and contentious imaginations” (Gadjigo 2004: 39). As will be discussed below, the response of those in power to political and historical representation shows that the films are seen as subversive.

The intrinsic power of art to communicate is enormous, and Barber (1987) already attested to it in the following statement, “But popular arts are also much more than constellations of social, political, and economic relationships-they are expressive acts. Their most important attribute is their power to communicate. This power is eloquently testified to by the frequency with which they are repressed” (p. 3). Ekwuazi’s (2001) account of Francis Oladele’s 1970s experience with *Things Fall Apart* is telling: “while...shooting...was going on, security agents came and sealed up my location, bringing shooting to an abrupt end. On enquiry I was told that I should not make a film about *Things Fall Apart* because nothing was falling apart in Nigeria” (p. 280). Eddie Ugboma had similar threats with his 1970s and 80s films.

Directly relevant to this research is the article by Chukwuma Okoye (2007a) *History and Nation Imagination: Igbo and the Videos of Nationalism* in which he details – with examples from two Nigerian films – the ideological and discursive standpoints from which history is mediated. Using the background of the Nigerian civil war (1967 –

1970) which creates settings for *Battle of Love* and *Laraba*, he argues that the marginalised peoples of Nigeria especially the Igbos find refuge in “ethno-nationalism”. For him, ethnic subjectivities are the basis of the positioned rendering of the past evident in the two films discussed. Similarly, Francoise Ugochukwu (2014) examined in a book chapter, *Nigerian Video-films on History: Love in Vendetta* and the 1987 Kano riots, the problems of ethnicity and religious conflicts among Christians and Muslims, and how such tensions affect marriages and families. Like popular culture theorists, notably Barber (1987), Ugochukwu concludes that Nollywood has provided alternative spaces for freedom of speech to people who were previously denied. She posits that such spaces engender national dialogues where official forms of communication have failed.

This segment has noted African’s efforts to make films about their past and some of the contexts under which these were done. It showed the themes explored by those cineastes among which (de)colonisation stood tall. Through these films, Africans wrested their past from colonial narrators. What these films achieved have not been sufficiently articulated by academics because of the gaps in audience studies in Africa, and also as Haynes (2011) argued, such films were rarely seen by African audiences. However, the banning the films faced in several European countries bears some testimony to their impact, not only in the decolonisation discourse, but also in the power of the audio-visual medium as an effective tool for retelling the past.

If the history of African and, in particular, Nigerian cinema shared any similarity, the next logical step would immediately examine how Nigerian filmmakers have undertaken the construction of their past. It has already been stated above that there are similarities and dissimilarities. The present day Nigerian filmmaking has deep roots in the Yoruba popular travelling theatre. The Yorubas are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria (with Igbos and Hausas as the other two). The literature on the practice and consumption of popular arts in Africa is extensive. Therefore, an understanding of these forms of expression is useful.

3.8 On Popular Arts in Africa

Africans have experienced various forms of popular arts ranging from paintings, music and concert parties to travelling theatres, literature and video films. Such art forms have narrated the daily cultural experiences of their creators and consumers. They have also mediated the past and opened up debates on historicising national and political events of the state. Scholars of African popular arts have recognised its interdisciplinary nature and Haynes (2000) in his thoughtful introductory essay to the edited volume, *Nigerian Video Films*, outlined social history, anthropology, literary theory and criticism as well as cultural studies of the Birmingham School as predecessors of popular art and culture (p. 13). As a starting point, the debates on popular arts and culture is approached in this research through the work of Karin Barber (1987) because it encompasses a wide range of art forms across the continent, including the Yoruba travelling theatre, which is a precursor to the video films. Barber's work is not without limitations, as will be seen below, yet she more than any other scholar is mindful of those limitations. For as she admits the study of popular arts is akin to battling the hydra.

There have been various debates and interpretations surrounding the notion of popular arts and culture. Among these are Obiechina (1973), Graburn (1976), Fabian (1978), Barber (1987), Hall (1998), Street (2001) to mention a few. These are by no means the first or last scholarly efforts on popular arts and culture, but they are, together with others, significant contributions to the theorisation of popular arts and culture in Africa. A definition of 'popular' or 'culture' is problematic, evasive and political. Street (2001:302-3) noted succinctly that "the very definition of popular culture is political, sanctioning some forms of culture and marginalising others".

For Hall (1998), an interpretation of popular culture begins with grasping the constituents of the 'popular', a term understood by Barber (1987) as the 'people' or the grassroots. Hall notes that, "the structuring principle of the popular...is the tensions and oppositions between what belongs to the central domain of elite or dominant culture, and the culture of the periphery. It is this opposition which constantly structures the domain of culture into popular and the non-popular" (1998: 448). So the idea of contestation is central to his idea of popular culture. Hall provides a common definition of popular culture as that which also gains popularity because masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and seem to enjoy them to the full. In

another sense, popular culture is loosely understood as the expression of art originating from the people and designed for the populace. The notion of what constitutes popular is indefinite, somewhat evasive, and a generally accepted definition is even less desirable among scholars. This is precisely because popular culture is broad and has multiple meanings which are dependent on one's point of departure. It denotes various forms of artistic productions and expressions of the desires, aspirations, grievances, oppositions and general dispositions of the people, not so much their eating and drinking as differentiated by Englert (2008). According to Hall, "... no whole, authentic, coherent and autonomous popular culture lies outside the field of force or the relations of cultural power and domination" (p. 447). He ties the study of popular culture or what the term is, properly speaking, to containment, resistance and acceptance which are typically exemplified in cultural relations, cultural power and cultural implantation. This is where he begins to build his argument on the nature and component of popular culture as well as his outline of what popular culture is not. "It is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture – already fully formed – might be simply 'expressed'. But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. This is why popular culture matters" (Hall, 1998: 453). Arguing along these lines, Barber notes that popular culture is unofficial, i.e. if 'unofficial' is understood as circumventing state mechanisms. She states: "popular art is modern and urban-oriented, and represents a culture that can be recognised by its unofficial character and novelty...they combine elements from the traditional and the metropolitan cultures in unprecedented conjunctures, with the effect of radical departure from both" (1987: 13).

Or as Fabian (1978) asserted when highlighting the connotations that popular culture might have, "it signifies, potentially at least, processes occurring behind the back of established powers and accepted interpretations..." (p. 315). Fabian compared three popular forms of Zairean culture existing between 1950s and 1970s: song, religion and painting along the lines of male-female relationship. Taking context, forms and function as well as narrative structure as frames of reference, he underlined the notion that these expressive media are constantly engaged in processes of identity formation. He concludes:

...it is equally clear that popular culture does not consist of a play of pure forms and structural relations. Substantial issues are being formulated; political-ideological choices are made, and distinctive expressions are

being created. In other words, the observable processes are such that we cannot dispense with notions of intention and intellectual content. Nor can we neglect relations of power and domination (Fabian, 1978: 328).

Here again, the subject of power arises, but Fabian does not show how, within each popular cultural mode, the relations of “power and domination” occur. With his single and brilliant examples of each form: love songs, mythologised Adam/Eve narrative and mermaid paintings, Fabian leaves the reader without a clue of other genres within popular songs, religious teachings and paintings, and how one differs from another.

As one of the leading scholars of African popular arts, Barber gave the following definition: popular art is a category that seems to be characterised above all by its inclusiveness and its apparently infinite elasticity (1987: 6). This is similar to the position adopted by John Collins, whose definition of popular art was cited in Barber (1987: 10) as a popular syncretic form “which has continuity with traditional life and which has assimilated ideas creatively from the West, resulting in a qualitatively novel phenomenon”. This new form is often accepted based on its creative uniqueness or rejected as something inferior to the ‘authentic’. In his study of three expressions of popular culture in Zaire, Fabian (1978) also argues that “this form of popular art owes its existence to highly creative and original processes” (p. 315).

Further, Hall (1998) highlights the cultural flux which is found in different historical periods; indicating that the tensions evident in popular art forms will take on varying manifestations. He rejected every form of static culture. Cultural struggle takes on many forms: incorporation, distortion, resistance, negotiation and recuperation. He refers to tradition as a tricky term in popular culture, a vital element which has little to do with the persistence of old forms. For Hall, “popular culture is one of the sites where this struggle for and against the culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured (p. 239).

There is a Euro-triadic art paradigm, traditional-popular-elite, which has been espoused by scholars over the years. But even this has been problematised by Karin Barber. Popular art addresses all forms of living, all classes of people, but is generated by the common, ordinary folk as distinct from the privileged ruling class (characterised by wealth, position and power). The traditional is the authentic communal, participatory,

non-profit oriented and official construction of art. Barber cites Mamadou Diawara (1985) to contest the 'official' and at the same time, subversive character attributed to traditional arts. Traditional art dates back to the pre-colonial and colonial era. Implicitly, there is an assumption that this traditional mode of expression is uneducated and lacks sophistication, especially when contrasted with the elite art. The traditional art forms were found among the pre-colonial/ancient communities of African societies. Barber, quoting Ulli Beier (1962a), provides a valid and contrary opinion to this position about illiterate and uneducated producers of traditional art.

Traditional art... is...produced according to rigid codes by highly trained, skilled craftsmen. It has a tendency to be austere and serious. Individual art (which others would call high or elite) is produced as Beier's choice of term suggests by named, self-conscious, educated artists, searching for a personal and original style and executing intellectually-conceived projects (Barber 1987: 9)

Elite art is the individualised production of a highly privileged few, the culturally and intellectually well-placed in the society. This triadic model then alludes to the popular as the mass of expressions or productions between the traditional and the elitist. A polarised conceptualization of the popular reiterates the evasive nature of what actually constitutes popular arts, as an art form which is neither here nor there. Fabian (1978) admits to the open, never-ending process of how perceptions, experiences and problems are mediated by popular culture (p. 329). For Barber (1987), the triadic model simply yields two because what is in the middle is indefinite and as such, defies a finite definition. She maintains, however, that the popular is recognisable, its distinguishing properties being syncretism, novelty and change in a critical combination of forms (p. 10)

Music is said to be one of the early forms of popular cultural expression on the continent (Barber, 1987: 1-2). Other forms include painting, literature, concert parties, religious movements, and various forms of drama troupes. Englert (2008) argues that in South Africa and Kenya, popular music helped shape the direction of political governance to good and evil ends. Citing Olwage (2008), he points out that scholarly attention is brought to the fact that popular music "helped constitute apartheid just as it helped take apartheid apart" (Englert 2008: 8). It is both warmly received and appropriated by the people and the government who turn such popular songs to election

campaign slogans. Barber (1987: 4) refers to Wole Soyinka and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, two Nigerian public figures who write and sing respectively about Nigerian politics. Her reference to Soyinka addressed the jest he made of politicians with the song '*etike revo wetin*' after the 1983 elections. And to Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's *Who kill Dele Giwa?* – a song which the social activist cum musician used to alert the Nigerian public to the ruthless operations of the military regime in the 1980s. Englert records similar experiences in Tanzania, Senegal and other parts of Africa where music is deployed to entertain, educate and resist repressive leadership.

Similarly, Mano (2011) writes about the nexus between music and journalism in postcolonial Zimbabwe. He argues that like other forms of popular arts, popular music adopts a counter-hegemonic tempo, similar to what journalistic practices in repressive regimes would do. And, that musicians positioned themselves as intermediaries, broadcasters and discourse-originators between the suppressed populace and the political regime of the day. In other words, popular music functions as alternative journalism, not necessarily as political endorsement as Englert (2008) showed. This positioning of popular arts is contested in chapter five below, which sees video films and their producers as consciously endorsing political power.

Another interesting dimension of popular art's interactions with the people and the state was presented by Dolby (2006). In South Africa, Dolby (2006) investigated the highly controversial *Big Brother Africa*'s rise, social impact and moral standing, not only in that country, but also in other African countries, which demonstrate varied receptions by the ruling class and the ruled. Her analysis of contemporary scholarship of popular culture reveals that the economic nature of popular culture makes its consumption heavily accessible to the youth. It speaks of their lifestyle, aspirations, anxieties, and even indifferences. It is also a site of public discourse, arresting personal and public attention in leadership, governance, religion, ethnicity and a host of issues that provide an outlet to identify with and relieve tensions. According to Dolby, *Big Brother Africa* was welcomed by the youth in twelve African countries, condemned by citizens and church leaders for its voyeuristic quality, and acclaimed by the Zambian government for placing the country in the limelight with the success of Cherise Makubale. The reality TV show is a center of identity formation and public discourse whose impact is not articulated beyond the concerns of unifying citizens of diverse

African cultures and countries. Similarly, Dodds's (2010) study of popular cartoons of political figures, notably President Jacob Zuma, is yet another example of the extent of mediation that popular art forms can and do engage. The production and circulation of the cartoons via the internet has reached phenomenal proportions resulting in a steady barrage of tension among supporters and critics of the Zuma administration, including death threats to Jonathan Shapiro, the cartoonist. Clearly, art forms have been used to interrogate old and new forms of culture and politics across the continent.

The understanding of what constitutes popular culture has undergone numerous revisions – the most outstanding of which is Barber's (2014) and Newell and Okome's (2014) – to accommodate an ever-shifting and flexible notion of what is meant by the 'unofficial popular', but it has retained a lot of the definitional 'problems' raised in the 1987 article. Rather than focus on definitions, Barber posits that it is more beneficial to "think of this emergent field precisely as a terrain – open, stretching out in all directions, with no marked boundaries, but with centres of activity, hot spots, sites of generativity" (2014: xvi). The freedom of popular arts from the constraints of the official traditions and their position in the unofficial sphere as cultural brokers between the foreign and the indigenous, mean that the popular arts are liable. These conventions are opposed to the accepted standards of popular expressions obtainable in European culture. Barber collapses her earlier position that these culture forms are "dynamic," "ever-changing," "playful," with "undefined forms," as opposed to official art which is "finished, completed, didactic, utilitarian." The conventions according to which "they construct their meanings and communicate with their audiences are not publicly legitimized" (1987: 37). Evident from the revisions is that these later positions are changing. The communication between the producers of popular arts and their audiences now seems secure although it is not entirely so as chapter eight reveals; the problematic traditional-popular-elite paradigm has equally been revised to accommodate overlaps rather than focusing on distinct and untenable traditional, popular and elite categories. Attention is now turned to the popular in Nigeria, the country of study.

3.9 Popular Arts in Nigeria

The first form of popular art in Nigeria was music (Waterman, 1982; Barber 1987). Popular music forms notably juju and afro-beat have drawn the attention of scholars notably anthropologists and sociologists. Christopher Waterman's *Juju* (1990) is the first extensive study of musical performance as a cultural phenomenon among the Yorubas. It provides an excellent historical and ethnographic account of this form of African music in which the dynamics of power relations, identity and socio-cultural practices are enacted. Thematic leanings privilege financial, domestic, religious, philosophical and political concerns.

Associated with the West African coast, and the Caribbean, its aesthetic form is increased by the use of poetic rhetoric combined with harmonious sounds from instruments made of ceramic and wood. Performance sites include beer parlours, elite gatherings and outdoor parties, weddings and other festivities. The rendition of *juju* music favours praise-singing of power-brokers during which crisp naira notes are ostentatiously 'sprayed' at the performers, and on occasions subversive tropes are targeted at politicians. Waterman demonstrates convincingly how the praise and criticism of political powers relate to the nexus in *juju* music between tradition and modernity. However, Erlmann (1991) questions the growing attribution to *juju* and other popular art forms of the power to realise social change by revealing questionable practices of political powers (p. 151). Quoting Fabian's (1990) observation that "not everything that is crucial to culture and to knowledge about culture is performance" (p. 13), Erlmann argues "might we not have to argue that some performance traditions (such as *juju*?) do not articulate the kind of alternative vision that Yoruba speaking Nigerians may well create in other realms of social and political action?" (p. 151). Apart from the *juju* music widely popularised by King Sunny Ade (KSA) and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey, the other dominant style is *fuji* which Waterman (1990) described as a secularised outgrowth of *ajisaari*, a religious chant that calls Muslims for prayers. These debates reveal the changing and contentious perceptions of popular arts, even among scholars, which is later articulated by Haynes (2000).

A later manifestation of popular arts in Nigeria was the Onitsha market literature which was extensively researched and documented by Emmanuel Obiechina (1973). He addresses, among other concerns, the dislocations of modernity and the effects that such

might have on the masses in their day to day operations (Okome, 2008: 148). Its syncretic nature was affirmed by Barber, who observed that the Onitsha market literature “raids European art forms” (1987:36). Lindfors (1968) quoted in Barber (1987) comments on the writers of such literature “who approach a foreign language with so much zest and audacity, who do not bother to learn all the niceties of grammar, spelling and punctuation, who simply rip into English and let the splinters fly” (Barber 1987:36). This syncretic nature is evident in Nollywood films as well where American filmmaking and acting styles are transposed to the Nigerian setting (Haynes and Okome, 2000). Typical examples are Zeb Ejiro’s film *The President Must Not Die* (2004) and Teco Benson’s action thrillers. In the first, scantily-clad female detectives fight crime in martial displays to the chagrin of a kidnapped president. Those ladies, together with police officers, deploy comical CIA techniques (not commonly found in Nigerian law enforcement practice) to rescue the president. The localisation of American and Asian procedures further attests to the characteristic syncretism found in popular arts.

Another popular art form in Nigeria is the Yoruba travelling theatre. Biodun Jeyifo, in his brilliant book on the *Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria* (1984), at one point uses popular in the sense of all the people: the whole population, the nation. The Yoruba popular theatre, he says, is widely popular, attracting large audiences of various socio-economic backgrounds. There is a link between the travelling theatre and the video film culture as constituted in Nigeria today. On the origins of the Nigerian film industry, scholars have identified the role of the Yoruba travelling theatres of the 1960s and 1970s. Particularly, Adesanya (2000) notes that:

Involvement of the Yoruba travelling theatre practitioners in motion picture production was perhaps the most auspicious single factor in the evolution of an indigenous cinema in Nigeria. This happened in the mid-seventies when, in spite of positive reviews, English-language feature films by Nigerian filmmakers were not making the desired impact to stimulate the constant market demand both at home and abroad. Ola Balogun’s box office hit *Ajani Ogun* (1976) which opened the floodgates, gave the much-needed impetus to local film production and led to a new career for travelling theatre troupes (p. 38)

Similarly, Ogundele (2000) also provides a stimulating historical account of the antecedents of Nollywood as the site of cultural production and contestation. In fact his

account makes most plausible the nexus between the Yoruba travelling troupes and what is known today as Nollywood. From its beginnings in the 1930s to the 1970s, when its popularity increased significantly, there were well over 100 troupes spread across the western areas of Nigeria, and “the big cities of the West African coast, all the way to Freetown” (p.92). The founders of this movement were Hubert Ogunde (1916-1990) also known as the father of the popular theatre troupes. He founded the Ogunde Concert Party in 1945. Others include Duro Ladipo (1931-1978), widely acclaimed for his play, *Oba Koso* (The king did not hang) in which he also acted, and Kola Ogunmola (1925-1973) who founded the Ogunmola Travelling Theatre in 1947. It appears that Ogunde’s theatre contemporaries before Ladipo and Ogunmola were A. B. David, P. A. Dawodu, Layeni and G.T. Onimole. Apparently, Ogunde and Ladipo developed their interest in theatre under the auspices of churches based in the western region. Other dramatists, notably Oyin Adejobi, were to follow. His theatre company formed the protagonist of Karin Barber’s book *The Generation of Plays* (2000)

Ekwuazi (2000) notes that the “Yoruba travelling theatre created a guaranteed audience for the Yoruba film, for when the practitioners of this theatre took to film, they merely adapted their stage repertoire to the screen: they produced the same kind of work for the same kind of audience” (p. 132). The themes of the plays were varied. At the onset, and while still under colonial rule, there were church plays and harvest concerts. Later, Ogunde re-designed it to accommodate indigenous masquerade performances and traditional elements. There was also the inclusion of borrowed cultural flavour from neighbouring countries, e.g. Ghanaian highlife music. Duro Ladipo is said to have incarnated the Yoruba god of thunder in his performance in the internationally acclaimed *Oba Koso*, and indeed elevated the entertainment business with other productions to his credit including *Moremi* and *Oba Waja*. These were classics largely composed from Yoruba history and mythology. Ogundele asserts that:

theatre has of course always been an instrument for forging group social, political and cultural identity, for interrogating such an identity, mirroring its state of being, and recuperating its past, especially when that past is in danger of being forgotten in the face of present crises (2000: 93).

Before Ogundele, Duro-Ladipo and Kolawole (1997) addressed the mix of traditional and westernised (in this sense additions informed by Christianity and Islam) forms and the latter's begrudging impact on the former:

The history of West African theatre in the colonial period reveals itself therefore as largely a history of cultural resistance and survival. Confronted by the hostility of both Islamic and Christian values in addition to the destructive imperatives of colonialism, it has continued until today to vitalise contemporary theatrical form, both in the traditional folk opera and in the works of those playwrights and directors commonly regarded as Westernized (Duro-Ladipo and Kolawole, 1997: 103).

Interestingly, Ogunde is recorded as the first to produce plays with brief film insertions at the end (Ogundele, 2000: 95). Such insertions were depictions of super-human powers and effects on humans that could not be performed by the actors. This was well received by audiences and would-be producers who latched onto the new opportunity. As the commercial benefits of the new medium were being reaped, Ogunde proceeded to make more feature films using the same technique.

The Yoruba popular theatre was not without its share of criticisms. With the introduction of traditional drums to church plays, a whole congregation before whom Ladipo performed was scandalised. In fact, Duro-Ladipo and Kolawole (1997: 103) and Ogundele (2000) affirm that Ladipo was expelled from the church and the 1960 Easter cantata to which he was invited discontinued. By the travelling theatre standards, such hybridization, a feature of popular arts and the very element on which they thrive (Barber 1987) was unacceptable in a religious setting.

When Barber's article, *Popular Arts in Africa*, was published in 1987, Nollywood, the popular film culture in Nigeria was in the offing, although the first generation filmmakers from the 1970s were already in practice. Other popular art forms in Africa – and specifically, Nigeria – the first of which was music and later literature, pervaded the Nigerian space at that time. Interestingly, the characteristics of popular arts outlined in that essay can aid the reading and interpretation of Nigerian video films today. Nollywood scholars, among who are Jonathan Haynes, Onookome Okome, John McCall and Moradewun Adejunmobi, have drawn from that seminal essay in debating the nature of Nollywood productions as popular art.

If popular culture is the non-elite, non-governmental (or unofficial), people-oriented representation of the knowledge systems of a society, how does it differ from the traditional or elite? Jules-Rosette (1987) refers to Graburn's (1976:7) assertion that popular arts are those produced by an artistic elite "whose arts often take the forms of European traditions, but in content express feelings totally different, feelings appropriate to the new cultures that are emerging among the leaders of the Third World." In contrast, Barber criticizes both the view that popular arts are produced by an artistic elite and the approach that reduces such art forms to a "residual cultural category". Instead, she argues that this new art form is a distinct, syncretic form with its own new or distinct character. And this is where Nollywood belongs.

Graburn's assertion will be found problematic if weighed against Nollywood films primarily because a large number of the video films is not produced by elitist individuals. They are produced, directed and marketed by partially and informally trained cinematographers and Igbo merchants. In fact, some of the Nigerian elite, e.g. Dora Akunyili cited in Onyekakeyah (2009), Reuben Abati (2009), Femi Osofisan (2007) unreservedly dissociate themselves from and criticise Nollywood. However, the latter part of Graburn's postulation sits comfortably within Barber's and later theorisations of popular arts. Barber rejects the 'residual cultural category', and refers to it as a mix peculiar to the culture from where it originates rather than the 'remainder' of something else, probably an elite cultural form. Commercial art "produced and consumed by the people" is the most fully popular of all art forms and, according to Barber, encompasses "the vast majority of all arts usually described as popular, e.g., dance music, urban theater, and popular painting and fiction." Jules-Rosette (1978) challenges Barber's classifications of popular arts, "Although this 'provisional framework' is first introduced in a section of Barber's paper entitled *Popular Art and Social Change*, the model is static and accounts for neither social change nor artistic production and communication" (p. 92).

Barber (1987) further states, "one of the most valuable insights to have emerged from the triadic model is, precisely, the indefiniteness of the area labelled popular, its fluidity and lack of boundaries. What we are looking at, then, is not a bounded category but a field whose edges are indeterminate but whose centre is clearly recognizable" (p. 20). Chris Waterman (1986) identified the absence of observable rigid boundaries

between ‘popular’ and ‘traditional’ music in Ibadan, but notes that the popular borrows freely from the traditional. Fabian (1978) notes the common traits of popular arts as 1. urban traits, 2. contexts of colonisation and decolonisation, 3. local audiences, 4. opposition to established powers and accepted interpretations. Over the years, this categorisation has undergone modifications especially when applied to Nollywood productions. Certainly the video films have urban traits. They depict contemporary cultural life. Most of them are shot in posh houses in Lagos and other Nigerian cities; actors use expensive automobiles, and in some instances, a class struggle is evident (Haynes 2007). The stories explicate life in Lagos (the commercial nerve-centre of Nigeria) and are unapologetically steeped in domestic themes of marriage, infertility, love and betrayal, and wealth acquisition. This makes them widely acceptable to local audiences who see their personal circumstances played out in the films.

To further pursue Fabian’s ‘common traits’, Nigerian video films have indirectly grown out of colonial and missionary encounters. Its audiences span the entire globe including non-Africans (Ugochukwu, 2014; Krings and Okome, 2013; Okome, 2011), and in instances are vehemently opposed to irresponsible governance. Hence, Fabian’s categorisations, while useful as a starting point of discourse, do not provide absolute indicators of the nature of popular African arts. It serves to highlight the variations in expressions that exist among African countries, even though certain similarities still exist. Regarding the opposition to established powers, Fabian fails to account completely for all forms of popular arts as there are those that endorse, rather than contest political or established powers.

Alternative conceptions of popular arts were promoted by Kinsey Katchka. Katchka (2000) argues for a non-resisting, non-hegemonic conceptualization of popular art as opposed to Barber’s and Fabian’s response-to-oppression paradigm. Katchka observes that while some see popular arts as a deviation, which is a regrettable corruption of the authentic culture, others welcome it. In her article on *Exhibiting the Popular...*, she cites Waterman’s (1990) position of complementarity of popular and elite art, thus questioning the positions of the former scholars. In parts of Dakar where Katchka carried out her 4-year ethnographic work, popular arts were institutionalised and exhibited in public places. The institutionalisation and exhibition of popular works of African arts also serves a pedagogical purpose. Katchka notes that developmental

community programmes were held in the museums for children, where they exhibited their artworks and were further integrated into cultural life. So while Dolby (2004) and Stack and Kelly (2006) examined people's negative perception of popular arts and culture, referring to its negative influence on youth, children and the entire populace, Katchka (2000), McCall (2004), Dolby (2004), Haynes (2000, 2007e), and Okome (2007) celebrate it for its ability to communicate intentionally the deep-seated differences among people and places. The debate over the utility and futility of popular arts and culture is world-wide, yielding an array of scholarly and journalistic material, but for my purposes, I limit the discussions to the African continent.

To West Africans in the Diaspora, it appears that Nollywood is their cultural ambassador, indicating the traditional and modern complexities of African life in ways yet unexplored in classrooms, textbooks and the news media. They are avid spectators of Nigerian films, taking advantage of every trip home to re-stock their collection of the video films. Sitting beside a Nigerian MBA student at a UK university on a Lagos-London trip, I was apprised of her last-minute travel plans, which included purchasing over a dozen videos (with the multiple instalments of each title) because they make her laugh and remember Lag (Lagos), not because she likes them very much (personal communication, 2011).

Scholars have not sufficiently explored the alternative conceptions of popular arts, as the emerging productions, however few, seem to exhibit. Some of the video productions outrightly support official powers, which suggest the need for additional theoretical work on the changing nature of popular arts and what might be responsible for such changes. To illustrate this point, films like Zeb Ejiro's *The President must not die* (2004), Andy Amenechi's *The Last Vote* (2001) and musical videos such as Tony Tetuila's *You don't hit my car* (2001) are arguably political statements in favour of the official powers of the day.

There have been various reactions to Nollywood as popular art. Nollywood's most vocal defender, Onookome Okome, has published impressive literature on the origins, nature and popular criticisms of the film industry. The latest and most complete of this is *Nollywood and its critics* (2010) in which he marshals stakeholders' arguments for and against the industry. He argued that "the social significance and political value of Nollywood must be located in the practice of popular arts in much the same way

as...the Onitsha market pamphlets or the concert parties of Ghana of the 1950s” (p. 37). It is precisely a misunderstanding of Nollywood as an arena of popular culture that leads critics to view its productions with foreign parameters. Okome’s contribution is telling, detailing a vast collection of private and public exchanges and documents that chronicle a continent-wide reading and analyses of Nollywood films. He concludes: “...Nollywood and the cultural products it sells constitute one social document, a *tableau vivant*, if you like, of contemporary Nigerian social and cultural history from the bottom up” (p. 39). Elsewhere, Haynes (2005) refers to Okome’s denunciation of “Europeans for seeing Nigerian videos as a mere ‘curiosity,’ detecting an underlying lack of respect”. That parochial mentality is most certainly another variant of Euro-centrism.

Luke Onyekakeyah’s (2009) article queries the former Minister of Information and Communication, Dora Akunyili, for her intervention on Nollywood’s effort at degrading the country. The scathing comments levelled against authors of popular arts are as old as the study of popular culture itself. He argued against perceptions of Nollywood’s moral and cultural bankruptcy stating, “[A]s a matter of fact, a critical analysis of what has contributed in tarnishing the nation's image would certainly not place Nollywood in the list. On the other hand, the same analysis, if unbiased, would place Nollywood high on the list of agents of good image for Nigeria” (*The Guardian*, Dec. 15, p.67). It is indeed ironical that the same minister launched a ‘Rebrand Nigeria’ project in 2009 and appointed a key Nollywood figure, Pete Edochie, to head the project committee. Rebrand Nigeria was designed to restore the negative image that the country and her people attract in international circles. The Minister of Information and Culture, Prof. Dora Akunyili launched the rebranding project for a national and international re-orientation on African and specifically Nigerian values. It was not a project for Nollywood filmmakers as such, but given the power wielded by the filmmakers through the reach of their films, the minister co-opted some of them as stakeholders.

Nigeria’s literary giant, Femi Osofisan, is not the first of his kind to openly rebuke the popular products of Nollywood. He states:

This is where the films present us with a great dilemma, and where, in spite of our pleasure, we must take a stand in the interest of our collective survival. For we cannot but remark that, however popular the films may be, and however much in demand, the picture that the majority

of them present of our world is one that we must not only interrogate, but indeed reject very strongly, if what we seek is the transformation of our society into a modern, progressive state (2007: 2).

McCall (2004) in his analysis of vigilante films (*Issakaba 1-4*) argues that those films represent the people's call for justice and the restoration of popular confidence in the government and para-military agencies – a laudable popular initiative. The 2000/1 *Issakaba* films are replete with rituals/human sacrifices, the occult and recourse to the supernatural as an alternative means of eliminating villainy. Whereas McCall, anthropologist, examines the films in the light of their significance in a troubled and troubling society, Osofisan excoriates such depictions in a standoffish manner:

...why this unceasing preoccupation with juju, this relentless celebration of dark rituals and diabolical cults? Practically every Nollywood director seems to have been caught in the spell-mix a diet of grotesque murders and cacophonous chants and bizarre incantations...instead of ...empirical extrapolations and direct physical participation in social struggle (2007: 2-3).

But the more pressing issue here is how the film director, Lancelot Imasuen, re-cast past and on-going state security issues, government and popular responses to crime and punishment in southeastern Nigeria. Furthermore, there are Haynes's (2010) and McCall's (2012) reviews of Pierre Barrot's (2008) book on Nollywood where the latter recounts with dissociated interest and poignant disdain, the 'personality/character' of the video industry. As one of the first edited volumes on Nollywood, the book has its merits. While serving as an introductory journalistic material to the industry, Barrot's book also lambastes directors of the popular video film culture and their modes of representations. Clearly, the author's criticism of the Nigerian popular art originated from his limited and probably Euro-centric view of cultures.

Celebrated journalist-now-turned presidential spokesman, Reuben Abati (in newsdiaryonline.com) has the following to say of Nollywood:

There is a crying need for professionalism in Nollywood. The industry, despite its popularity and impact is gradually being overtaken by home-grown mediocrity. Every actor and actress is a potential producer, movie director and screenplay writer. This "jack-of-all-trades" mentality reduces the quality of the output. When this is not the case, a typical Nigerian film is a family-affair. I have seen quite a number of these films in which the cast and crew are made up of husband, wife, brothers and

children. Casting is not determined by ability but filial relations. The dialogue is poor. (2009: para 9)

These criticisms which reveal the semi-literate background of the film producers and the possible constraints they face have made the filmmakers more attuned to the needs of their audience. It has led to better productions (A. Amenechi and F. Amata, personal communication). But it has also revealed the initial reluctance of the elite to accept Nollywood as anything good or for its achievements as a home grown filmmaking practice – even if the processes are crude.

Katchka (2000) questioning the presentation of popular arts as a site of contention notes that Waterman (1982, 1990) in his ethnography of Nigerian highlife music, makes no reference to the polarised descriptions of the popular but reiterates its parallel existence alongside traditional and elite art. This, he argues, is made possible by the heterogeneous and dynamic nature of urban settings – the space where popular arts dominate. Nollywood films are set in rural and urban locations, and in fact, majority of the films project a nexus between rural and urban lives. This is derived from Nigerian realities, which bear at once harmony and tension between the rural and urban lifestyles. In Nigeria, as well as in other parts of the world, indigenes live in cities from where they did not originate. At specific times of the year and however elitist they may be, they return to their roots to visit families.

In spite of the criticisms of popular against Nollywood and its producers, the industry continues to thrive because the people for whom the productions are made see in the videos a powerful space for negotiating their own identities. But popular arts are also much more than constellations of social, political, and economic relationships – they are expressive acts (Barber, 1987). Their most important attribute is their power to communicate. Referring to Nollywood productions, this power is inadvertently asserted by Femi Osofisan in favour of the video films:

The films have been proven to exercise a tremendous impact on our people's minds, on their ways of thinking and their habits of perception, on their attitude to the world, to work, to family, to their neighbours. The films also have significant influence on the way that others see us, and hence on the way they relate to us. We cannot but be concerned therefore about what they are saying, what attitudes they are promoting, what image of us they are projecting (2007: 2)

And it is eloquently testified to by “the frequency with which they are repressed” (Barber 1987: 3). Street (2001) also notes that “the fact that regimes bother to censor popular cultural products is the best proof that it is nothing trivial. It is worthy of systematic societal and scholarly attention to understand clearly its manifest forms of production, circulation and consumption as well as whose interests are represented or undermined” (p. 303).

This chapter has outlined the dynamics of representing the past on screen beginning with the contestations on what constitutes history. It examined the distinctions between early African efforts at historical films, which had a decolonization agenda and the video film practices with a less revisionist approach. Since the video films were not concerned with rewriting colonial history, they tended to what scholars have identified as popular arts. The defining traits and debates of popular arts in Africa and particularly Nigeria were examined paying close attention to how those informed the growth of Nigerian video films that depict history. The contestations on Nollywood’s attempt at representing the past were also highlighted and it was argued that if the films tell us what to think about the past, then they do certainly re-enact history in spite of the less technically sophisticated ways in which the filmmakers may approach the past.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY OF POLITICAL FILMMAKING IN NIGERIA

4.1 Introduction

The history of film in Nigeria has already been well documented by Nigerian and non-Nigerian scholars alike (Opubor & Nwuneli, 1979; Balogun, 1987; Mgbejume, 1989; Ekwuazi, 1991; Haynes 1995, 2000; Larkin, 2008), and aspects of it were examined in the preceding chapter. In this chapter, I examine the early Nigerian films that deal with politics as earlier defined in the light of their motivation, narrative techniques, ideology and reception. The paucity of political filmmaking in Nollywood has been identified by Alamu (2010) for reasons that will be examined throughout the following chapters. It suffices to set up here the divergent opinions on political filmmaking.

While Haynes (2006) suggests that political filmmaking is gaining ascendancy in the collection of Nollywood films, Alamu (2010), writing later argues “that contemporary films in Nigeria do not have any interest in shaping current political discourse and situations, given that little or no effort has been devoted to these issues by the producers” (p. 168). On the one hand, Haynes devotes his attention to the nature and forms of political critiques while teasing out the environmental factors that impinge on such productions. On the other hand, Alamu foregrounds his article on the stylistic elements of narratives in Nollywood by identifying the topical issues addressed in the films. Although both authors approach Nollywood from different perspectives, there is arguably a lack of awareness by later scholars on the subtle developments within the film industry, and the reasons thereof. This oversight is glaring when considered in the light of Adesokan’s (2009b) article in which he aims “to discuss the emergence of films concerned with democratic governance” (p. 2). Alamu is neither aware of Haynes nor Adesokan, but rightly observes that “the industry does not possess a vibrant tradition of political filmmaking” (2010: 168). But it is also necessary to examine cultural production in Nigeria/Africa as well as the kinds of political issues such productions dealt with.

4.2 Cultural Production in Nigeria

The most simplistic definition of a concept as broad and as shifty as ‘culture’ is that, it is a people’s way of life. But that definition, now seriously overused and also severely inadequate is now obsolete. Barber (2014) defines culture (popular) “as a site in which people understand themselves as part of a global order which nonetheless, in significant ways, operates to marginalise them and their local experience” (p. xx). The benefit of this chapter, it is supposed, is to take a close look at the political and cultural situation in which independent cultural, and specifically, film production thrived in Nigeria before and after colonisation, because as a cultural tool, cinema shapes the people who make and consume it just as the culture of the people is deeply reflected in their cinema.

In spite of the negative and critical sentiments associated with colonialism, there is the undeniable truth that film in Nigeria, and indeed in many former colonies, is one major legacy of the colonial enterprise. Film policy and regulation also drew heavily from the British, which as McCall (2004) argued, prepared the scene for contemporary filmmaking. During the colonial era, film was produced to the extent that it served as a tool of propaganda, to show to the colonised what the British had done for them and for which they were expected to be grateful and subservient. It was also deployed as an educational tool and as the means for inspiring self-help projects among the viewers and under the auspices of the colonised (e.g. *Daybreak in Udi*). In his book, *Film in Nigeria* (1989), Mgbejume also writes about the early “films shown to the communities which were on education, health, community development and modern farming techniques” (Mgbejume, 1989: 11). The films were either purchased from European filmmakers or were produced by the British. Depending on the audience – Hausa or Yoruba, an interpreter adopted various nuances in his explanations to cater for the existing cultural differences. By and large, the ‘message’ of the films served the purposes of the British.

In the 19th Century, together with the colonization agenda, the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was set up. Ekwuazi (1991) records the CFU’s formation at the beginning of World War II – although Mgbejume (1989) states it was established in October 1946 – primarily to use the film medium to promote British agenda in the colonies and to mobilise support against the Germans. Under the British government’s central offices of information, the British Council, the CFU and the Crown Film Unit (CFU) in Britain operated. The CFU through the colonial and regional governments funded film

productions that were shown to indigenes of the colonies. The films, funded through the Colonial Development Welfare Act, were intended to deepen British superiority, indoctrinate, acculturate, assimilate and foster more civilised social behaviour on the part of the colonised. The films were distributed through strategic outlets such as government agencies, churches, cinema vans, community exhibitors, schools and clubs (Opubor & Nwuneli, 1979; Mgbejume, 1989; Ekwuazi 1991). This period, 1946 onwards, is significant because it saw the growth of mobile cinema shows to which over two million Nigerians regularly thronged (Larkin 2008). Larkin's observation was that the organisation of the shows did not remain within the CFU, but rather shifted to the Federal Film Unit and regional units as more Africans got involved in the processes of production and exhibition (Larkin 2008: 86).

Films made by the CFU, documentaries and newsreel, are not considered political in the sense adopted in this thesis although they were made by a political power, Britain, and were motivated by political objectives. They were of a top-down approach targeted primarily at "breaking through mass ignorance and illiteracy" (Mgbejume 1989: 39) and were not reconstructions of the past as understood in this study. It is in the same vein that films made by the independent Nigerian government are also not considered political. Rather, the colonial films sought to "train these people to play a larger part in the life of their own territories" (ibid) and to facilitate Britain's discharge of its duties. The Federal Film Unit was established in 1947, a year after the CFU. Similar to the functions of the CFU, the Federal Film Unit made and imported propagandist films with all the support from Britain, films that were aimed at educating an illiterate people on the functions of government, and by exhibiting colonial films. In addition to these, Mgbejume (1989) observed that the Federal Film Unit was charged with other responsibilities: that of portraying the achievements of the Nigerian culture, both locally and internationally as well as informing the public of news events in and outside Nigeria. Mobile cinema units were the conduit by which these objectives were met.

At Nigeria's Independence in 1960, much of the infrastructure and policies of the colonial government were bequeathed to the newly formed national government. Frank Aig-Imoukhuede's (1979) observation that in Nigeria, distribution, exhibition (including advertisement films) and productions (except the products of government

film units) were largely in the hands of expatriates” (p. 40) is in sync with previous narratives on the growth of the film industry. Nigerians were exposed to documentaries made by the post-colonial government, and feature films largely from India, America, China and Britain. Ekwuazi (1991) rightly observes that “too heavy a dependence on these films has conditioned the Nigerian industry by influencing both the audience and the filmmakers and has consequently conditioned the definition of the production context of the Nigerian film” (p. 12).

The 1979 seminar organised by the Nigerian National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) saw an increased and more academic interest in film production training, in film production and distribution itself, “in the fact that the film has become the focus of a more concerted government legislation, and in the foetal stirrings of a vibrant industry” (Ekwuazi 1991: x). The event also led to one of the first edited volume by Alfred Opubor and Onuora Nwuneli on Nigerian film and its precursors. The edited book turned out to be a landmark publication which formed the basis for subsequent studies and references to the burgeoning film industry in the then 19 year old post-colonial state.

Writing about Third World Cinema, the film practice by which Third World Countries are known, Sholat and Stam (1994) define this film practice as the “vast cinematic productions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America and of the minoritarian cinema in the First World” (p. 27). Russell (1989) argues that Third Cinema counters the First (US, Europe, Australia and Japan) and Second World Cinemas, is revolutionary, and emerges from “poor, non-white nations who are emerging from colonial domination” (p. 3). This category is contentious as Sholat & Stam (1994: 25) have revealed since Third World countries like Venezuela, Iraq and Nigeria are rich in oil, and Argentina and Ireland are predominantly White. Among the trends of Third Cinema are its dependence on First and Second World countries as funding sources for films production because “severe IMF-provoked austerity crises and the collapse of the developmentalist models...led to the dollarization of film production and consequently to the rise of international co-productions or to a search for alternative forms such as video” (Sholat & Stam, 1994:29). This line of argument has been repeatedly rehearsed in the literature of Nigerian film. Apart from the economic constraints that led to the

video boom, there was also the ingenuity of Igbo (Nigerian) businessmen who, rather than selling off empty VHS cassettes, recorded filmed drama on them.

Political filmmaking has risen through the years of the celluloid films of the 1970s, the Yoruba travelling theatre, the television soap opera genre (Adejunmobi, 2003), and the video technology all of which practiced mild democracy (Adesokan, 2009b) or questioned unprincipled conduct by government officials (Haynes, 2006). The sections below provide particular examples of political films from the celluloid filmmaking period. Of the filmmakers discussed, one of them Eddie Ugbomah, stands out for the number of films devoted to political issues. For this reason, his filmmaking career is explored at some length below before drawing in other relevant examples.

As former Chairman of the Nigeria Film Corporation, Eddie Ugbomah was born in 1941 and now has up to 13 celluloid films to his credit although none of them is in circulation today, and five have been lost to humidity. Trained in American and UK universities, Eddie Ugboma became one of the first indigenous and prestigious filmmakers in Nigeria. Very few people in contemporary Nigeria got to see any of Ugboma's films, yet he is one of the most important filmmakers in the first generation of Nigerian filmmaking practice who devoted his cinematic prowess to political issues. Ugboma claims that up to 8 of his films, shot on 35mm, are intact although they need to be transferred to DVD for preservation. Shaka (2004) discussing funding avenues of early Anglophone cinema notes that Ugboma ventured into video filmmaking when celluloid became unattainable due to high costs. His first film, *The Rise and Fall of Dr. Oyenusi* (1977) similar to *Anini* was inspired by a personal experience of armed robbery, which subtly revealed the aftermath of the Nigerian Civil War. In post-war Nigeria, guns were available and were indiscriminately handled. The Nigerian society after the Civil War left unemployed youths with a lot of guns or at least made the purchase affordable. This led to the spate of armed robbery during the period. According to Ugboma, the film was a big hit, with its proceeds funding his next two films.

He describes his own genre of films as the historic-contemporary genre i.e. casting a glance backwards at significant events of the past while drawing out the story's relevance to the present realities. Affirming this, Ugboma states, "look at a film like *Death of a Black President*, anyone born then that you tell about the film will

mention Murtala Mohammed” (The Guardian, April 19, 2013). Mohammed was a former military Head of State (1975-1976).

Ugboma was motivated to make films by a combination of factors. His personal experiences, as well as the social and political events of his period were also key factors, but in all, there was an element of personal interest forming part of his frame of reference. *Oil Doom* (1979) was produced because of the recklessness of government spending of oil revenue. This filmmaker is from one of the oil producing regions, Delta State, therefore he felt personally obliged to caution the government of the impending disaster that awaited the nation if fiscal regulation was not practiced. The film, *Death of a Black President*, saw the light of day because Murtala Mohammed, whose assassination was portrayed in the film, was a personal friend of his. Ugbomah revealed in an interview that Ekwuazi accused him of being too sentimental about the death of Mohammed. (E. Ugbomah, personal communication, August 2014).

The major problem with discussing Ugboma’s films (and indeed others of the same period) is that there are neither substantial plot synopsis nor analyses documented anywhere except Françoise Balogun’s brief accounts in *The Cinema of Nigeria* (1987). Elsewhere, the only available information is film titles and themes that do not allow for a thorough engagement with or even analysis of the films. The films have long been out of circulation because of poor preservative mechanics and the very humid atmosphere of the country which destroyed the celluloid films.

Like his contemporaries, Ugboma is critical of the majority of Nollywood practitioners for their lack of technical ability, and poor story telling abilities in spite of his openness to the video technology. Part of the disaffection for Nollywood by this older generation of filmmakers originated from the perceived snub by the newer and more video-oriented practitioners. Most of the video filmmakers do not consult with the older ones and thus, draw the latter’s wrath as Ugbomah himself revealed throughout the 82-minute interview he granted me.

Ugboma laments the past and present lack of requisite funding that independent Nigerian filmmakers have to grapple with, noting particularly, that political films are on the decrease because of Nollywood’s pecuniary interests in associating with the government. He believes that the filmmaker must resist governmental pressures or

interference in terms of themes and subject matter. But this position is not entirely reflected in his conduct since his utterances revealed his financial expectations from the Delta State government (personal communication, 24 August 2014). He argues inconsistently that the filmmaker must be prepared to battle the Censors' Board in upholding the social and political values espoused in his films. In the interview conducted with him, he stated that one has to be mindful of the social and political implications of representing the past in his film. This was said in reference to *Half of a Yellow Sun's* depiction of violence on the basis of ethnic differences (E. Ugboma, personal communication, August 2014).

4.3 The Early Political Films

This study also sought to unpack the motivation of early political films. Mgbejume (1989) mentions a number of films produced in the 1950s and 1960s by Nigerians in collaboration with foreign technical crew. By presenting 22 films and then listing 11 more as "recent films", the author makes no distinction between Nigerian and non-Nigerian films. The 1958 and 1963 productions he highlighted were arguably made by foreigners. Mgbejume states that the first Nigerian feature film was titled *Fincho* (1958), directed by Sam Zebba, whereas other scholars make no similar claim. Rather, *Kongi's Harvest*, discussed below, is celebrated as the first indigenous political film in Nigeria. It is difficult to ascertain the veracity of Mgbejume's (1989) claim; however, from his account of the film, it is not a political genre. He states that "it is a careful examination of an individual's inner conflict" (p. 65), the individual being a foreign business man.

To begin an examination of early filmmaking in Nigeria, reference is made to the catalogue of indigenous feature films with 109 entries provided by Ekwuazi (1991: 16-18). Ekwuazi's entries include film titles, producer/director/production company, year of production, language and rating. There are 68 Yoruba, 35 English, 5 Hausa and 1 Igbo films. From the list, it is impossible to tell which are politically-informed and which are not, but the list is useful since it provides a starting point for further work and analysis to be done. The author does not analyse all the films. Although no selection criterion is provided, he selects a few of them to comment on. The selection for this

section is done from the 35 English Language films documented, which have very slim commentaries in academic texts on the subject. There are lots of scholarly thoughts on one or two films but very little or nothing on most other films of that period.

Kongi's Harvest (1970) is said to be the first political feature film produced in independent Nigeria by private filmmakers through the collaborative efforts of Francis Oladele, Ossie Davis and Wole Soyinka (playwright) to mention a few minds behind the production. Before then, the Nigerian government had made feature films such as *Moral Disarmament* (1957) and *Bound for Lagos* (1962). Shell-BP in Nigeria had also released a feature film *Culture in Transition* (1963). Ola Balogun is credited to have made a documentary titled *One Nigeria* (1969) which addressed the Nigerian Civil War. He was motivated to make the film upon his return to Nigeria from his training abroad and the witness of the vestiges of war (Russell, 1998:30). *Kongi's Harvest* is an adaptation of Soyinka's 1967 play by the same title. According to Opubor & Nwuneli (1979), "*Kongi's Harvest* is a satirical commentary of the First Republic of independent Nigeria. It is about power politics, preventive detention and image-making" (p. 6). Similarly, Josef Gugler, African film critic, writes of the historical production:

Kongi's Harvest is, as the playwright put it, a play "about Power, Pomp and Ecstasy": the power of autocratic president Kongi, the pomp of detained king Danlola, the ecstasy of Segi and Daodu who oppose the dictator. It is one of Soyinka's finest plays. The film, unfortunately, must be considered a failure. It follows the play closely in most respects but falls far short of its accomplishments and betrays it in the end. Still, it conveys Soyinka's bitter satire of the recurrent features of dictatorships—the sycophants surrounding the dictator, the dictator's megalomania, the ideological *isms* invoked to justify *absolute-ism*, the propaganda blared at the population, the repression of dissent, and the economic concomitants of such political features: mismanagement and corruption (Gugler, n.d.)

This commentary on the film, though informative but unverifiable since the film is out of circulation, is typical of most present day adaptations which are often read as being far off the mark. Ekwuazi's (1991) review of the film is more robust moving from the dissimilitude between play and script, to the film structure, production budget and contexts to its favourable reception in the US and UK. For Ekwuazi, "the point is that Ossie Davies' *Kongi's Harvest* is a film that fosters the West's stereotype about the rest of us" apart of course from its raising "a number of questions bearing on the problems

of an epistemology for the Nigerian film” (pp. 24-25). By these, Ekwuazi notes the foreign influences, which rip the film of its ‘Nigerianness’ and which perhaps contributes to Soyinka’s denial of the film. However, as the first treatment of dictatorship in Africa, it occupies a useful space in the historical records of political filmmaking in a West African State.

Following Kongi’s Harvest is *Bullfrog in the Sun* (1971) which was directed by Francis Oladele and produced by his company Calpenny Films – the same company that produced Kongi’s Harvest. *Bullfrog in the Sun* was an adaptation of Chinua Achebe’s novels *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*. No substantial information regarding the film’s plot or narrative techniques exists except for the stringent censorship ordeal it went through (Chapter 5).

Another Nigerian film, *Dinner with the Devil* (1975) is also believed to be a political film and was directed by Sanya Dosunmu. Opubor & Nwuneli’s slim account of the film reveals it to be one that “deals with political corruption and the quest for its eradication” (1979: 8). Aig-Imoukhuede referred to it as a formula film. Initiated by Balogun’s *Ajani-Ogun*, a formula film according to Aig-Imoukhuede is one which “exploits well-established and popular theatrical conventions” (1979: 42) well known to the actors and acceptable to the audience. The formula guaranteed success because it drew the patronage of the audience, and enabled the filmmaker to sustain the production process. Balogun and Eddie Ugbomah tried making films unsuccessfully outside this known framework (Russell, 1989; Ukadike 2014). Russell notes that the failure of Balogun’s experimental film, *Alpha* (1972) and *Musik-Man* (1976) both steering away from the Yoruba actors and narrative styles led him back to the travelling theatre of the Yorubas where success was guaranteed.

Ola Balogun is also credited to have made *Black Goddess* (1975), a film which deals with the subject of slavery in a familial dislocation and reunion narrative. During the period of slave trade, members of a family are separated, one left behind in Nigeria. However, they are kept ‘united’ by the twin carvings which each party carried upon separation. Their reunion is wrought when the older folk travels to Brazil armed with the carving. Although not explicitly political since the film does not dwell on slave trade, it reflects on the consequences of slavery to show how the events of the past

retain its shadows in the present. Mbye Cham (2004) wrote that the film was set in contemporary times (then 1975).

Blues for a prodigal (1984), which in Haynes' terms is the original underground political film (2003:85) was a Wole Soyinka film. It was after this production that the acclaimed writer declared his intention to discontinue with the audio-visual medium, thus restricting himself to the literary genres for which he was well-known. Apparently, Soyinka was displeased with the film claiming that it failed to mirror his intentions. Filmmaking is so collaborative that the final product cannot be attributed to any one individual. This is such that in spite of brilliant stories and themes, executing the technical requirements to an acceptable aesthetical level may leave a producer (or director) dissatisfied.

While the English and Yoruba language films thrived, that of Igbo was non-existent. However, Ola Balogun's *Amadi* (1975) was the first Igbo contribution to the collection of films in the celluloid filmmaking period. Haynes (1995) wrote that, there was heavy sponsorship for Hausa language films, a factor attributed to the Hausa politicians and elite who were in government. The economic situation was not viable, and Balogun (1987) was of the opinion that governmental aid should enable independent producers to make films. The call went unheeded for several years owing to the government's interest in non-commercial films.

4.4 Motivation of Early Filmmakers

It is not entirely clear what the motivation of the early filmmakers were as little or nothing was written about their sources of inspiration, but there is reason to suggest that their sense of filmmaking was less of a commercially oriented enterprise than the filmmaking realities from 1992 to the present. The cultural exposure associated with training in western universities increased their awareness of the technical and aesthetic values of film. Francis Oladele, for instance, recognising the power of cinema saw himself as a missionary (Ekwuazi 2001: 276). Eddie Ugbomah also appreciates the power of film and uses it to "make statements about societal issues" (Ukadike 2014: 251). This is not to insinuate that these early filmmakers had no commercial interests at all. They did. However, existing literature does not emphasize commercial motivations

among the early filmmakers as it does for Nollywood practitioners. Ekwuazi states that the Nigerian English-language filmmaker was more educated than their indigenous language films counterpart, and so they recognised and placed the merit of art above pecuniary concerns. This reflected in their treatment of stories and themes. This, Ekwuazi continues, “did not isolate them from the commercial imperatives of the cinema, but they do not work merely with a view to commercial returns” (2001: 276).

Animated by the success of Yoruba films, Balogun’s film project, *Ija Ominira/Fight for Freedom* (1977), addressed the features of “a tyrannical king deposed by his people” (Russell 1989: 31). The film was regarded as successful probably due to the appearance in a lead role of Ade Afolayan, a well-known actor and the adaptation of Adebayo Faleti’s novel of the same title. Haynes and Okome (2000) writing about contemporary Yoruba films referred to the model of using Yoruba actors to re-enact novels by the literati as a workable one because the audience of the theatre productions naturally turned to the screen without much ado. Balogun’s film touches broadly on politics and can be contrasted with Gbenga Adewusi’s film *Maradona/Babangida must go* (1993), which in spite of coming much later was presented as the first Yoruba film on Nigerian politics (Haynes 2003). It was largely a protest film set in Lagos against the backdrop of General Babangida’s annulment of the 1993 presidential elections. The film was made to reveal the general’s political machinations in the Nigerian society as well as to call for his exit, attributing to him the dribbling tactics of the Argentinean football player, Diego Maradona. Tunde Kelani, one of Nigeria’s best cinematographers, now producer and director made *Koseegbe* (1996) to decry corruption in the civil service.

There were social and economic factors that directly affected the production of celluloid filmmaking, factors which have been established in Nigerian film literature. Notable among these are Ekwuazi (1991), Haynes (1995), Adesanya (2000) and Ogundele (2000). It was the result of monetary policy originated by the IMF and implemented by Babangida that made filmmaking on celluloid impossible because the naira was devalued. This meant that filmmakers could no longer purchase the raw stock for films nor could they afford the cost of travel for post-production work even if films were made.

4.5 Narrative Content of Early Political Films

Although they were indigenous films, the early political and non-political films had traces of foreign influences in them and as Opubor & Nwuneli (1979) observed, they were like documentaries. Russell observes that “Balogun’s early features explore various cinematic techniques as he gradually discovers his own voice” (1998: 31) although further comments on those cinematic techniques were not provided.

Two major factors that affected the quality of narratives of early (Yoruba) films, and subsequently south-western films in general were knowledge and money. Without the requisite formal knowledge in narrative techniques, plot development and characterisation, and with only a few trained hands amidst the plethora of filmmakers, the stories ‘suffered’ in structure and form. Much of the practice at the onset of Nollywood was directly handed down informally and through observation of the travelling theatre. Haynes and Okome state this quite clearly:

the travelling theatre artists always proceeded on the basis of a minimal scenario rather than a fully written-out script; this arrangement for film production ensures that this method cannot change. It also tends to hold in place the typecasting of actors, who bear the same stage name and persona in every film. The actors on the set may well not know the title of the film they are acting in...The result is unrehearsed cameo appearances, shallow characterization, predictable turns, and lots of irrelevant business (2000: 57)

A similar point was made by Gabriel Oyewo who wrote that “the idea of scripting a video film production, with dialogue and detailed description of the situations, scenes and sequences remained alien to the Yoruba video film producers until 1995 when Mainframe produced Akinwumi Ishola’s *Koseegbe*” (2003:146). To this, the Yoruba actors who were accustomed to improvisation and ad-lib dialogues complained, but it signalled the emergence of professional pre-production work in filmmaking. Closely linked to the problem of knowledge was the inability of most producers or directors to fund themselves through any kind of formal training. The system was – and to a large extent still is – an apprentice-led one. It is quite common to hear older filmmakers say “*I trained so-and-so.*” (A. Amenechi, personal communication, August 29, 2013; E. Ugbona, August 24, 2014). Actions were taken not because the rationale behind it was understood but on the basis of trust in the under-studied director.

Because of the now-proven link between the Yoruba theatre tradition and Nollywood, Oyewo (2003) draws on Barber's insights in *The Generation of Plays* (2000) to describe the narratives of the filmmakers. In his estimation, the Yoruba film producers classified their genre according to cultural and modern narratives. Whereas cultural narratives referred to those that drew on the Yoruba philosophy, tradition, history, myth, legend and spirituality, the modern referred to contemporary issues. This classification, though helpful fails to define with clarity the features of the modern narratives. However, written and oral narratives from actors' experiences were exploited, adapted and retold to develop stories, making each presentation a medley of Oyewo's traditional and possibly modern constituents. Haynes (2003) refers to the hybrid nature of Yoruba films some of which combine – as in the specific case he wrote about – music video elements, diatribes, and acting similar to the theatrical performances. The films do not represent a pure style, but are widely known to incorporate elements of different styles, traditions and modes of narration, which is akin to Barber's syncretism discussed earlier in chapter three of this study.

In his description of an early political film, Haynes (2003) identifies as the narrative layering of popular voices against the political elite, the *ewi* (a Yoruba traditional poetic chant), traditional comedy, music videos, televised news akin to journalistic practice, texts and subtexts powerful enough to drive home the points (p. 83). While this is illuminating, it is striking that early scholarly literature on Nigerian films speak less about camera movements, lighting, editing and other technical compositions of film and more about themes and formats i.e. video versus celluloid (16 or 35mm). The ideological standpoints of the filmmakers are also sandwiched or hurdled up in texts that prefer to deal with the seemingly bigger issues of film policy production, distribution, censorship or exhibition.

4.6 Cultural Ideology in the Early Films

Although the first Nigerian films by independent producers were not solely preoccupied with explicit political ideology, some of them, notably Ugbomah's as examined above, addressed political corruption, tyranny, authoritarianism and contestable power relations. All the literature on Nigerian cinema established that the medium was an

educational and propagandist tool, which was successfully deployed in a hegemonic sense to entrench the dominant ideology of the producers.

Along the lines of the Yoruba narratives were politicians' agenda structured to influence the electorate in their favour. Such politicians financed the productions of Yoruba films like Kareem Adepoju's *Ekun Oke Oke* and Adebayo Salami's *Ejiogbe* to highlight their positive and nationalist qualities. This genre thrived in the 1990s. Writing about these films, Oyewo (2003) remarks that "the tendentious nature of the...productions reveals the intentions of the sponsors to impinge on the emotions of the electorate through the power of the video film, which is capable of manipulating them without their noticing the manipulation" (p. 147).

Some of the early films also address the populace, calling it to some sort of self-reflexivity in a way that apportions blame equally to the politicians and the people at large. One of the earliest promises of the video technology boom was its trenchant ability to punish evil doers and reward integrity. This has pervaded the films and as Adejunmobi (2003) claims, "the universe of many Nigerian and Ghanaian video films is one of moral absolutes demonstrated through the final scenes of the serial narrative where the triumph of good over evil is always complete and without ambiguity" (p. 58).

Religion or the place of the supernatural is also quite pervasive in the political or other representations in films. This led Adejunmobi (2003) to assert that, "but equally as important, these spiritual forms of justice and the liberal use of the *deus ex machina* have considerable appeal for those West Africans who believe that the crises they encounter have a spiritual causation" (p. 59). Many filmmakers have retained the element of the spiritual in the narratives either by equating the Christian God with the deities known and revered in traditional African religions or as an extension of the band wagon attitude of cultural producers whose assumptions of passionate reception endorse and sustain the narrative trend.

4.7 Reception of the Films

The distribution of *Kongi's Harvest* failed partly because of the dominance by the Lebanese businessmen who imported pirated copies of Indian, American and Chinese

films into the country. By the time Nigerians started making films, the market had been saturated by the foreign ones and it took a long time before the Indigenization decree of 1972 was fully implemented. This later led the Lebanese businessmen to gradually relinquish the monopolistic hold to include Nigerian operatives. That the foreign films were more popular at that time meant that after a first production, Nigerian filmmakers could not sustain the business because the funds were not there. Part of the problem included the reluctance of the Lebanese merchants to distribute Nigerian films. With the dominance of foreign films, first time indigenous producers abandoned the practice soon after their first production. This factor was well recognised by scholars at the time.

Quoting Afolabi Adesanya, Ekwuazi (1991: 196) noted:

Among Nigerian filmmakers, only Ola Balogun, Eddy Ugboma, Adeyemi Afolayan and Hubert Ogunde have been able, somehow, to go from one film to another. Francis Oladele was last heard of with *Bullfrog in the Sun* (1971); Jab Adu with *Bisi Daughter of the River* (1977); *Ishola Ogunshola* with *Efunsetan Aniwura* (1982); Bayo Aderohunmu with *Ireke Onibudo* (1983) and Ayo Razak with *Anikura* (1983).

This is because the distribution and exhibition framework has proved to be intractably problematic (Opubor & Nwuneli 1979; Mgbejume 1989), not different in any way from what it is in recent times. Writing on the problems of the early cinema period in Nigeria, scholars have often referred to lack of funding and proper distribution outlets including robbery during film screenings, political bureaucracy, untrained practitioners and a general lack of interest in film from some important quarters especially the government. With such insecurity lurking around filmmakers, it was evident that some structural problems were yet to be tackled. Among the more ‘successful’ filmmakers like Balogun and Ugbomah, there also existed the incessant cries of depleting finances leading some of them to compromise their creative values. For instance Eddie Ugbomah’s adoption of the Yoruba film genre was due to its popular reception. In an interview with Frank Ukadike, Ugbomah made the following point:

I myself have since changed course and adopted the Yoruba film tradition. Since this tradition is oriented towards cultural plays and dramas and remains largely apolitical, a filmmaker is spared the danger of making enemies. The Yoruba theatre/film genre does not satisfy my creative impulse, but I have been making money from it... It is very frustrating that the quest for survival has forced me to relinquish my original style of filmmaking (Ukadike 2014: 256).

As expected, not all filmmakers of Ugbomah's period made Yoruba films for the masses, and so did not attract an equal measure of reception. Writing about Ladi Ladebo's film, *Vendor*, Ekwuazi (2000) says that it (and other productions of his) are usually shown to a small group of elitist individuals, "opinion leaders who, through interpersonal channels pass on the socio-political message" (p. 279). Ladebo must have been compelled to adopt this approach because of the 'newness' of the cinema to Nigerians at that time or because of the pressures of regulatory bodies, to which he had been previously subjected. Ladebo's films were financed by foreign aid, which explains his continued affinity to the elite.

The film *Maradona*, preceded by an audio rendition of a backlash to the military power for its annulment of the elections was so popular that a political scientist of the period attributed Babangida's decision to relinquish power to Gbenga Adewusi's audio cassette and later video film (Haynes 2003). The musician was briefly arrested for the production, but connections to influential elites saw his release sooner than Soyinka who spent several months in jail for his oppositional voice to the government. But such cultural missiles aimed at political powers were not to last especially after the Babangida administration. By the time his successor, Abacha, assumed office, and in the wake of his repression of dissident voices, video producers turned away from overtly political subjects to 'safer' and more economically rewarding thematic concerns. By the mid-1990s, there arose a film genre which catered to traditional and pre-colonial politics.

4.8 Alternative Constructions of the Political Past: Cultural Epics

According to Haynes (2000), "many of the films have traditional village settings; some are set in the historical past; many are self-consciously traditional" (p. 2). In the Nigerian imagination, any mention of a historical film or a construction of the past, conjures up what is today referred to as cultural epics. During the course of the numerous interviews conducted, it was realised that such films described above by Haynes fitted neatly into people's minds as the depiction of history in film. By history according to this imagination is the distant pre-colonial time. Such references

envisioned 18th and 19th Century cultural history of ethnic groups in which kingdoms existed, were conquered and regained by valiant men and women.

Filmmakers like Charles Novia, Fred Amata, Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen and Bond Emeruwa have already commented on the *modus operandi* of the film industry regarding the development of the epic genre. The success of a particular genre of film meant that several more like it was to follow. In the 1990s, there was the growth of a particular genre which practitioners called epics. Popular critical characterizations of the epic will invariably describe a lengthy, larger than life, heroic tale – a hyperbolic assessment which also traditionally applies to superhero characters – with a longer-than-normal duration. Epics are stories or dramas about humans on a grand scale. They are said to involve a hero(s) – kings, princes, aristocrats. They often have a lead character who is presented with an arduous task that must be undertaken, (in some cases with reasonable success) and usually for the common good. The characteristics of epic heroes include such qualities as strength, authority, intelligence, courage and attractiveness. Epics may have gods or other supernatural beings.

Although initiated by the Italian film industry, the US has been known to popularize the genre in a way that has not been paralleled by any other film culture. On the one hand, Western film cultures have been known to develop various genres, the most popular of which are action, gangster, horror, war films, science fiction and fantasy, but as explained in the first chapter, these labels fail to adequately account for those that exist in Nollywood. It seems that authors adopt them as a kind of reference for their readers, often without a proviso.

Nigerian film genres on the other hand are predominantly drama even though the lines separating one from another are often blurred. A further division would identify melodrama, comedy and epics. It is the latter that engages the focus of this section. Shaka (2011) points out that Nollywood genres did not emerge in a vacuum. Their roots can be traced to the social anxieties, fears, dreams, aspirations and demands of members of the Nigerian society. With the success of the ‘pioneer’ film *Living in Bondage*, many other would-be filmmakers cashed in on the subject matter. The result was a proliferation of ritual and occult genres in the 1990s. When filmmakers were set on edge with the incessant cries from critics (Okome, 2010) who denounced their focus on witchcraft and human sacrifice, they turned to epics as Shaka (2011) claims which in

itself constituted a rise in the cultural epic genre. Ayakoroma (2007) described the Igbo language genre, English language genre, epics/historical, prostitution and ghetto life, traditional belief genre (similar to epics), family situation dramas, gender-related genre, Christian genre, comedy, love and romance genre, thrillers, war/action films, political video film genre and horror films. This shows how unstable genre classification is and in most cases, it defies categorisations and boundaries.

In the Igbo/English language film genre, *Battle of Musanga* (1995) was an important film, dubbed, an authentic African epic by its producer, Gabriel Okoye. But it was not as popular as the film *Igodo* (1999) which was a watershed in the history of the class of films that would be later known as cultural epics. Charles Novia in his book *Nollywood till November* (2012) shares great insights on the film about the producer, director, budget, stars, theme and reception. Clearly, *Igodo* was different in its style and portrayal of pre-colonial Africans because it represented a different perspective of story-telling “when the movies were over-flogging rituals and witchcraft themes which the public were getting weary of” (Novia 2012: 7).

Co-directed by Don Pedro Obaseki and Andy Amenechi, *Igodo* explored the idea of collective sacrifice to appease a god for a crime committed by one but with the acquiescence of an entire community. The film is an excellent example of Nigerian filmmaking and the epic genre. Set in the eastern region of Nigeria, the story mirrors communal living and lifestyle while de-emphasizing the role of the individual. When an innocent Iheukwumere is unjustly killed, the villagers silently endorse his death without consulting the oracle to determine the veracity of the accusations leveled against the victim. But for the mysterious and multiple deaths of villagers, the oracle would not have been consulted. When eventually it is, the perpetrators of the hideous crime also die in inexplicable ways, one after another. Celebrated as one of the best epics (a Nigerian filmmaker referred to it as the best historical film from Nollywood), *Igodo* engages the supernatural, has a major theme of retributive justice, and underscores communal living. Seven men sent off on a rescue mission to a blood thirsty oracle must return with a special knife with which to bring down a tree allegedly causing the death of villagers.

Novia’s belief that *Igodo* “was released to massive acceptance and a sales record breaking feat” (up to 1 million copies were sold) (2012: 7) is indicative of the kinds of

films that were released for the next two years, while the producer of *Igodo*, Ojiofor Ezeanyache, was basking in his success. *Egg of Life* (2003), a feminine version of *Igodo* soon followed, among a plethora of similarly constructed films.

This chapter has briefly traced the history of political filmmaking in Nigeria, what might be called the precursors of the six English language films examined in this research. It examined the existing literature on the 1970s films made by independent producers in Nigeria in terms of their motivation, narrative and ideological slant as well as their reception within their contexts of production. The alternatives to historical films, which are called cultural epics were also examined, noting that although such films are largely fictional, their producers and the viewing audience tend to refer to them as history because they are set in rural areas in pre-colonial times. But in actual fact, these epics may not be markedly different from folk tales orally handed down through generations, as Amaka Igwe claimed (personal communication, April 26, 2013).

CHAPTER 5

REPRESENTING THE PAST: MOTIVATORS AND DE-MOTIVATORS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter responds to the first research question raised in the first chapter, which addresses the motivation behind the construction of a political past. It looks at the character of Nigerian filmmakers whose works are studied, all of whom are men. The number of women filmmakers is growing rapidly in recent times, but none, it can be argued has ventured into political representations of the past. Filmmakers' background is reflected on to understand how that affects the choice of which political past is narrated and how. This chapter demonstrates that Nollywood is neither apolitical nor ahistorical, and if it perceived to be so, it is the result of a series of factors outside the filmmakers' control.

Recent studies on Nollywood project the industry as a commercially motivated one (Adesokan, 2011; Haynes, 2000). While that is true to a large extent, this chapter shows that a minority group of filmmakers are not primarily concerned about commerce as much as they are about voicing certain social and political issues. For instance, Kingsley Ogoro, who has made up to 8 films remarked, *"I don't make a living from films. I am a businessman first, which is where my money comes from. I make films to address issues and correct impressions"* (K. Ogoro, personal communication, 29 Aug, 2013).

However, the filmmaker's 'voice' in past political and national conversations is frequently suppressed by budgetary constraints, censorship, poor distribution outlets and piracy. The historic representation of events and people requires a bigger (than the usual melodrama or romantic comedy) budget, which admittedly is out of the reach of the majority of Nollywood practitioners. After making his first historical film, *October 1* (2014), Kunle Afolayan stated that it cost him \$2M (£1.3M), which is 400 percent more than his last production, *Phone Swap* (2012). In addition to that, the filmmaker affirmed that *October 1* was the most challenging of his productions, one which stretched him financially, physically and psychologically (K. Afolayan, personal communication, November 3, 2014). Budgetary requirements, coupled with the possibility of a ban by a pro-government Censor's Board, uncertain distribution channels and the mechanism of

piracy combine to steer filmmakers away from representing a political past. This is especially so in an industry not populated by Kingsley Ogoros, who have alternative sources of income. These de-motivators are further discussed below.

Writing on filmmakers' political critiques, Haynes (2006) notes that "the effects of the video films on their audiences and the motivations of their makers are effectively unknowable..." (p. 534). I argue the contrary in this and in the seventh chapter since this research has precisely addressed filmmakers' motivation in this chapter and the audience responses to some of the politically-charged films in the penultimate chapter.

The film *Half of a Yellow Sun* was a later addition to the collection of films listed in the first chapter because it was released officially in Nigeria in 2014 (although premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival's special presentation section in 2013), by which time this research was near completion. Therefore, it was impossible to interview, at least as an inclusion to the present study, the producers or director of the film. Apart from the minor experimental reception study performed at the Nigerian premiere of the film (not reported in this thesis), this researcher relied on media sources and interviews with Censor's Board officials for information on the film.

The educational background and the totality of filmmakers' experiences as well as the traditions from which they emerge will undoubtedly affect their artistic vision, and the kind of treatment given to past political subjects. Charles Novia, Theatre Arts Graduate, attests to this by recounting the experience that inspired one of his films, shortly after a visit to Holland:

When I returned to Lagos, my whole world-view had suddenly changed because of that trip...I started asking myself questions about the political leadership in my country and why Nigeria had...the worst form of self-serving leaders over the years, despite our potential to be a great force to reckon with in the world. I had witnessed successive draconian military governments and at the time I came back from Holland, Nigeria was just two years into a democratic government with President Olusegun Obasanjo as the democratically elected President. However, his first term was quite directionless and nothing appeared to be any different from the past military governments. Whilst agonising over the state of my country, the stirrings of an idea for a movie came to my mind. It would later form the backbone of a movie I produced two years later titled *I will die for you* (Novia, 2012: 36)

Whether they employ the past political scene as a background for narrating more contemporary stories or they produce an adaptation of a historical piece, a filmmaker's artistic vision will be shaped by the level of formal, semi-formal or informal education he is exposed to as evidenced by Novia's comments above. Similarly, Tunde Kelani, another filmmaker, makes elaborate reference to the influence of his childhood years and education on his commitment to Yoruba culture and identity in all his films (Haynes 2007). Furthermore, Kunle Afolayan, one of the most respected contemporary Nigerian filmmaker, grew up in the home of a famous theatre and film director, his father, Adeyemi Afolayan (also known as Ade Love). From an early age, he was exposed to the film business, which explains his preference for filmmaking over a Banking career. Even in difficult circumstances and challenging infrastructural environment such as the absence of cinemas and brazen piracy, Afolayan is not interested in pursuing alternative careers. Entirely motivated by a passion for films, he carries on at the risk of incurring losses from the piracy of his films, a point which Kelani also makes "*I don't see myself doing any other business; it's my background and the passion. Even when I say enough because of those Igbo boys (piracy), I still go back to it*". (T. Kelani, personal communication, February 12, 2013).

Another prominent filmmaker, Eddie Ugbomah, confirms that for him, money making in film is secondary. "*I was abroad making films, acting and making a lot of money, but the stupid love to go home and do the same things was still there*" (E. Ugboma, personal communication, August 24, 2014). For these reasons, and because the filmmakers occupy a key position in this research, the paragraphs below provide background information of varying lengths on the filmmakers whose works are discussed in subsequent chapters. Several Nollywood scholars address film texts in complete ignorance of the backgrounds of the producers of such titles as if the character and personality of the filmmaker did not influence the narrative and technical choices that realised the film. I argue against such an approach because it does not differ intellectually from a lay person's analytical reading of films. As a critical and intellectual exercise, it is far more fruitful to interrogate, not just film, but also all art forms with sufficient background information of the creators because that knowledge reveals the rationale behind artistic decisions, actions and inactions.

5.2 Background Information on Individual Filmmakers

5.2.1 Tunde Kelani (aka TK)

Born in 1948 and although none of his films is reviewed in this study, Tunde Kelani is included in this section for three reasons. The first is that his Yoruba-language film *Saworoide* (1999) bears a resemblance to the films under critical review. The film, which uses the talking drum to symbolise the people's voice, is a camouflaged depiction of military intervention amidst heightened civilian corruption in Nigerian civil life. Second, his contributions to contemporary Nigerian film industry have earned him the enviable position of a, if not the, pacesetter in terms of cinematography. Jonathan Haynes's 2007 interview with him attests to this. Third, his name got multiple mentions in all the interviews conducted with filmmakers and film journalists as the most highly regarded contemporary filmmaker in the country. Widely respected in and outside the country, he is regarded by his colleagues as the don of filmmaking. In the video boom filmmaking era, Kelani alone approximates Eddie Ugbomah of the celluloid 1970s and 1980s in terms of output, social and political commentaries in and through films.

Kelani received financial aid from the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) to study at the London Film School in the 1970s after an apprenticeship in still photography. After a 2-year programme, graduating with a Diploma in filmmaking from the London Film School, he returned to Nigeria and worked with NTA for another two years before going ahead to practice independently. In his own words, the economic, political, and social climate in which he and most other filmmakers worked was "inauspicious" (Esonwanne 2008: 27). He began a video renting facility with Wale Fanu called 'Cinekraft', but he owns a studio, Mainframe Productions from which all his productions emerge.

TK makes films in his native language, Yoruba, in his attempt to project its rich cultural heritage to a paying audience although it eventually gets recorded and sold in the home video format. His films are influenced by the fact that he grew up with his grandfather in Abeokuta, southwest Nigeria, where he was exposed to Yoruba culture and tradition. His films are either self-financed or through sponsorships from corporate organizations and governments. Kelani is a passionate filmmaker, motivated by the

desire to project his culture which is evidenced by his continued filmmaking practice in spite of being severely affected by piracy.

5.2.2 Kingsley Ogoro

Kingsley Ogoro, producer of *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, started his entertainment career as a dancer, and later music producer in his own recording studio in Surulere, Lagos with artistes like Blacky, Sunny Ade, Charles Oputa and Ese Agesse. He has two degrees in Banking and Finance and Accountancy, but describes himself first and foremost as a musician, film producer and business man. His quest for excellence drove him into filmmaking because as he attests himself, “*I observed the motion picture industry and realised that more was needed to raise the ante*” (K. Ogoro, personal communication, August 23, 2013). He believed himself to be the custodian of the talent and leadership the film industry needed at the time of his entry. Ogoro is change-driven. He is in a superior class of producers because he runs an equipment-leasing outfit which places him on a pedestal that most other producers covet. As Charles Novia, film producer and director, aptly recorded:

...over eighty percent of the movies shot from 1995 to 2005 were shot with camera equipment from Carvers Studios. From U-matic camera to analogue Betacam and later on, the Digital Camera and its Digital-Editing Suites, Carvers had them all. The company was a dependable, up-to-date outfit anchored on the vision of its Managing Director, Kingsley Ogoro (Novia 2012: 2).

Owning a film equipment and rental facility turned out to be a huge advantage that Ogoro has over fellow filmmakers who have to rent film equipment and work round the clock in order to return them within the stipulated time to avoid incurring additional costs. Ogoro has several films to his production credit. *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* stand out for what he called their “federal character”. Both films are projections of the Nigerian Civil War and how the questions of ethnicity challenge and are challenged by contemporary romantic relationships.

Initially titled *Guns of Biafra*, *Across the Niger* drew the ire of the Censor’s Board, and was denied approval until the title was changed. Ogoro hinted at what he perceived to be a bias among the classifiers at the National Film and Video Censor’s

Board (NFVCB). He pointed out that only the title of a film is sufficient to irritate them and make them label a film even before screening it. This prejudice is deepened by an allegiance to the government of the day, which the Board seeks to protect from public embarrassment by prohibiting at will those films which are likely to undermine national security in their opinions.

The motivations behind past political constructions are as varied as the filmmakers themselves as Ogoro observed. From audience preferences, political endorsements and contestations to budgetary constraints (research, props) and censorship, the political consciousness of filmmakers takes on different representations. What is certain is that they are undeniably aware of the political landscape in which they operate but may be willing or unwilling to commit resources to its commentary through film for a wide range of reasons.

5.2.3 Sam Onwuka

Sam Onwuka, film producer, is a Nigerian emigrant to the United States. According to him, he has some 40 productions to his credit including *Stubborn Grasshopper* (2001) and *Oil Village* (2001) which are of interest to my study. His conversation revealed a measure of disfluency in his knowledge of English language, and consequently, his educational background, which he failed to disclose. Onwuka made films with the intention of acting as an emissary of sorts. He affirmed that behind every movie of his, was an important message which he wanted to transmit to the Nigerian people. He claims that *Stubborn Grasshopper* was made “to tell Nigerians the truth about government and the way they were being ruled by the military” (S. Onwuka, personal communication, October 2013). He, like other Nigerian filmmakers, took on the burden of ‘preaching’ or reminding the audience that evil is always paid for by the perpetrator here on earth. His messages, as he believed them to be, were invariably positive and served as a deterrent to evil doers. *Stubborn Grasshopper* was intended to uncover some of the widespread untruths that trailed the death of General Sani Abacha. The film’s protagonist is undeniably General Abacha (acted by Sam Obeakheme as General Alba) although Onwuka claims to have been concerned, at the time of production, more about the country as a whole, than Abacha himself. In defence of that position, he explained

that the film also reflected on Babangida, Chief Abiola and some other political characters of the period, apart from the military dictator.

Like many other filmmakers and audiences in Nigeria, Onwuka's understanding of the construction of the past, dwells largely on the fictional portrayal of rural communities in Nigeria (known as cultural epics, discussed in the previous chapter) and how communal living was much desired then than it is now. He draws on lessons from his ethnic group, Igbo, to develop his narratives. This was explained in an interview in October 2013 as his narrative strategy. Onwuka confirmed how being Igbo, one of the major Nigerian tribes, fuels his storytelling and even justified the title of *Stubborn Grasshopper* on the basis of an Igbo proverb that best illustrates the character of Abacha and Nigerian politicians of the 1980s and 1990s at large.

Sam Onwuka is described by his collaborators as a shrewd, daring and passionate film producer who would stop at nothing to realise his artistic vision. His relentlessness brought him Owerri State Police support during the production of *Stubborn Grasshopper*, which he believes has sold up to 100,000 copies at the time of the interview (2013). Onwuka revealed that he was mindful of the Censors' Board at the time of release of the film, which informed a caveat with which the film opens "...any resemblance to persons living or dead is not intended". "Without that", he admitted, "they (Censors' Board) will not let the film pass" In spite of this, there is reason to suggest that the film may have boycotted the Board. On two occasions in my telephone conversations with Onwuka, he evaded the question on how the film was received or classified at the Board. Although he may not have heard the questions clearly, another film director interviewed hinted at Onwuka's evasive and questionable practices. While pleading anonymity, the director referred to his resistance of Onwuka's antics which included shooting two films with the cast of one film and paying same for only one film project. So, with little if any formal education, his ethnic origin and a shrewd business outlook, Sam Onwuka sees the burden of representing the past as a duty, which he is obliged to perform. Interestingly, another filmmaker who worked with Onwuka on *Stubborn Grasshopper* revealed that the prospect of producing the film held financial promises for Onwuka at that time (N. Ossai, personal communication, March 23, 2013) although the latter declined commenting on commercial motivations.

5.2.4 Izu Ojukwu

Izu Ojukwu, film director, is a graduate of the Nigerian Film Institute, Jos. His first film *Ichabod* (1993) was a church production he made for the Catholic Biblical Movement in Jos. He directed Kingsley Ogoro's *Across the Niger* probably because of his love for what he termed 'military movies'. He has gone on to make other films but he is famous for the Nigerian Breweries, Amstel Malta Box Office (AMBO) movies *Sitanda* (2006), a film that reflects on slavery and love. *White Waters* (2007), which explores how talent can be uncovered through sports and friendship. *Cindy's Notes* (2008) is a film that examines the value of youthfulness as a stage of societal transformation. There is also *The Child* (2009/10). His most recent and forthcoming film, '76 is definitely, a construction of a political past. He describes the celluloid production as a film set in 1976 when General Murtala Mohammed was Head of State for a brief period, during which time he was assassinated. The film mirrors the lives of the wives of the soldiers. Much as the film crew would want to de-emphasise the violent character of the period, the year 1976 is almost synonymous with coup d'état. This filmmaker's vision for '76 "is to go beyond ethnic and religious boundaries in the film and preach a message of tolerance". Ojukwu, who has spent 20 years in the video film industry, believes that those years were preparatory and leading up to the peak of his career when he would make a real movie, a film with historical dimensions. In an interview with Obatala (2012), the filmmaker said:

...I wanted to take historical material and explore. It's an opportunity that I cannot blow: doing what I've always fantasized about, and then getting a story...that can tell us where we're coming from and where we begin [sic] to get it wrong...where the future of this country was determined (Obatala 2012: 26-27)

Undoubtedly, the forthcoming film is the high point of Ojukwu's career, but then, it has come with a good dose of difficulties since it was shot on celluloid, a format which many filmmakers including in Hollywood are turning away from. After reading the comments above and discovering I had a kindred spirit in him, I contacted him for the umpteenth time in the last four years for an interview. Even the intervention of Shaibu Hussein, the respected film journalist, failed. Izu Ojukwu subtly declined interviews and preferred a mediated conversation through WhatsApp. When I reluctantly agreed to chat on the mobile device app, he sent me the following statement: "*I didn't have any*

proper formal education, my environment was my classroom, events around me were my resource materials” (I. Ojukwu, personal communication, June 15, 2014). Subsequent efforts to extract further information from him failed.

5.2.5 Henry Legemah

The interview with Henry Legemah was conducted on WhatsApp, a mobile phone chat device that uses 3G data or wireless internet connection to send and receive messages in real time. Attempts to secure a face-to-face interview over a period of four months were futile because the filmmaker shuttled between Benin and Lagos. Since I was based in Lagos, I requested a Lagos meeting, but then, Legemah’s ill health made that impossible. When he suggested conducting the interview over WhatsApp, I was hesitant because as Sarah Tracy explained, mediated interviews are known to prevent some information such as non-verbal cues from getting through to the interviewer, and certain questions would go unanswered (Tracy 2013: 165). Probing would be difficult and his responses would depend on how quickly he was able to type. Some responses were sent the day after, allowing him to think through them before typing and sending. As expected, some questions were not answered, even after a reminder and most of his responses were one-liners. But the basic information about him and his 2005 production *Anini* were obtained.

Legemah is presently the Chairman of the Association of Movie Producers (AMP), Edo State Chapter. With two degrees and two diplomas in Electrical and Electronics Engineering, and a profile of working in different capacities as actor, scriptwriter, director and producer, the figure of Henry Legemah is versatile. The producer of *Anini*, Legemah, has spent close to 30 years as a filmmaker. The film, *Anini*, according to him was his fourth film, which earned him the attention of the viewing public. The film also brought with it the recognition he sought as an African filmmaker, with nine nominations and a special mention from the African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA) 2006 event. The Edo State born producer’s parents are royalty and he belongs to the Legemah and Obaseki dynasty.

Having grown up in Benin City, he had familiarised himself with the intrigues of the Lawrence Anini saga in the late 1980s when it raged. He was particularly motivated

to make the film in order to disabuse the minds of the Nigerian audience who thought that Anini was a super-hero. To Legemah, Anini was a common thief, and in his own words, “*I was a top dog in town when Anini saga came on and killed social night life in Benin. When I became a film maker, I decided to correct and de-mystify the myth and giant Nigerians thought Lawrence Anini was. He was just a common thief*” (H. Legemah, personal communication, May 30, 2014). Besides, when the Anini crises abated, Otwin Marenin produced a brilliant and incisive article in 1987 on the robbery phenomenon which stated that, “the Military Governor ...called on the public to help find Anini; [because] the once ebullient nightlife of Benin City came to a standstill as people kept off the main roads after dark; for months, traffic was disrupted and motorists were harassed...” (Marenin, 1987: 260). The heightened insecurity in the city was a major source of concern which seemed to defy solutions at the time primarily because of the complicity and complexity of police operations.

Legemah recalls the “extensive research” performed on the screenplay while talking about the pre-production, budget, production and release. Several filmmakers proudly refer to the research carried out on their scripts before shooting begins. Zeb Ejiro said it of *Domitilla*, Bond Emeruwa of *Mortal Inheritance*, Funke Akindele of *Jenifa*, Sam Onwuka of *Stubborn Grasshopper*, Franklin Okoro of *Militants*, Kalu Anya of *Oil Village*, and Lancelot Imasuen of *Invasion 1897* to mention recent examples. These references to pre-production research reveal a professionalism that was largely absent from the film industry in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the scale of research is sometimes incongruous with the final product which seems to suggest a lop-sided approach to pre-production research in Nollywood. For instance, Bond Emeruwa remarked that before cast and crew went on location to shoot *Mortal Inheritance*, which was on sickle cell anaemia, he alone did an extensive research (B. Emeruwa, personal communication, September 13, 2013). This means that the cast and crew had to rely on Emeruwa’s understanding of the health condition to interpret their various roles. This might also suggest the need for a vertical and horizontal broadening of the scale of pre-production research.

With Legemah’s *Anini*, there was evidence of research, up to a point that the second part of the film began somewhat like a documentary, with real names and biographical details of Anini’s new gang appearing as anchorage on screen. There was a

semblance to the real actors among the film cast. Legemah commented that to show how thoroughly they worked, he was himself auditioned for the role of Iyamu, the notorious police officer who aided Anini in his escapades. He pegged the film budget at ₦6.5m in 2003, when work began on the film. About ₦4m was provided by a business partner of his, Victor Ogiemwonyi. *Anini* was not released till 2005, and even then, he complained of being swindled by the marketer whose name was undisclosed during the interview.

5.2.6 Fred Amata

The interview with Fred Amata was engaging. It took place in his living room in Surulere Lagos, where three of us – the interviewee, an acquaintance of mine and huge fan of the Amata family and I – sat together for two hours to talk about Fred’s career, his involvement in the production of *Anini* and his vision of Nollywood. Amata is an energetic and eloquent speaker of Nigerian Pidgin. Although the interview was conducted in English Language, he switched frequently and with ease to Pidgin. He laughed a lot and defended some of the deficiencies well-documented in the film industry, one in which he has become a vital part of. Said Amata, *“there is a reason for all that and I can explain it all to you. You know, we can justify a lot of things...argue positions and assertions. It is not a question of Nollywood settling for mediocrity; it is a question of mediocrity coming out of mediocrity”* (F. Amata, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

Fred Amata, a celebrated filmmaker, belongs to the Amata dynasty. His family is versatile in the creative arts (his father, Zack Amata his brother, Jeta Amata his nephew and Ruke Amata are actors and filmmakers). A graduate of Theatre Arts, Amata began his career at the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) Headquarters library where he met and dubbed cassettes for Zeb Ejiro, who had just completed the pilot of *Ripples*, a television soap opera. Amata has been in the creative industry since he was six. After graduation, he started acting and before long, directing for television too.

He had gone on to make films of his own before being approached by Henry Legemah. His motivation for directing *Anini* is the great story behind the character of

Lawrence Anini. “*Who did not know about the story*”, he quipped? “*When Legemah brought it to me, I jumped at it.*” At the time when the film was made, Nollywood was transiting, discovering itself and exploring genres as they (filmmakers) thought appropriate. In Amata’s perspective, there was a tacit agreement on what themes or story types were explored. Then, there was the band-wagon issue that saw a proliferation of every kind of film that succeeded financially.

Amata revealed interesting aspects of the journey in the production of *Anini*. At a time in the industry when script conferences were alien, they held one for *Anini*. The pre-production lasted a whole year before the actual shooting began. The cast and crew travelled to Benin to shoot the film because they wanted it to be as real as possible. Lawrence Anini lived and worked in Benin even though he was originally from Orogho, a village about 50km from Benin City, in the then Bendel State of Nigeria. Even at that, he spoke very fondly of the film adding that it was challenging and fun to work on what the crew interpreted as an “action movie”. Legemah refers to Fred and Jeta Amata, filmmakers in their own rights, who both acted in the film as two of the “*best hands in the industry at that time*” (H. Legemah, personal communication, May 30, 2014)

Two other details of interest are the crowd-directing and the soundtrack, which Amata raised in the interview. At some point during the shoot, the exact location of a character’s (Dis-is-me) death could not be decided. Scores of on-lookers assembled to dictate where Dis-is-me was actually shot. The crowd grew to frenzy and had to be quietened to prevent civil unrest. The soundtrack popular with the audience, was markedly different from the kind of lyrics that obtain today, the sort that complete the narration in each scene in a semi-didactic manner.

The release of the film was uncertain. Legemah released it two years after shooting, while Amata claimed not to have known when the film went public. An acquaintance of Amata’s called him up to talk about the film, which was how he came to know his “*library film*” had hit the shelves. Furthermore, Amata claimed the film was “*shot as one movie but through the marketer, we got parts 1 and 2*”. Legemah also painfully reflected on the dubious practice of the marketer when I interrogated the source of the ₦6.5m used to produce the film. He said, “*No. The main funding of almost ₦4m came from Mr Victor Ogiemwonyi, a friend. A rare Bini man whom the good Lord will continue to bless; unfortunately the man did not get a dime back on his investment*

because we were ripped off by the Onitsha marketer” (H. Legemah, personal communication, May 30, 2014)

5.2.7 Kalu Anya

Kalu Anya, is a man who describes himself in his film career as a very old hand in the industry, first as an apprentice and later as a film director. He claims to have been present from inception of Nollywood since he worked on *Living in Bondage* as director of photography. For Anya, “*filmmaking is my passion, a profession that brings me fulfilment and which I find myself doing all the time. I can’t do anything else*” (K. Anya, personal communication, February 12, 2012). A diploma graduate of International Film and Global Academy in Lagos, Anya is another filmmaker who has also trained for the most part on the job (personal communication). Apart from his passion, filmmaking for Anya was occupational in the sense that he sought it in order to make a living. When he directed *Oil Village*, he was approached by Sam Onwuka, the producer. But as he claims, he had to go in search of producers who needed his services and who could pay a good deal. He also attests to the role of censorship as a deterrent to constructing a political past, a factor which makes filmmakers carefully negotiate the images and codes of representation. The subject of censorship is discussed further below.

From the background details of the film producers and directors, it is clear that there are several factors at play in the choices of which political past to portray. First, this set of filmmakers is motivated by a passionate desire to tell their own stories before the commercial benefits of filmmaking are considered as they claimed in the interviews. None of them stated explicitly that financial gains were their prime motivators, contrary to the conventional wisdom that the filmmakers are generally motivated by pecuniary compensations, set out by scholars including Haynes and Okome (2000). It is pertinent to note that non-commercial motivation is not a generalisation that accounts for filmmakers depicting a political past because of the small number of films examined. However, among those listed here and a good number of others, art and social commentary, they argued, trump monetary considerations. A salient observation is that the information reported thus far was self-reported by the producers of popular videos so that even if the filmmakers were commercially motivated, they did not present it as

being their prime concern. As will be shown below, there are several others who are motivated by financial returns.

Second, personal and family backgrounds influenced choices and education played a key role in shaping the filmmakers' cinematic view. The minimum level of education of the producers of the films discussed was a diploma, although some had first degrees as well, which, from the findings of this research did not necessarily emerge from Mass Communication faculties. Kingsley Ogoro has two degrees in Banking; Fred Amata has one in Theatre Arts; Henry Legemah has two in Engineering. Simi Opeoluwa now has one in Film Studies (but not at the time he directed *Battle of Love*). Tunde Kelani, Kalu Anya, Sam Onwuka and Izu Ojukwu have Diplomas in Film and allied studies.

Third, nothing appears to be radically different from other kinds of representation in Nollywood videos. The same processes of story-telling, financing and distribution are deployed in spite of the bigger budgets that representing the past demands. Similar complaints of insufficient funding and censorship made by the early Nigerian and Bollywood filmmakers (Pendakur, 2003) arose. However, the filmmakers affirmed that a greater burden of representation fell on them since they sought to portray events, which the anticipated audience had as much information on (and perhaps more) as they did.

Fourth, the films under consideration are shot on location like all other Nollywood films with popular (Segun Arinze, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Bimbo Akintola, Ramsey Noah, Sam Obeakheme, Iretiola Doyle, Fred Amata, to mention the top popular actors) and less popular actors at work (Jeta Amata, Henry Legemah, Neville Ossai). There was a subtle yearning for audience acceptance by the filmmakers which the researcher perceived during the interviews, hence the casting of popular actors. The desire for acceptance also has in part to do with the third reason on the burden of representation such that it was both a burden and a guarantee. Because the events portrayed were already in the public domain, the filmmakers nursed the thought that the films would be well received by the audience. Fred Amata articulated this point carefully, "*there is nobody that does not know Anini. Even children heard of him then. We knew we had a massive story that people will like, so I jumped at it*". Similarly, Kalu Anya said, "*it was a Ken Saro Wiwa story, you know how popular it was*". And

Kingsley Ogoro added “*people know about the war. I wanted them to come out from watching the film thinking that they have seen what they know...*”

In the following paragraphs, a broad categorisation of the motives of Nigerian filmmaking as understood from several interspersed months of interacting with filmmakers is provided.

5.3 Filmmakers’ Motivation

Several factors spur on a Nigerian filmmaker. Dominant among them is the quest for profit, which has been rehearsed ad infinitum in literature on the video films. This study supports the notion that majority of the filmmakers are indeed motivated by sheer commerce, but more importantly, it also identifies other motives which receive little or no attention in the ever-increasing literature on Nigerian films. The subsequent sections address economic and social factors seen to incite filmmakers into visual storytelling.

5.3.1 Economic Factors

Haynes (2010) in *African Cinema and Nollywood*, observes that, “Commercial cinemas became essential features of colonial cities, powerful instances of modernity, along with electric lighting, amplified popular music, factory wages, and motorized vehicles” (p. 68). In post-colonial Nigeria, when economic fortunes plummeted due to fiscal policy (Haynes 2000), commercial cinema culture waned, to be revived through the video technology. Paul Obazele, filmmaker, in asserting that the commercial viability of films was placed before other options stated that political constructions are a task for the government (a task he referred to as propaganda and which was unlikely to be financially rewarding). “*I’m not the one to propagate government affairs and events*” he said. *The main factors are income and audience. The filmmaker always has to do what will pay him at the end of the day*” (P. Obazele, personal communication, November 2010).

With the Nigerian video films, speedy financial gain was put before art because the film marketers were shrewd, largely uneducated businessmen. The videos were one

more commodity put up for sale. Commerce was known to replace technical knowhow, and Haynes (2006) rightly observed that “one of the most common charges against video producers and distributors is that they are motivated entirely by the desire for profit, with a consequent strong preference for sticking to known subjects and formulae, which does not include political matters” (p. 513). The reason for this was primarily because Kenneth Nnebue, and later producers cum marketers belonged among the Igbos whose business acumen, according to conventional wisdom, surpasses those of the Hausas and Yorubas or any other ethnic groups in the country for that matter. They were merchants who traded in everything and anything that could bring in profits. In Lagos, they dominated Idumota and Alaba markets, the same locations where films are sold; in Onitsha, the Igbos owned the film shops and other spaces in Iweka Road because it was their land.

However, there are some exceptions. Novia (2012) wrote that although Ojiofor Ezeanyanche (OJ Productions), a popular film marketer, was uneducated, he “knew a lot about filmmaking and ... could create amazing story ideas. He also knew the requisite elements needed to make the scene or dialogue punchy” (pp. 21-22). So while it was profit for the majority, a few who ranked profit as secondary existed and practiced as well.

All the filmmakers interviewed for this project did agree on one point: constructing the past is not an all-comers affair. Charles Novia, actor, writer, and a director of Project Nollywood is of the opinion that the greatest obstacle to the production of quality historical films is the lack of funds. This, he believes, will cater for all the other requirements including travel, research and props to mention a few. It is an uphill task for the intellectual filmmaker because it is much more capital and labour-intensive than any other kind of audio-visual re-construction. With this, it becomes easy to see why depicting a political past could not be done quickly enough to guarantee the sales the merchants-turned-filmmakers were after. It is a reason that partly accounts for the small number of films that recast their vision of past events. Of course, other factors influencing telling a political past come into play but the level of education and the ‘maximum profit’ orientation among producers and marketers did not make for a balanced equation.

Fred Amata's take on the subject is that of collective social consciousness as well as environmental factors. His decision (or lack of) to make political and historical reconstructions of films will be determined by the popular and successful films of the period. To Amata, the success of a film is highly dependent on its timeliness. He attributed the success enjoyed by *Ije* (2010) to the period in which the film was made. Had it been done three or four years ago, it may not have been so popular. The unspoken motive of every filmmaker is to make profit, and so the income factor occasionally supersedes that of art. Furthermore, it is not every practitioner that is inclined to make history films, as Amata claims. *"One of the qualities of successful people is the ability to follow their passion. I have to be passionate about something to do it"* (personal communication, February 16, 2012)

Among the commercially oriented filmmakers, two groups exist: the ones who make high quality productions and therefore have a right to derive profit from their labours, and the carefree practitioners who make compromises even before difficulties are encountered. To the first group belong veterans like Amaka Igwe who said at the Nigerian Entertainment Conference (NEC) 2013 in Lagos, *"I make my own films to make money. I am unapologetic about it because I have bills to pay"* (NEC, April 26, 2013). But behind that desire for money is the passion for quality and socially relevant stories that Nigerians have enjoyed to the credit of this doyenne of Nigerian filmmaking. Indeed, every filmmaker gives attention to the commercial value of his production otherwise the passion will remain unfed and unexpressed. Further, before shooting began on Izu Ojukwu's latest film project, '76, the screenplay was sent to screenwriters in the United States because they were looking for "acceptability and a wider market" (The Guardian). Another passionate filmmaker, Kunle Afolayan, left a banking career in pursuit of film. Driven first by sheer pleasure in the art of filmmaking, the Igwes and Afolayans remain motivated even when the profits are thin, delayed or non-existent.

To the second group belong the majority of Nigerian filmmakers who Bond Emeruwa and Andy Amenechi describe as 'Asaba filmmakers'. The term referred to the hasty productions done solely with the intention of making quick money and moving on to other similar "Asaba movies." This group shows little concern for training or production of high quality video films. Among this group of seemingly pompous

filmmakers, the following comments have been heard, “*if our films are not good, why is Nollywood so popular? Why are people watching it all over the world?*” (L. Imasuen, personal communication, August 20, 2014). There is a kind of imaginary status that has been conferred on Nollywood by fans, the media and film awards promoters that makes its practitioners complacent. Awards to first-time directors and producers, inordinate media hype and tabloid gossip on film stars’ lifestyles usually confer a larger-than-life status on actors/actresses, and film practitioners in general (F. Amata, personal communication, February 16, 2012). Dapo Adelegan’s comments to filmmakers at a film summit, reported by Florence Utor, speak to this fact:

[E]ven if you have talent...you need to go to school...to put some finishing touches to the talent to make it more solid... The vain flattery in town that Nollywood is the fastest growing movie industry in the world and only next to Bollywood is not helpful. Traders and businessmen in garbs of movie directors, producers, scriptwriters and actors must lean back and come up with better ideas” (Utor 2013: 40)

If this group of filmmakers, the Asaba breed, produce films without much depth, with rehashed plotlines and therefore draw the criticisms of the observing public and stakeholders, then the question of politics and history in film or “better ideas” becomes impossible. Perhaps, it is not entirely their fault because accolades have been quick and widespread, awards are given at one’s debut production, and the media representation is often uncritical, to such an extent that the awardees not only rest on their laurels, but also abandon training, perfection and historical portrayals altogether. The focus then rests solely on making money in order to live up to the contrived status.

However, the quest for quick commercial gain did not spur on any of the filmmakers whose films are studied in this project except Sam Onwuka and his *Stubborn Grasshopper*. Neville Ossai, actor and co-producer of the film, disclosed that in spite of feeling personally uneasy with the prospect of being arrested by General Abacha’s men, he went ahead with the production for the monetary gains, the measure of which remained undisclosed (personal communication, March 23, 2013). Another film maker, Chico Ejio, also known as Mr. Prolific in the industry, acknowledged the high cost, rigorous research, frequent travels, permissions and approvals required to make such films. He mentioned the time constraints and interest rates they have to grapple with if loans are taken from the banks. To illustrate his point, he stated, “*If I*

want to shoot a film at the airport, and I take ₦10million from the bank, and I'm waiting for the approvals to come, interest will kill me. I have to pay the bank back and get my own money" (C. Ejio, personal communication, November 2010). There is also the problem of distribution and dysfunctional exhibition spaces – which audiences cannot access – to ensure that creative ideas are not stifled by bureaucratic processes.

5.3.2 Social Factors – Audience Preferences

Filmmakers are keen to feel the pulse of their audiences before and after the release of their films. This is even more so in 2014 when reliance on cinema releases (few in comparison to the annual output of films) seems to guarantee higher returns on investment given the 'pirate-infested' film markets. Nigeria's cinema-going audience is the youth, but with the proliferation of films on terrestrial and satellite TV channels, the biggest audience is the women folk as Brian Larkin (2008) argued and as has been repeatedly emphasized at film conferences by scholars and practitioners alike. Film producer and director, Novia (2012), observes this gender imbalance "80% of the audience for Nollywood movies are women because the movies massively appeal to them" (p. 33).

The audience component is critical to the success of films. The filmmakers do require a measure of audience loyalty for their films, which is why an informal and unwritten system of determining audience preferences exists. This is usually done by word-of-mouth, through telephone conversations, and lately on social media platforms. The audience component is further understood in terms of market sales of CD/DVD, although piracy has made this impossible to determine. Audiences feedback to other producers and directors on the kinds of films people want to see or are willing to pay for, hence the band-wagon effect. For Fred Amata, director, *Anini*, the audience could relate to the 1986 story of Lawrence Anini aka 'The Law'. He was primarily motivated to work on the film because the armed robber's story was reported in the daily newspapers on a grand scale. Anini's notoriety went well beyond his city of operation.

F. Amata: *The Anini story is phenomenal, honestly, it's phenomenal. We had a great subject matter for an engaging film. It was a film that everybody could relate to. 80% of the people in Benin claim a one-on-one experience with Anini,*

so it was huge. Even the famous presidential quote then was ‘my friend, where is Anini?’ (February 16, 2012)

H. Legemah: *I grew up in Benin and was a top dog in town when Anini saga came on and killed social night life in Benin. When I became a film maker I decided to correct and demystify the myth and giant Nigerians thought Lawrence Anini was. He was just a common thief (June 2, 2014)*

The reference to the audience in Legemah’s comment suggests that the Anini story was popularly known. It did not come as a surprise then that the film was widely accepted and was endorsed by the NFVCB even though at the time of the interview with the producer, he could not provide a copy of the letter from the Board. Legemah’s comment also indicates a change in interpersonal and communal life in Benin City, which annoyed him, the indigenes of that geographical space and the populace who were able to relate to the story, and who were even partakers of his spoils. Anini was known to distribute the money he stole from rich individuals and corporate organisations to the poor. So, Anini was a ‘psychic’ miscreant who pleased and displeased the people at the same time. After all, his sobriquet ‘The Law’ originated from the people, the same whose ‘social night life’ he killed. My point is, there was massive reception of the film, *Anini* and the filmmakers were aware of this even before making the film.

Just like some filmmakers (Tunde Kelani, Kingsley Ogoro, Tade Ogidan) are convinced that representations of the political past have the potential to draw in audiences, hence raise their social relevance and financial prospects, some others (Chico Ejiro, Chikezie Donatus) believe that the Nigerian audience is not interested in seeing a political past on screen. Yet some more (Bond Emeruwa, Lancelot Imasuen) agree that factors beyond politics endear an audience to a film, factors such as acting (star system), story treatment and publicity surrounding the film.

C. Ejiro: *I don’t think the Nigerian audience is ready for that. They are happy with the kind of entertainment we give them. Nigerians are not going to watch anything historical (November 2010)*

B. Emeruwa: *Yes, Nigerians are not too interested in history. Nigerians are only interested in today and tomorrow and their stomach. They do not see how*

history will put food on the table which is very unfortunate (Lagos, September 13, 2013)

Reacting to Chico Ejiro's comments on the lack of historical interest among Nigerian audiences, Bond Emeruwa agreed in the following words:

B. Emeruwa: *Up to a point, yes...up to a point. When I said it, I just said it. The truth is that the audience is prepared for every good movie. Now, if you say because you are doing history, you do something that is didactic and boring, you won't have an audience. Movies are supposed to entertain primarily. Like right now, Kunle is shooting Oct 1. That movie is going to be successful because he's taking his time to do it. And it's history* (September 13, 2013).

My conversation with Kingsley Ogoro revealed that while he was pleased with the reception which *Across the Niger* received within and outside the country, he was somewhat regretful of the approach the film had taken. From his point of view, the film would have been much more popular among women if it was not a war film. A quick glance at the film jacket showed guns and military uniforms, which was sure to disinterest the female viewers.

K. Ogoro: *... doing it again, I would actually try to remove a lot of the uniforms. The women, people who watch films, as soon as they see it, they'll think it's a war movie. That was the only thing, problem I didn't like about the movie... a woman looking at the film, they'll [sic] think it's a war movie...* (August 29, 2013)

Arguably, one of the first attempts at constructing a political past in Nigerian feature films which came with Ola Balogun's *Cry Freedom* (1981) was unpopular among the audience. Sharon Russell writing about Ola Balogun observed:

He shot *Cry Freedom* (1981) in Ghana once again in the face of tremendous difficulties. He wanted to present a specifically African perspective of colonialism and those who fought it. The film deals with the activities of a guerrilla group and a colonial army both led by young men of the same age who have grown up together – one as master and the other as servant. While the film appealed to intellectuals who were impressed with its serious considerations of important issues, the general public, accustomed to Hollywood-style action adventure films, largely ignored it (1998: 32).

Perhaps this partly accounts for the reasons why filmmakers shun past or present political commentary. The audience factor is a key one. Venturing into constructions of the political past in recent productions given the operational shoe-string budgets with the uncertainty of audience approval and patronage can prove detrimental to a filmmaker's career. It is fairly established that mainly women occupy themselves with viewing Nigerian films and that their tastes do not, of necessity, run in the directions of political narratives as some contemporary filmmakers have identified.

On constructions of the past, Bond Emeruwa says that it belongs to a limited audience, which Russell's comments above support. It cannot be for the general public consumption since audiences are so diverse, with equally divergent tastes. There will be people who appreciate the subject of the political past, the more educated, intellectual ones, but there will also be those who settle for entertainment and narratives which are not necessarily accounts of the past.

B. Emeruwa: *Nollywood tells stories – African stories that's why it has caught and built the audience that it built...worldwide audience...not necessarily history but it told our stories* (September 13, 2013).

The reference to appreciation of historical depictions by the intellectual class supports the idea that the films are primarily seen by women, and that the films are so popular because of Nigeria's huge uneducated or semi-educated citizens. Nollywood has achieved its status without heavily resorting to political commentaries, which suggest that such commentaries, even if they have much relevance in current political discourse, like the ones addressed in this study, did not drive Nigerian filmic narratives in the way that francophone African cinema did, and still does.

The following sections deal with some of the revealed factors known generally to inspire the film directors and producers, as well as those that specifically inspired the production of the films studied here. One overarching theme of the conversations with filmmakers is that a filmmaker is a messenger and a social crusader.

5.3.3 Social Factors - Nollywood as Political Endorsers

As infamous as some Federal and State Governments of Nigeria have been, the idea of being funded by any of them or having one's film premiere graced by government executives is most desirable to Nollywood filmmakers. By political endorsement is meant the mutual exchange of 'favourable' attention between filmmakers and government officials. The government also seeks to be well-portrayed in the video-films. This attention is manifest in commending governmental efforts, or drawing their attention to one's film wherein political principles are upheld or other propaganda made, or where a negative critique is couched in positive codes. Nollywood is anxiously hobnobbing with the government at all levels in anticipation of financial and other favours (e.g. signing into law a film council such as the Motion Picture Practitioners Council, MOPICON) to aid the industry. In the production process of *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, Ogoro was deeply motivated by a consciousness that seeks lasting solutions to national issues as well as an ambition for political endorsement. He deploys the past to speak to the prevailing circumstances in Nigeria's political sphere in the hope that it will receive political applause.

K. Ogoro: *My main quests were that I'd be the first to premiere my movie at a major cinema and that the president of my country be present. It happened; 'Across the Niger', which is about creating peace for the country was successfully premiered. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo through Information Minister, Chukwuemeka Chikelu, got interested and came for the premiere in Abuja. The only thing he felt was missing was the Nigerian flag.*

The president shook my hand after the screening and I was happy with that handshake.

I shoot movies to give our country a positive image. Across the Niger was shot when there were so many problems in Nigeria...ethnicity everywhere...a Chinese adage prompted me to make the film... it is great to fight and win any battle but it is even greater to win those battles without fighting ... I wanted to highlight the reasons behind the problems of the past, and to address the solutions (August 29, 2013).

In line with Ogoro's motive, Nollywood 'Sheik', Zeb Ejiro shares a similar although semi-political position.

Z. Ejiro: *Then if you look at 'The president must not die', it's all about our democracy, our nascent democracy. The president at that time was the symbol of democracy. And we must guide and protect our democracy. That film was shot when Obasanjo was in power and I used Obasanjo as a character which Enebeli played. I used Obasanjo's catch phrases like I dey kampe and all that. And I presented that movie to Obasanjo and I said Sir, this character here is you.*

Yes, he said we should bring more copies to put them in the library for him so that when other presidents come, he'll be giving them and showing it to them. There's a picture on Facebook where I bent down giving Baba (Obasanjo) the film (July 25, 2013).

Ejiro's strategic construction of a political past, he claims, is approached with caution, so as not to incur the wrath of the Censor's Board and the consequent loss of money that may accrue. This corroborates Haynes' (2006) point on censorship concerns informing the production (or not) of political critiques. It is important to note that Ejiro negotiates his portrayal of the past through common phrases or expressions used by the character portrayed. This ensures that the audience grasps the meaning of the image or the text. So that, even if physical resemblances do not sig-ni-fy (Hall, 2013), verbal habits or traits will. Such linguistic coding of a character and his idiosyncrasy in ways decodable by viewers familiar with the personality, guarantees that censorship does not thrive. Of crucial importance here is that the film appears to endorse the political order, but in actual fact also carries subversive messages, even if marginally represented. The initial title of the film was *The president must die*, by which the producer meant that corrupt leaders must be exterminated, but his irony serves to overcome political pressure and censorship.

These are similar to other efforts and comments by filmmakers wherein the official support required to make a film is either achieved through direct funding from government officials and the subsequent acknowledgement of the funder in film credits such as *Amazing Grace* (2005), *The Last Vote* (2001).

Nollywood's function as political endorsement seems to be a strategy by filmmakers to secure requisite funding for current and probably future film productions. Apart from making specific films to draw the attention of the government, practitioners also hobnob with the powers that be for political appointments and cash rewards. This endorsement has various other manifestations including invitations to State Governors to attend film premieres, one of which is Alex Eyengho's invitation to the Delta State Governor for a film purporting to promote the people's cultural heritage. The politicians' awareness of the cultural power wielded by actors and actresses is often used by such politicians to endear themselves to the public. Popular screen faces like Richard Mofe-Damijo (RMD) and Paul Obazele conspicuously flanked Adams Oshiomole's side during his gubernatorial campaign in 2007, and other campaigns – a fact confirmed by Andy Amenechi in the following words:

A.Amenechi: *Nollywood is going to be a key factor in 2015 elections. Adams Oshiomole was elected not just because of his policies but because of the total endorsement of artists. I was in Benin that period so I know what I'm talking about. The other group took them for granted but each campaign that he did and took along Nollywood stars was twice the size of the last one. So by the time he did the final one when ... actors, Aki and Paw Paw, were there, it was humongous (March 29, 2013)*

In 2007, Mofe-Damijo, an actor, was also actively involved in campaigning for Emmanuel Uduaghan's in the gubernatorial elections in Delta State. The Special Adviser to the President on Research and Documentation, Oronto Douglas, in 2012, held a meeting with well-known Nollywood producers and actors/actresses to address some of the recurring problems in film production in the country. That was a period of decline in the industry with producers and directors bearing the brunt of piracy as much as the screen stars. The meeting was held because practitioners saw the government as the cause and solution to the problems that plagued the industry. In May 2013, a presidential dinner for the creative industries was held in Lagos. This attracted a large number of Nollywood producers, directors, actors, actresses and people working in the industry.

Further, the 2013 President of the Association of Movie Producers (AMP), Zik Zulu Okafor, led a delegate to former President Obasanjo's home in July 2013 to make

him the grand patron of the association by virtue of his contributions to the film industry in Nigeria. The gesture drew promises of ‘support’ from the elder statesman, support which included placing his presidential library at AMP’s disposal. Actress Ini Edo in an acknowledgement speech referred to the support given by Godswill Akpabio, the Cross Rivers State Governor at the premiere of her co-produced film *I’ll take my chances* (2011). These few examples go to show the extent of association Nollywood has or desires to have with past or incumbent government officials in order to guarantee the sustenance of their profession and livelihood.

Of course every industry needs collaboration between practitioners and policy makers but the arts industries bear a unique burden that suggests keeping a good distance from the political power of the day. In the current scheme of things, Nollywood’s association with the government has direct implications for political representations in the films. Barber (1987) observes that popular arts producers have been known to contest official authority through their works because they have been denied official hearing. But this may be rapidly changing in the Nigerian filmmaking scene in which official authorities are not contested but are courted. The actress now-turned-producer, Omoni Oboli’s latest *Being Ms. Elliot* (2014) was premiered at the presidential villa amidst multiple speculations on the appropriateness of screening a romantic comedy in such an official setting. But that also signals the latest effort on the sort of affinity that filmmakers anticipate with the government. Such associations, it is argued, are likely to make filmmakers less critical and objective in their portrayal of political leadership.

While their film productions may not carry explicit endorsements of political actions, the filmmakers’ increasing socialisation with politicians suggests that deep political critiques such as those written by Nigerian novelists and dramatists will be late, if at all, in coming. This partly explains the absence of political critiques. Recent films (*The Last Vote*, 2001) with political undertones are careful to adopt neutral or patronising positions not only to evade the censorship of the regulatory board, but also to keep the doors of Aso Rock (Nigeria’s presidential villa) open to filmmakers.

According to Egya (2011), Soyinka (1996) and Obi (1994), artists should bear a special responsibility to their audience and their trade. Similarly, in his last book, *There was a Country*, Chinua Achebe pointed out that “the role of the writer (and artist)

depends to some extent on the state of health of his or her society...if a society is ill, the writer has a responsibility to point it out. If the society is healthier, the writer's job is different" (Achebe 2012: 57). Reacting to the idea also expressed in the just-mentioned book that a writer has no business in politics or social upheavals of his or her day, he states... "the African writer who steps aside can only write footnotes or a glossary when the event is over. He or she will become like the contemporary intellectual of futility in many other places..." (p. 55).

In March 2014, Patience Ozokwor, a prominent Nigerian actress was given a Centenary award by the Nigerian government in its celebration of 100 years of Britain's amalgamation (1914-2014) of Nigeria. The award left her elated. Wole Soyinka, who was also nominated for the same award in a different category, rejected his and stated his reasons for doing so. Soyinka's most important reason amounted to scorn for a government that rewards General Abacha who "put the nation under siege during an unrelenting reign of terror that is barely different from the current rampage of Boko Haram" (Ejiogu, 2014: 5). This occurrence tied in significantly with Steve Ayorinde's comment on Nollywood which he made a year before the centenary.

S. Ayorinde: *I think Nollywood is still a very hungry industry that will go cap in hand every now and then, every time the government beckons. Nollywood should rise above the commodification of its own very essence.... Again it comes to who is the Fela, Achebe, Soyinka that will refuse CON of the Fed. Govt.... and will state logical reasons why you cannot take that from the government, and it will be on the covers of all the newspapers the next day. Are you saying that Soyinka and Achebe are richer than these Nollywood people? No, it's just that they subscribe to values that are much more elevated than the merchants who are pretending to be filmmakers in my opinion (May 6, 2013).*

Ayorinde's comments served to highlight a point made by other journalists regarding the notorious familiarisation of the filmmakers with governments at all levels. Jeta Amata's 2005 film *Amazing Grace* was heavily supported by the Cross River State Government in view of the film's potential to promote the state's cultural and historical heritage. Other producers like Tunde Kelani and Kunle Afolayan have queued up at government offices as well. These support the point that Nollywood functions as political endorsers first through their filmic narratives and second, through the sustained

familiarity with political office holders. This position counters the view that popular arts are sites of contestation and resistance (Englert, 2008; Barber 1987, 1997a; Fabian, 1978), if contestation is meant popular opposition to power. Rather, it works as popular arts being pro-establishment and institutionalising the medium and the forces that shape its production and consumption (Katchka, 2000).

To the question of filmmakers' motivation, I argue that they are motivated to protest wrongdoing by the government as the next section will demonstrate, but also to endorse certain political actions, bringing Barber's (1987) and other scholars' contestation paradigm of popular arts to fruition as well as to question. *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* were made to promote a social and political agenda – the One Nigeria campaign; *Anini* was to highlight environmental forces that bred crime and to protest paramilitary corruption; *Oil Village* was also a protest film on the Niger Delta problems, therefore political. *Stubborn Grasshopper* was a social crusade film intended to raise the consciousness of viewers on the cost of military governments whereas *Half of a Yellow Sun* was unapologetically pro-Biafran (and therefore, pro-secession) although it was also opposed to war.

5.3.4 Social Factors – Contesting Dominant Power

Apart from Nollywood's direct rapport with the government in and through films, there is also a group of practitioners who contest the activities of the political elite. What is clear, however, is that seeking financial assistance from the government does not, in this case, preclude subtle criticisms in the video films. But it does diminish the propensity of such representations by filmmakers who are obliged to 'thank' funders in the closing credits and invite them to film premieres. That said, some filmmakers are conscious of the role Achebe (2012) mapped out for writers and artists in general. In the way Achebe poked fingers at British colonizers, writers after him do so to postcolonial governments, who in the thoughts of Mbembe (2002) inherited colonial sovereignty in quite similar, arbitrary and totalising ways.

While musing over the different connotations that the word 'popular' might assume, and how popular art forms respond to and are viewed by the society, Barber (2014) remarks that they are "negative to some, positive to others: meretricious trash or

authentic expressions of resistance to oppression” (xvi). This section takes up the view that video films as popular arts resist political oppression or “get revenge” on repressive military government through their representations. In the words of filmmaker, Charles Novia (2012), this is achieved by “paying a visual tribute to all the pro-democracy activists of the military era” (p. 54). Accusatory fingers are pointed to the government officials who fail in the execution of their duties, thus affirming Mbembe’s (1997) use of figurative images as meaning making sites in confronting autocratic governments. Novia, writer, director and producer, made a point of this as the motivation for one of his films, *I will die for you*, to protest what he termed the “draconian military government” (p. 54) of General Sani Abacha. He wrote of a script which he “skilfully wrapped...round a romantic tale” (p. 55) in a subversive manner:

The script was motivated by the senseless murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other pro-democracy activists ...that November evening in 1995. A tyrant, bereft of literary intellect and appreciation, had murdered a kindred spirit! To me, he did not deserve to be hanged. Something in me rebelled that evening. I cannot quite put a finger to what it was but it gave vent to an anger which was only doused when I wrote the *I will die for you* script eight years later...the rebellion to poke fingers at the government of my country, both past and present, swelled up in me (Novia 2012: 53).

Here, we see popular art not only as a site of resistance and opposition but also as one of ‘restoration’ for the producers. Restoration here is not understood as a total change of the state of oppression, but rather a healing, an assuagement – however brief or lasting – that enables the producers deal with troubling political situations. Novia’s anger, he claims, subsided only after his fictionalised self-expression of political murder had been accomplished. The films speak to the emotional state of their producers and their audiences as well while contesting dominant power. Another filmmaker, Zeb Ejiro, shares a similar concern even though he does not directly claim relief from his sadness through his artistic expressions. That was inferred by his statements:

Z. Ejiro: *What motivates me actually is my environment... I am angry. I’m still angry with my society, with my government and so on. Whenever you see me carry my camera, it is because I am not happy with what is going on*

Any day you see me set out to make a movie, that means there’s something bothering me that I want to tell the world.

We are going to make movies that are going to change Nigeria. I don't care whether we go to jail. That anger is still with me because they are not doing anything to change Nigeria (July 25, 2013).

Similarly, some other filmmakers share the view that the corrupt government must be brought to account for its ineptitude by telling the world about their operations. The director or producer, criticised and marginalised in society as untrained commercially motivated peddlers of art, finds no other avenue for this self expression and he thus utilises the one most available to him – the video film. This group of people who are “silenced and excluded from public debate...turn to popular genres as the only space in which to represent their views”. Thus affirming that “the marginanlised can also be the vanguard...who took the lead in calling for more responsive and responsible government” (Barber, 2014: xix). The responses below equally fit neatly into this category:

F. Amata: *we wanted to make a statement about the political situation in the country: the same police that gives you arms to rob are hounding you for robbery...yea yea yea that was clearly in the back of our minds* (Februray 16, 2012).

H. Legemah: *we wanted to portray the military government as they are: aloof and corrupt* (June 2, 2014).

S. Onwuka: *when I made Stubborn Grasshopper, you know, it was just after Abacha died. And we were not getting the actual story of how Nigerian government was actually running that time...a lot of things were covered up. So I chose to make it [Stubborn Grasshopper] to enlighten people ... The main thing is exactly what people picked up, how Nigerians were operating in the dark and at the same time, the selfish way of ruling the country* (October 16, 2013).

K. Anya: *we wanted to tell the Ken Saro-Wiwa story again* (February 20, 2012)

In all these examples, a measure of political consciousness is evident in the filmmakers. And, more importantly, it is a political consciousness that evokes the past in order to draw parallels between then and the present times. The filmmakers may not be radical activists as Onwuka affirmed (personal communication, October 16, 2013), or as

theorised by Chris Atton in 2002 while writing on alternative media, but they certainly bear the anxieties brought on by the prevailing socio-political complexities of their times. This is a position which popular arts scholars like Fabian (1978) and Barber (1987, 1997a, 2014) as well as postcolonial theorists like Mbembe (1997, 2002) have written extensively about.

5.4 De-motivation

The discussion on motivating factors would be incomplete without a consideration of the perceived or actual factors that steer video filmmakers away from re-enacting a political past. There is no consensus on what de-motivates in this regard since the NFVCB often denies censorship of political films, and some filmmakers are of the opinion that available funds would not necessarily lead them to producing historical films. To some extent, self-reporting rarely produces a complete picture, and denial or silence on what demotivates does not mean its absence. The following sub-sections deal with two key demotivating factors for most filmmakers practicing in Nigeria.

5.4.1 Censorship

In 1979, Opubor and Nwuneli wrote that the “Nigerian government does not directly control or effectively participate in distributing or exhibiting... [film]” for a number of reasons. One of such reasons is “the possible belief of the Nigerian Government that the production of feature films does not constitute a threat to its existence...” (Opubor & Nwuneli, 1979: 9). Almost a decade later, the government came to the full realisation of the impact of films – documentary or feature. The issues surrounding censorship are just as salient to the topic of filmmakers’ motivation as are those discussed above. In most if not all cases, censorship de-motivates the filmmakers intending to re-enact the political past, especially one as problematic and contested as that of Nigeria. In 2000, Haynes wrote that “African governments may do little to support filmmaking, but they have the power to censor it and would be likely to see any but the most anodyne handling of the issue [of ethnicity] as divisive” (p. 11). The thought of the restraints imposed by the Censor’s Board serves as deterrence to filmmakers, some of whom are intent on

exploring politics. Haynes (2006) observed that, “the end of military rule in 1999 has certainly not solved Nigeria’s political problems, but it has created a more open political environment in which previously undiscussable topics can be aired” (p. 526). While this is true to a certain extent, the opposite can most certainly be argued too. This is because it appears that the Censor’s Board has taken over the repressive baton from the military.

According to Ekwuazi (2001), there have been three celebrated cases of censorship in the production of Nigerian films. These happened with Francis Oladele’s (producer) *Things Fall Apart/Bullfrog in the Sun* (1971), Wole Soyinka’s *Blues for a Prodigal* (1984) and *The Great Attempt* (1990). In these cases, censorship took various forms: sealing up the shooting location(s), shutting down exhibition centres, setting up a special censorship committee to follow the life of the film and if considered necessary, banning it altogether. Such was the level of control that early Nigerian filmmakers faced in postcolonial Nigeria, under military regimes. In an interview with the film producer, Kingsley Ogoro, he reminisced on his arrest by the State Security Service (SSS) because it was thought that he and the lead actor, Segun Arinze were Biafran spies. It was Ademola James, former head of the Board that wrote a petition for the film to be released because according to Ogoro, “Ademola saw the film, thought it was sound and agreed to stand by it” (personal communication, August 29, 2013). Without such an intervention, the film would have been banned because it evoked memories of the war that the government of Nigeria would prefer to see obliterated, and because the country is still highly polarised along ethnic and religious lines. Such visual images may incite fresh ethnic tensions, the Board claimed. Furthermore, filmmakers have been jailed (McCain, 2013), bribed (Haynes, 2006), threatened (Ekwuazi, 2000; Ugboma, personal communication, 2014) and had their equipment confiscated (Francis Oladele in Ekwuazi, 2000) whenever they ventured into political commentaries. This explains the paucity of explicit political critiques that characterised early Nigerian cinema, in addition, of course, to the attendance loss of income that such prohibitions would attract.

Under the umbrella of preserving national security, factually or fictitiously, the Board bans films that smack of any direct reference to past or present politics. Ishaya Bako’s *Fuelling Poverty* (2012) and Biyi Bandele’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2013) are the most recent examples. The documentary *Fuelling Poverty* gave a tip of the iceberg of

the fuel subsidy crisis in Nigeria and received the sledge hammer from Effiong Inwang who was the head of legal services at the NFVCB in 2013. Not only was Bako prohibited from screening the film in Nigeria, he was also ‘threatened’ in the official letter from the Board which stated that the Inspector General of the Police had been informed of his film and the ban. In April 2014, the official distributor of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Kene Mkpuru, wrote to Patricia Bala, the Director General of the Board requesting a formal feedback on the film presented for classification over six weeks before to which there had been an uneasy silence. Mkpuru wrote:

The continued unexplained delay in getting a formal response from the Board suggests that the Film has been banned even though there has been no formal communication to this effect. The Producers have informed us that they are already exploring alternative measures towards the resolution of this quandary, as they believe the delayed classification of the Film is injurious to their investment in the short term and is damaging in the long term to investments in the Nigerian film industry (Mkpuru, 2014: para 6, 11)

The difference between the current actions of the NFVCB and the Abacha (and military) clamp down on the media, which Haynes (2006) referred to, is perhaps the absence of deaths and incarceration which the latter routinely and unabashedly performed. Everything else remains unchanged. In 2014, the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) served a notice to radio stations requesting the names of politicians invited to live talk shows be submitted to the agency in view of the activities of the terrorist group, Boko Haram.

Eddie Ugboma has insistently remarked that the filmmaker has to be stubborn even if threatened with incarceration. Zeb Ejiro’s insistence with *The President must die* gave way to *The President must not die* after “the Censors’ Board kept the film for 6 months, money was going, and I didn’t want to die of hunger” (Z. Ejiro, personal communication, July 25, 2013). Tunde Kelani is sometimes pointed, and at other times, ambivalent in his treatment of topics like the military take-over of power. He attested to the idea that censorship restricts the indigenous filmmaker from venturing directly into controversial political subjects. Haynes documented Kelani’s remarks:

...because the Nigerian film industry is a private enterprise, all the producers would just produce very safe stories, family issues, comedies, and love stories, but nothing about politics for fear of jeopardizing their investment. So everybody played it safe. *Saworoide* was a tame attempt

to document the evil of military rule. You know the print media on the other hand did very well because they openly criticized dictatorship. Of course some journalists had to go into exile and all that. But none of the filmmakers would dare that, so everybody just seemingly turned a blind eye and just went for their businesses (Haynes 2007: 13-14)

To strategically overcome restrictions imposed by the Censor's Board, indirect references to politicians and political events (understood here as negotiated images) are deployed although explicit references (Adesokan, 2009b) are also made. Kelani also observes that religious and ethnic biases of staff of the Censor's Board led to misinterpretation of cultural representations and so attracted wrong classifications (Haynes 2007). My interviews with Kingsley Ogoro and Kene Mkpuru confirmed Kelani's sentiments. For instance, Kelani accused former Director General of the Board, Rosemary Odeh of giving speedy approvals (and even awards) to Christian videos even if those videos had rituals in them, but refused approvals to non-Christian and other genres that may have similar rituals or native doctor scenes (Haynes 2007).

Kingsley Ogoro is cautious. The original title of his film, *Battle of Love*, was *Guns of Biafra*. At the Censor's Board, it was rejected and denied approval until the title was changed to *Battle of Love*. Charles Novia's approach in the production of the Saro-Wiwa inspired video-film sums up the attitude of most, if not all, the filmmakers:

When the movie *I will die for you*, went to the NFVCB for classification, the panellists were a bit apprehensive at the overall tone of the movie, which was quite ambivalent towards the past military government, but I skilfully wrapped the story round a romantic tale and they could not really pin-point any parts they wanted removed or censored. I remember I got a call later from one of the panellists after the movie had been classified. He asked if I was not scared of what the military apologists would do when the movie finally hit the shelves. I replied that I wasn't afraid in any way (Novia, 2012: 55).

My interview with Kelani also revealed this intentional ambivalence which Novia refers to. Sam Onwuka, on the other hand, was fearless about the release of his film *Stubborn Grasshopper*. Neville Ossai, the production manager on the film project states that Onwuka was so passionate and fearless about making a film on Abacha that his passion diffused among cast and crew (personal communication, March 23, 2013). Worthy of note also is the fact that Abacha had passed away at the time of the release of the film. The fact of Abacha's passing on was a relief to Kelani whose production of *Saworoide*,

with its references to the evil of military rule, had begun during the military dictator's life time (Haynes 2007: 12).

Kingsley Ogoro of *Across the Niger* notes that he too had to 'battle' with the Censor's Board and the State Security Service (SSS) before his film was released. He and one of the actors, Segun Arinze, were arrested by the SSS and kept in custody for hours for fear that they were Biafran spies. Interestingly, Major Dubem in the film is wrongly accused of being a Biafran spy, and is consequently severely tortured. Ogoro chuckled as he narrated the episode, with several references to, "*that was then when people didn't know much about filmmaking*" (August 29, 2013). Fortunately, Ogoro did not have to engage in a protracted battle with the Board because an influential man in the film censorship circle came to his defence:

K. Ogoro: *The first DG of the, Ademola James...He was the one that named the first movie, the Battle of Love because... he looked at the movie, the story was sound. He loved the story and decided that they can't ban the film. He wrote an article that they should release the movie, and that he would stand by it. Segun (Arinze) and I were invited by the SSS. They thought we were Biafran spies. That was another obstacle we had.* (August 29, 2013)

As mentioned above, the very recent case of film censorship came to light again with the big budget (\$8m/£5.3m) production of *Half of a Yellow Sun*. The film was sent to the Censors' Board and the producers had scheduled a Lagos premiere on the 25th of April, 2014. Two weeks before then, rumours on social media platforms indicated that the film had been banned. The Management of the Board released an ambivalent and counterintuitive statement on its commitment to fulfilling its mandate. The statement refuted the claim on the ban, but was silent on the reason for holding up the film, even to the producers and FilmOne, the film distribution company. It is possible that the Board chooses to tread with caution given the alarming rate of Boko Haram-related bombings and the April kidnap of over 200 school girls by the same terrorist sect in the northern parts of Nigeria.

Unarguably, film censorship has come to be registered as a deterrent to video film practitioners who, first, moan a lack of funding for film production, and second, who berate the government through its film agencies for not ensuring that a sustainable

film development structure is actualised. Successive governments have deployed rhetorical devices in their claims to support the industry but lasting solutions to the teeming problems faced by the practitioners are yet to be seen. With the existing hurdles that confront the filmmaker, it becomes clear why ‘full’ political histories are avoided, even if only to minimise the challenges of artistic expressions in postcolonial societies.

Censorship plays a key role regarding the possibilities of political representation as shown above and as other scholars including Ekwuazi (1991), Haynes (2007) and Ugor (2008) have demonstrated. It is absolutely true that freedom of expression is yet to be realised in the Nigerian public space. Equally true is the fact that filmmakers are guilty of artistic abuses of various kinds in the past, leading to licentiousness and the celebration of the infamous, the impious and crass obscenity. Walking through film markets, one’s sight is assaulted by film jackets with pornographic material. This is why the NFVCB in its bid to sanitise the environment must be seen to be free, fair and open to critical dialogue.

A former DG of the Board, Emeka Mba, advised the filmmakers not to be dissuaded from putting history on film by rumours of censorship. “*We don’t do pre-censorship*”, Mba remarked at Eko International Film Festival in Lagos, 2010. “*We only request that reality be adequately represented.*” Earlier in his office as Censor’s Board boss, he had attempted to specify the kind of content that Nigerian films should have, but that failed woefully. This is not surprising especially when the practitioners believe that the choice of stories to tell over all possible options is theirs to make, more so when government aid is lacking. Although Mba agreed that the resources required to enact history on film may be lacking, his comments hinted at the unwillingness of the stakeholders to explore cheaper alternatives and undertake the rigour of research. He ended his statement with “*Nigerians deserve to see more of such movies*” (E. Mba, personal communication, November 2010).

But majority of the filmmakers are dissatisfied with the film watch dog, not only on censorship and classification matters, but also when issues of piracy are raised. Film director, Andy Amenechi’s comments summed this up: *The regulatory board ought also to confine its operations within the limits of the law without arbitrary or unilateral decisions. More importantly, the Board should rise with its full constitutional weight*

against the most heinous act against filmmakers, which is that of piracy. (A.Amenechi, personal communication, March 29, 2013)

5.4.2 Piracy

The investment in any film project is often huge. Budgets for popular depictions of the past are even bigger, which again suggests its reserve for a few filmmakers who are able to muster the financial requirements of such productions. In an attempt to discuss the motivations of filmmakers who have attempted to reflect on a political past through the cinematic lens, it is believed that highlighting factors that might de-motivate filmmakers is also necessary. Of prime importance is the issue of funding. Closely related to piracy, but a de-motivator of its own right is the hefty budget required to re-enact the past. The filmmakers interviewed for this study unanimously stated that producing the past is the most expensive of film budgets. Two recent attestations to that are Biyi Bandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun* with a budget of \$8m (£5m) and Kunle Afolayan's *October 1* at \$2m (£1.2m). By Nollywood standards, these are exceptionally high budgets, which is a clear reason for the avoidance of the genre. *An average film budget is ₦20m (£78,000) or much less* (A. Amenechi, personal communication, March 29, 2013). *Several of us are eager to explore rich historical topics, even if only as a background to more modern narratives, but financial constraints prevent us from doing so* (B. Emeruwa, personal communication, September 13, 2013). If funding is a problem, it is further compounded by the prospect of losing a significant portion, if not all, of it to piracy.

In the list of film de-motivators, piracy follows funding, but that is not peculiar to the portrayals of a political past. Films of other genres are also pirated. Even the not-so-good ones, the American, Indian and Chinese films formerly imported to Nigeria by the Lebanese businessmen were equally pirated. Piracy of Nigerian films is often carried out under the 'poor distribution channels' cover. Social commentators, film journalists and critics subscribe to the idea that films made in south western Lagos never reach the south eastern parts of the country where demand is huge. They unwittingly justify the criminal act by making such statements as "*people want to get the films everywhere; Nollywood is so popular.*" (S. Husseini, personal communication, May 26, 2013). This bootlegging thrives on the basis of corruption and impunity rather

than on the distribution factor. Granted that the question of distribution is a sore point for filmmakers because of the dearth of alternative distribution channels to beat piracy, it remains to be proven whether any marketer has ever approached a filmmaker for additional copies of films and was denied. *The problem is simply one of unscrupulous marketers reaping the fruits of other people's labour* (personal communication) as Hussein, now speaking for the filmmakers, also added.

Tunde Kelani is a regular victim of piracy. In May 2014, he released his 2012 film *Maami* on DVD and within 48 hours, he was alerted to the proliferation of pirated copies of his film in the Lagos film markets (personal communication, February 12, 2013). The same happened with the release of his 2009 film *Arugba* although the perpetrators waited much longer before swooping down on his intellectual property. Kelani still laments the 30,000 unsold copies of *Arugba* in his office. The 66-year-old filmmaker's frustration over film production and distribution is well known in filmmaking circles and among his fans with whom he has been interacting on social media platforms. The film *Half of a Yellow Sun* had not completed its first week in the cinemas (at ₦1,000/£4) when it went on sale in the streets for ₦50/25p (L. Imasuen, personal communication, August 24, 2014). With such a big budget film not being able to recoup its investment in its main market, it is certainly clear that piracy severely threatens future portrayals of the past – films 'notorious' for their hefty budgets.

At an interview with Bond Emeruwa (September 13, 2013), he stated that *there is no aspect of the political or even social past that cannot be portrayed on video because filmmakers have various interests – political and non-political* (B. Emeruwa, personal communication). An excerpt from the interview is presented below to reveal his musings on making a film about a historical figure Usman Dan Fodio. Emeruwa tied together in the last recorded statement some of the factors that influence past political re-constructions which we have been discussing above.

AA: *But why are you thinking of Usman dan Fodio?*

BE: *I love him.*

AA: *Ok, so interest...is a motivation, I'm thinking*

BE: *If I could, I'll love to shoot it, but right now, the facilities you need to shoot some of these things really don't exist and it's not just shooting it, but shooting it well.*

AA: *So when facilities become constraints, why don't you look at more contemporary agenda for which you can readily access facilities, for instance, people have been clamouring for a film on Fela Anikulapo-Kuti?*

BE: *At the end of the day, it will all happen when the moviemaking crowd becomes more educated and more enlightened. Have you heard about Izu Ojukwu's new film, the one he just made in Ibadan?*

AA: '76?

BE: *Yes, you've heard the story, about the coup but from another point of view. As the old people with their rigid mindset begin to leave and the younger generation takes over, you'll find one or two of these filmmakers who'll want to tell some of these stories and it'll happen naturally, and as resources begin to abound and the avenues to showcase these movies also open up. So there are lots of factors that will all come together and as they come together, naturally, there will be additions to the industry whether we like it or not. And we will not wait for anybody to dictate when it will happen. It will just happen.*

This chapter began with background information on key filmmakers known to have portrayed a political past for the reason that personal profiles and societal contexts have a bearing on one's artistic output. It then moved on to examine the motivations behind such portrayals by filmmakers. It reveals popular art, not just as sites of political endorsements (akin to Katchka, 2000), but also as avenues for talking back or talking to the government (Barber 1987, 1997). It was considered appropriate to address major demotivators as well. The argument here is that even if filmmakers are intent on depicting political events and figures of the past, the factors that work against such intentions seem to outweigh those in its favour, factors which seem to threaten seriously a filmmaker's career.

CHAPTER 6

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN CONSTRUCTING THE PAST

6.1 Introduction

We tell our own stories – Bond Emeruwa, Director

I wouldn't want to put a limit on what themes I would explore. I would say whatever feels compelling, whatever feels true, and hopefully what feels like the Nigerian voice that isn't being heard yet, whether in terms of culture, gender or age – Tunde Aladese, Writer

The previous chapter discussed the various factors that motivate and de-motivate filmmakers who portray the past, including the general motivations of non-political and non-historical cultural representations in video film. That chapter provided a range of reasons why history is attractive and sometimes problematic for filmmakers. This chapter proposes to address a 'how' question. What narrative techniques have Nigerian filmmakers used to reconstruct the events and people of Nigeria's political past? To make the chapter more specific, it has been divided into sections that ask the same question of each film: what narrative techniques have Henry Legemah and Fred Amata used to reconstruct the Anini episode for instance? In responding to this question, the chapter attends to others that naturally emanate from it: what do the narrative and their modes of telling say about the past they represent and the present? Thus, this latter question forms the crux of the sixth chapter.

Narrative theories abound, are broad and they cater to various mediums and formats. Owing their developments to the study of European fairy tales, myths, tribal cultures and legends, with leading proponents such as French/Bulgarian Tzvetan Todorov, Russian Vladimir Propp, French Claude Levi-Strauss, narrative theories provide the basis for approaching various art forms. They possess within them analytical tools for reading a 'story' in the broadest sense, tools which the authors claim are evident within every narrative. Todorov's thought attributes a state of equilibrium to every narrative, which is disrupted and then re-instated through the agency of characters, which for Propp, perform one of seven different roles (villain, donor, helper, princess, dispatcher, hero and false hero). Strauss conceived narratives as being

constituted of binary opposites. Turner (2006) confirms Strauss' theory by stating that "one of the ways in which humans understand the world is through dividing it into sets of mutually exclusive categories" (pp.103-104), such that an object or person is either good or bad. There are also Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, (and Hall, 2013 shows how both authors' works are linked to theories of representation) whose works have left a deep imprint on later theorizations of narratives in the First World Hollywood, Bollywood and other Third World countries.

Third Cinema, arising from Third World, narratives developed the technologies and certain codes of the dominant film model, Hollywood while infusing it with specific, culturally-defined aesthetics and mythologies (Russell, 1989). The Indian film industry, arguably the largest of third cinema cultures in terms of output and having been in existence for over a hundred years, is well known for its song sequences and emotionally-charged narratives. It has also deployed folk tales and epics re-making popular stories with little or no inventive reflections (Pendakur, 2008; Ganti, 2013). Writings on Third Cinema include the narratives of early African filmmaking as that which sought to reverse colonialist tendencies and representations (Russell, 1989; Sholat and Stam 1994). This is evident in the now-vast literature on the works of Ousmane Sembene and other filmmakers listed in the second and third chapters. Conversely, Ghanaian and Nigerian films were not explicit reactions against colonialism. Rather, they exhibited, at least until the year 2000, a preference for representing human rituals, witchcraft, questionable wealth and the intervention of the supernatural, a phenomenon which was criticized as pandering to the colonizers assertions of Third World backwardness. These narratives, apart from expressing the anxieties of the narrators and audiences (Barber, 1987; Okome 2000, 2003) also served to instruct the viewers in all forms of desirable social behavior.

Video film narratives originating from a West African filmmaking practice, distinct from African cinema of the Francophone persuasion, are best understood as popular cultural productions (Haynes, 2000) within the dynamic and modern economic systems of post-coloniality (Haynes and Okome, 2000). The structuring elements of popular arts: non-elite, non-traditional, playful, carefree, syncretic, and modern (Barber 1987, 1997a, 2014) provide useful insights to unpacking the narrative techniques of the films studied. Barber noted that reading popular arts is a complex activity because of the

multi-layered meanings they bear. But more importantly, she affirmed that, “the arts cannot be read without both comprehending their nature as aesthetic constructs with their own principles and conventions, and locating them in the specific social universe which is the grounds of their existence” (1987: 5). In this respect, the video film conventions are teased out in subsequent sections and paragraphs to reveal the form’s aesthetic modes of narration.

Scholars have already identified the uniqueness of Nigerian filmmaking narratives (Haynes 2007, Alamu 2010). “In terms of personnel, production techniques, administrative structure, and narrative elements, Nollywood is not homologous with foreign traditions” (Alamu 2010: 166). However, it has drawn elements from Hollywood filmmaking in an imitative way as Haynes (2007) observed (and as Barber’s syncretism implies), but not the formulaic three-act structure that has become a staple in Hollywood. Narratives have certain specific constituents and techniques of reading those elements as well. Brummett’s (2010) idea in providing the techniques for close reading rests on uncovering, within the text, the core elements of narratives, genres and characters. He regards narratives as being constituted mainly by form (the essence of narratives) and content, and which must possess certain analytical tools: coherence and sequence, tension and resolution. Of the first group, Brummett says, “these principles underlie successful narratives in every form” (p. 55). To distinguish form from content, attention is turned to Prasad’s (2008) definition of form as “the narrative structure, the organization of elements within the structure, the means employed to carry the message forward from one stage to the next and those by which narrative closure is achieved” (p. 46). And the content is the message, the ideas and themes littered throughout the film.

Genre, inherited from literary studies, is an important element in thinking of and analysing films. It is “a system of codes, conventions and visual styles which enables an audience to determine rapidly and with some complexity the kind of narrative they are viewing” (Turner 2006: 119). For Kolker (2006), “to better understand genre, we need to create categories that are not only inclusive but also more definitive...that flesh out and individualize the master narratives and tell us the stories we like, with the variations and invention that keep them interesting” (p. 216). The idea of individuality which Kolker writes of is rapidly blurring, for as will be shown below, genres in Nollywood, though largely melodramatic (Haynes, 2000) and serialised (Adejumobi, 2003) are

blurring the lines between one form and another as they tend to assume the elements of two or more genres throughout the narrative. Sources of Nollywood stories are mainly personal and communal experiences, folktales, myths, topical and contemporary issues (Alamu, 2010), and lately, modern novels (Haynes, 2007).

This is similar to the Indian popular cinema sources which Ganti (2013) as well as Pendakur (2003) highlights as deriving from “two main great epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, while puranas, folktales, Jakata tales and modern novels are other sources for cinematic works” (p. 103). However, unlike most American films that last 90 minutes and employ the three-act structure and Indian popular films that usually stretch into two and half to three hours with dances, songs, fights and romance, Nigerian films are serialised, like television dramas, with multiple instalments (1.5 hours each), use the story-within-story paradigm (sometimes effected through the flashback) with varying degrees of digression.

In the sub-sections below, I describe the narrative techniques and film form under sub-headings: character and genre, setting and plot, instead of dealing with each element individually to avoid repetitions. Form and content are the two sides of a coin, and so what follows in this chapter is mainly the film form although that inevitably also reveals the content of the films. However, more attention is paid to the thematic contents in the next chapter.

6.2 Discussions of Individual Films

In this research, it is considered a fruitful exercise to discuss the film individually rather than collectively as the latter is likely to ignore certain important elements. Each film is an example of how the past is constructed and has its own narratives aesthetics, limitations and excesses to deliver about that past as well as the present. Indeed, as texts carry multiple meanings and their decoding is dependent on a host of factors including cultural backgrounds and experiences, I do not claim any exhaustive discussions of the films. However, sufficient details are provided in line with the overall focus of the study.

6.3 Anini: Character and Genre

The portrayal of the character of Lawrence Nomanyagbo Anini, a native of Orogho (then Bendel State) in the 2005 Nollywood production, *Anini* exemplifies the filmmakers' deliberate construction of a government agency's 'funding' of crime in addition to providing a new direction in filmmaking. The film director, Fred Amata, confirmed this in a statement which reflected the moments of change and transition in the film industry:

At that time, we really didn't know what films to make, what the best stories were. Some themes were bandied about and everything was tried in Nollywood. We were looking at Anini from his different challenges, from home, from his girlfriend and his different attachments to his people and all that until he becomes a criminal (personal communication, February 16, 2012).

In support of the statement, Legemah affirmed that the production of *Anini* was a turning point not just for him as a filmmaking but also for the industry since it marked a new direction which distinguished it from the lot of predictable storylines available. The commendatory letter from the Censor's Board was also indicative of the institution's eagerness for newer productions that steered away from the routine, coming at a time when criticisms for the videos were rife. A tri-lingual – Bini (an indigenous Nigerian language), Pidgin and English – production without subtitles at the appropriate scenes to enable comprehension of the dialogue, the film actually starts from the end.

The involvement of the deputy superintendent of police, George Iyamu, locates the film within the portrayal of a political past as defined above. This is precisely because Iyamu headed the anti-robbery squad of the Bendel State Police Command in 1986, and effectively worked for the government. And, no other armed robber in Nigerian crime history has attracted the scale of attention including and especially the presidential attention which *Anini* drew (Marenin, 1987). This is line with earlier definitions of the political past which entails actions by governments and establishments set up by acts of the government as well as responses to events by the government of the day.

The press in October 1986 reported that *Anini* shared the governance of the geographical territory that was Nigeria with General Ibrahim Babangida, the military

Head of State at that time (Marenin 1987). The film director also pointed this out while recognising the limitations of portraying Dodan Barracks the residence of the Head of State: *If you know the Anini story, it was a national story. The President then, Babangida had to call and ... his popular question then was, “where is Anini?” Ok, logistics of it, we couldn’t put it in the film* (personal communication, February 16, 2012). Olurode (2008) argues that Anini was nicknamed ‘The Law’ because of his ability to circumvent the police (and by extension the Head of State) after every robbery operation, but conventional wisdom revealed that ‘The Law’ was a self-conferred alias, which came before Anini was shot into limelight.

In his characterisation, Legemah admitted that casting was rigorous because they wanted look-alikes so as to leave no doubts about the events and people he wanted to depict. As producer of the film, even he was auditioned for the role (George Iyamu) he played partly because of his physical resemblance to Iyamu. He recounts:

If you have watched the movie, you will notice that all the actors had a resemblance with the character they played as the script was well researched. To tell you how thorough we were, I was auditioned for the role of Iyamu (personal communication, May 30, 2014)

Prince Kingsley Eweka (aka Baba K) had a characteristic look and expression “full final fullstop” which he repeated when he needed to assert his authority and end any disagreement within the group of robbers. With a toothpick, which always stuck out from the left side of his mouth and his face cap worn backwards, he looked like a hoodlum instead of the prince that he was.

Kingsley and Anini had the same goal although the former’s was less clear; they were primarily motivated by the desire to make a living. Anini had a scarf twisted and tied round his head with a knot in front. On Kingsley’s death, Anini subtly adopted his mentor’s dress, wearing his face with the visor backwards. Indeed Anini’s point of reference and mentor was Baba K to whom he referred when he needed to stress good managerial skills in the armed robbery business. After a bank robbery, he commented gleefully, *“Baba K eh, him na thief o, but him own thief get respeeect...everything wey him de do, very careful”* (loosely translated as ‘Baba K is a superior thief; he’s very careful in all he does’).

Anini's upright position on a hospital bed provides a hint at the film genre. He was poised like someone eager to tell his life history with the introductory words: *My name na (is) Anini*. A medium shot revealed his amputated left leg, and from then on, the idea of a biopic became evident. Bonner (2013) identifies a biopic as that "genre of biographical film following some part of the life of one or more real persons" (p. 76), thus positioning the biopic as one way of constructing the past. The character of Anini is represented in red pyjamas on his hospital bed, which also gives a clue to the nature of the violent biopic. Lacey (2009) points out that "film directors may not consciously wish to make an expressive point with colour," (p. 41) yet viewers could read meanings to the interaction of colours within a frame. The film follows infamous Anini's teenage years to his state execution (an 11-year period) by firing squad. Anini confesses that he never planned to steal, a point to which I will return in the next chapter and then, the film cuts to his native home in a flashback that starts his story as a young boy, presumably a teenager, about to leave his parents for Benin City in search of a living. Biopics, like *Anini*, have documentary-like codes, with generous use of anchorage to guide the viewer through the historic moments being represented in the film. And as Kolker (2006) argued, genres in general "can be quite supple...[helping] the viewer negotiate with the film, promising to provide certain narrative structures and character types that the viewer finds satisfying" (p. 216).

The narrative provides a glimpse of the character traits of the two gangs through which Anini operated (and subverted political power), something akin to one's family of orientation and that of procreation. In the first gang, the armed robber was adopted by Kingsley, the gang leader. He becomes subservient to Kingsley after his 'rite of initiation' in a prison cell. Kingsley, the son of the Benin royal family, Eweka, calls the shot. He also deals directly with George Iyamu, the police officer responsible for supplying the gang with arms. Anini becomes Kingsley's protégé until the latter is captured by the police force. Anini raises with difficulty a sum of ₦50,000 (£200) as bribe money to Iyamu for Kingsley's release. Unfortunately, Kingsley is killed in spite of the 'ransom' paid. This infuriates Anini. Among this group of miscreants, there existed brotherliness – shown in their camaraderie – that made Anini work for his master's release. It is ironical that such emotions exist among criminals, a factor I tie to the melodramatic property of the narrative, something which they shared with no one else. This sort of characterisation, motivated by the gang's quest for survival, thrusts the

narrative forward without revealing any internal conflict within each member, not even of the protagonist.

Anini is the only character that is fully developed in comparison to his gang. The biopic provides glimpses of the round character's place of birth, family and future plans thus fulfilling the expectations of viewers as Kolker (2006) and Lacey (2009) observed. Every member of Anini's gang was accounted for through the anchorage. This was unnecessary with Kingsley's gang since the focus of the story is really on Anini. After Kingsley's death, Anini constitutes another gang and before they begin operations, each one is introduced to the audience with biographical details as text on the screen. Anini's sidekick, Monday Osunbor, is another look-alike of the real person who, through the text on the screen (anchorage), we know is a stammerer. This documentary evidence suggests and corroborates the research capacity of the film crew while simultaneously convincing the viewer of the narrative properties inherent in the biopic.

6.3.1 Setting and Plot

"Only one thing dey my mind" (There is only one thing on my mind). Anini revealed in his remorseful narrative that at the moment when he left his native home, there was only "one thing" on his mind. This piqued the interest of the audience who is left to guess at the "one thing." The story begins at the end, moves to the beginning, the middle and rushes back to the end. Anini's one thing upon relocation was presumably to eke out a living as portrayed in the exposition. The establishing shot of young Anini's background reveals poverty. Medium shots announce his tattered clothes and unkempt appearance. Just before departing his parents' home, he promises to supplement the family income by raising enough money from the trade he hoped to learn. When he eventually gets engaged in robbery, he laments that the money he makes services the corruption of the police, which presumably threatened his "one thing". Subsequently, he establishes a supermarket in another city in order to make good the promise made to his parents. So while the subject of Anini's "one thing" is never raised again in the narrative, it can be surmised that, as an elder son, he was intent on improving the lot of his poor family.

Anini was shot on location in different parts of Edo State particularly in Benin City where Lawrence Anini lived and operated from. It was set between 1979 and 1986, the moment from which Anini left his native home and when he was apprehended by the police. The desire to re-enact the look and feel of the past led the director to Benin in order to ensure audience suspension of disbelief. The crew must have begun working on the project in 2003 since Legemah revealed that the production took two years (the film was released in 2005). Anini also lived in Ibadan where he owned a supermarket, but that location was omitted in the film for budgetary reasons. Reference was only made to it through dialogues. With a budget of ₦6.5m (£26,000), the producer could not afford to convey and sustain cast and crew to Ibadan from Benin, a distance of 281km.

The flashback as a narrative device is characteristic of Nigerian films, frequently deployed to tell back stories with the intention of re-connecting to the current narrative. It is a tacit convention of storytelling, initiated by a close-up of the reminiscing character and a blurred screen that heralds the technique. More advanced productions like *Anini* use the technique but dissolves subtly to the back story. The entire narrative is held together through a series of flashbacks interspersed with the image of Anini on his bed and his off-screen voice-overs when the scene cuts to the action being narrated.

A similar but different technique to the flashback is the dream sequence used in Nigerian films to depict an omen, usually a bad one, from which a straight cut is used to depict the dreaming figure who is usually awakened from sleep (and sweating) by the dream. The Nigerian value system attaches importance to dreams which are believed to be used by dead ancestors to warn family members of impending dangers. With the rise of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Ghana in the 1980s and especially the 1990s, such dreams were presented to religious pastors who were believed to possess the gift of interpreting them and arming the dreamer with requisite prayers to ward off dangers. The dream sequence has also remained a dominant narrative technique in Nigerian films.

Another narrative technique deployed in *Anini* is foreshadowing. When Anini's father warned him prior to his departure against associating with band gangs, "no join bad gang", the viewer can assume that a gangster story is ahead. Foreshadows reveal hints of expected events or actions, which leave bits of clues for the audience and

enhance narrative coherence and closure. Foreshadowing is also evident in the quarrel among the gang members and later by Anini's parents when his father warns his wife of the imminent danger in their home due to Anini's sudden flamboyant lifestyle. Later, both parents are arrested and taken to an unknown destination. Further, *Dis-is-me's* (Segun Arinze) death was prefigured moments before he was shot by Iyamu.

We also hear the non-diegetic sound of Anini's voice as he continues his narrative in a voice over while the audience sees Marcus and Anini on the screen being accompanied by the latter's parents. The voice over continues through other scenes: his expulsion for theft from the mechanic workshop where he began his training with cars, talking about Baba K's grasp of the business of armed robbery which ends in 'thief na work; Baba K na manager (translated as 'robbery is a profession and Kingsley is the manager') Anini recognised a 'leader' in Kingsley. It was the latter's death that turned the narrative into a 'search and maim' of the police. Anini's voice over is suspended at this point until he is apprehended and shot in the leg by the police. Back in the hospital room from where the narrative began, he repents and asks the government's forgiveness pledging to join the police and eradicate robbery in Bendel State if he is forgiven.

Popular commentary is deployed in the narrative to enable the audience feel the pulse of the inhabitants of the areas where the armed robbers terrorised. At restaurants, ordinary citizens sat around tables and debated over Anini's escapades. They told of his robbery operations thereby informing the audience of narrative bits that the camera could not or did not reveal. One particular scene pictured a group of men criticising the bandits at about the same moment when the gang drove into the same bar for a drink. It is through the non-diegetic sound of their voices while Anini and company drove in that the information on Anini's threat to Bendel State and the federation is made known. The robbers killed and wounded those men. This served to tell the audience that the police was not the sole target of the gang's actions. Innocent people were also victims of the gruesome years as if to sanction commentary on the robbers' operations. It was also through the medium of popular commentary that Anini's use of fetish charms spread like wild fire. The popularised opinion was that the robber possessed the capability of disappearing from a location when he sensed the police was near. It is not clear if his gang members had the same power, especially as they did not accompany him to the native doctor who concocted the potion Anini drank.

Owing to the media broadcasts during Anini's operations in 1986, which critics concluded were significant contributors to the hero status conferred on Anini (Marenin, 1987; Olurode, 2008), it seemed appropriate to extend the narrative in the film through radio and TV broadcasts. This occurred twice when a sum of ₦10,000 (£40) was placed on Anini's head, and when Baba K and Kele were executed shortly after being nabbed by the police. A Bendel Broadcasting Service TV news reads:

Good evening

This is a government special announcement.

A daredevil group of robbers have been terrifying Benin.

Investigations have revealed this man Lawrence Anini as the leader of the gang

A sum of ₦10,000 has been promised to anyone with information that can lead to the arrest of these hoodlums.

The medium was also used to update the audience on the progress of the on-going police investigation except that the viewers of the broadcast are not known or seen, thus making that narrative technique stick out like a sore thumb. In spite of that, the technique revealed Amata's desire to approximate the real life events depicted in the film. Lai Olurode's book, *The Story of Anini*, and Marenin Otwin's journal article mentioned above drew heavily from such media reports.

A quick way of supplying information to the audience, advancing the plot and saving screen time is one of the functions of dialogue in this film. Fred Amata, the writer and film director, maintained that "*Nigerians have a special gift of gab, so I needed to include a lot of dialogue in the script*" (personal communication, February 16, 2012). But beyond that, Amata has worked with theatre practitioners and was trained in Theatre Arts which seems to be another plausible explanation for his lengthy dialogues. As a major talking point for Nollywood critics, the question of excessive dialogue in an audio-visual medium is often greeted with harsh criticisms. It is invariably defended by the filmmakers but scarcely do they mount any other argument beyond the perceived loquacity of Nigerians and the theatre background which Nollywood owes its origins in part to. Emem Isong, writer and producer remarked, "*We are a dialogue-based society. We like to talk and we like drama. We have our way of*

making films that is different from the European or the American. So do the Indians (who by the way like to sing!) this might not work for an American film but it does a Nigerian one. That is what makes us Nollywood.” (E. Isong, personal communication, February 25, 2013)

Through Anini’s parents’ dialogue, the controversy around his questionable source of income was made known in greater details. The audience also finds out through the same source that he had set up a supermarket in Ibadan, a south-western city and that he no longer stayed with his friend and mentor who took him to Benin in the first place. Narrations of separation and reunion are mainly revealed in the film through the gang and Anini’s parents. The film plods on through talk like Indian films, which Nayar (2008) regards as cultural products that “employ specific devices and motifs that are traditionally part of orally based storytelling” (p. 159). After major robbery operations which are not shown, the gangs (Kingsley’s and later, Anini’s) convene in a hide out to ‘tell the audience’ what transpired during the robbery operation. Those moments of talk were of information gathered from newspaper reports which Amata and Legemah had collected for the purpose of researching the characters’ lives (F. Amata, personal communication). Effectively, it was a conversation held among the robbers which had a celebratory character, but it primarily filled in the gaps for the viewers, and thus gave a sense of coherence that would otherwise leave audiences with questions if not disappointment. And when a member of the gang was absent from those celebratory periods, his return was greeted by additional comments on a robbery operation he was a part of. Such moments were also used to reward the most efficient of the group by way of praises as in Kingsley’s gang or monetary reward as done by Anini. These layers of dialogue were at once flaws and strengths in that they needlessly prolonged the scenes, but were also the filmmaker’s attempts at staying ‘faithful’ to the actual events being portrayed.

As the protagonist, it is from Anini’s POV that the first 30 minutes of the story is unfolded before the audience. However, it is unclear at what point Anini’s recollections merge with that of the filmmaker. The police investigation scenes could not have been known to Anini. Shots of Anini’s image on the hospital bed interfere with the narrative in a continuous fashion until 25 minutes into the film. There, Anini stops narrating at the peak of his admiration for Kingsley. Furthermore, he could not have

been privy to what transpired between his parents, the police officers who were in search of him or the private lives of his gang members. This fusion of points of view contributed to the overall aesthetic of the film.

The choices related to the *mise-en-scene*, editing, camera movement, color patterns, sound, and music were largely influenced by budgetary constraints already mentioned. The lighting is often low key when interior scenes are shot, thus creating a sombre feel among the gangs. This is with the exception of the police station. With only one camera to shoot, the director noted that there were multiple challenges outside his control. Sometimes, there were scenes that had two sound tracks at the same time with both struggling to out-do each other and to stifle the dialogue. Amata made excuses for the technical problems of the film by appealing to a mediocre culture in Nigeria. He said:

We are evolving; Nollywood is evolving ... You know we can justify a lot of things, argue positions and assertions, but truthfully, at that time in the life of Nollywood, we were like adventurers. Film is a reflection of the environment. Everything generally in the society is sub-standard: education, transportation. It's not a matter of accepting mediocrity; it's a matter of mediocrity coming from mediocrity (personal communication, February 16, 2012).

Anini had a montage of sorts when the police killed Baba Kingsley. This was portrayed through Anini's POV. Amata made a montage by editing several previously seen shots of Kingsley which seemed to celebrate the slain character. He boasted about popularising the technique after he used it in several other films of his.

As a trained filmmaker, Amata said he was proud of his achievements with *Anini*. The narrative techniques in the film are indicative of the period in which the film was made, a period in which as revealed by Amata, "*filmmakers were in transition and were looking for a filming voice*" (personal communication, February 16, 2012). Apart from the 'fetishization' of story-telling earlier mentioned, Amata's views are indicative of an experimental moment in Nollywood. That is, the fresh attempts by filmmakers to tell unique stories without references to the occult. Amata also revealed how his

favourite technique, a montage of previous shots, depicted not a compression of time, but the psychological state of a bereaved Anini. Two points are necessary here.

The first is a foreshadowing of Anini's point of reference in the second instalment of the film. Throughout the second part of the film, Anini makes reference to Kingsley's leadership and administration of the robbery business in a tone that seems to suggest hero-conferral. There too, while dealing with the loss of his leader, he vows to avenge him, one who by societal mores was a threat to national security. The second is that by enumerating five other films in which the technique was used, Amata alluded to the supremacy of the technique over the story, a point which Ekwuazi (1991, 2000) repeatedly makes. It is not the story, it appears, that dictates the style of editing in Amata's and mostly other Nollywood directors, but the 'successful' editing styles that are imposed.

6.4 *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*: Character and Genre

Okoye (2007a) referred to *Battle of Love* as a video of nationalism, while Akpuda (2009) reviewed it as an African war film. These labels adequately express the genre of *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* reveal how shiftily generic labelling can be (depending on the spectator and his purposes) although the concepts of nationalism and war are not too far removed from discourse on African (Nigerian) politics. Writing in another context in which he compares *Battle of Love* with another film *Laraba*, Okoye (2007a) claims that the films "provide one continuous narrative of Nigeria's political and social history from the hostilities of the war era to the ethnic-related disturbances of the present." (p. 5) This suggests that the film also has the features of a historical film even though, again, he notes "they neither directly chronicle the actual events of the war nor offer cold facts about its causes, players or highlights, they articulate a position towards social and historical reconstruction that is experiential and humanist on the one hand, and popular and ideological on the other (p. 6)".

Both *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* share war motifs and icons such as open fire exchanges, deaths, military parades, fighting and torture, sexual and verbal assault, images of high mobility, displacements and family separation. Similar to *Love in Vendetta* (1987), analysed by Ugochukwu (2014), the films use anchorage (and later

on dialogue, even soliloquy) to cue the reader into the historical setting of the film. This partly fills in a bit of contextual data without which the film will be lost on the viewer. But the anchorage also performs a disservice to the entire film because as Ugochukwu noted, “once this prologue is done with, the film will neither make any reference to it, nor explain the reason ...” (p. 129) behind the representation. Filmmakers agreed that the cost of staging a period piece with a full-fledged war apparatus is huge, often out of their reach, and so they are compelled to limit themselves to their economic possibilities (personal communication, Amata, Ogoro, Iregbu, Egborge), which often appear in the form of text: oral or written.

If the icons listed above reveal the genre as war films, and genres are a paradigm that producers and audiences understand (Lacey, 2009), then the second half of *Across the Niger* sits within the melodrama category. Attention shifts to the domestic and the personal, and remains there till the last scene when the nationalist agenda is evoked like an epilogue. This latter part of the film presents four individuals, two of whom struggle to win lovers. The historical agenda is suspended to “knit the viewers’ gaze within the narrative space...emphasizing glances, faces, hands...to mold the viewers’ response into a narrative flow of despair, loss, anxiety, hope and eventual triumph suffered or instigated mainly by women” (Kolker, 2006: 233) in a melodramatic gesture similar to *Hotel Rwanda* (2004). Amidst the violent representations of the Hutu killings of minority Tutsis, Paul’s relationship with his wife and a hotel worker’s escapades with women find narrative space in director, Terry George’s *Rwanda*.

Characterisation in the two films lacks depth. The film opens with a wide shot of a Hausa traditional wedding, with half-dressed men gyrating to the sound of drums that takes over the opening credits’ music. The shot zooms to a richly-attired Igbo man and an equally well-dressed Hausa lady. In this first encounter with the protagonists, Dubem and Rehia, with its accompanying background information, the narrative is set in motion as an inter-ethnic love story set against a fragile moment in Nigerian history, 15th January 1966, as the anchorage reads on the screen. Observing the importance of the domestic in Nollywood film, Alamu (2010) “states the family has been a major focus of Nollywood films” (p. 167). Worthy of note therefore in this important event in the life of an Igbo man, is the absence of his parents, who are later revealed as royalty, probably due to their disapproval of the union. It is only in the second instalment,

Across the Niger, that the viewer gets a glimpse of Dubem's family background – his mother was killed in the war; a maiden is being groomed for him to marry upon his return. Surprisingly too, Reikia's parents are absent at the wedding. It is only later in the film that we meet Reikia's mother. There is no father. Dubem and Reikia supposedly round characters with expected emotional and psychological developments resulting in change are treated as mere flat characters.

Nollywood's penchant for naming characters along ethnic origins, and making such characters assume the language of the persona being portrayed, that is if the actor (Kanayo O. Kanayo) is not Igbo (Dubem) is well-known. In this case, he is. This discussion is extended below under *Stubborn Grasshopper*. The important point to note is that, until the war breaks out, Dubem has no motivation. Nothing else is known about the soldier until he is set to flee the north, leaving behind his newly-wed. His fleeing companions, though known actors such as Ramsey Nouah, remain anonymous Igbo soldiers. Only at Nouah's death (43 minutes into the film) does the viewer learn his name is Chidi.

6.4.1 Setting and Plot

Nigerian filmmakers tend to use historical events to frame stories that are considered more acceptable to their audiences. This was the case in *Love in Vendetta* as argued by Ugochukwu (2014), which is similar to the story-within-a-story narrative paradigm. Such metanarratives tell two or more stories concurrently with one being acted out by the characters and the other(s) embedded in the dialogues. They adopt a similar setting to the historical narrative they envision, and weave a plot around that setting while hesitantly negotiating history in a gesture similar to a Spanish bullfighter's antics. "In *The Battle of Love*, the sounds of actual warfare frame and underscore the actions of the film, but the war does not in itself constitute the main plot of the narrative" (Okoye 2007a: 6). While *Battle of Love* was set in Middle Belt Jos (near the centre of Nigeria), *Across the Niger* was set in the southeast city of Enugu although it also has the geographical features of a road movie owing to the fleeing easterners from the north travelling several hundred kilometres southwards (which took up two-thirds of *Across the Niger*). This is curious as the ethnic conflicts that led to the war did not begin in Jos,

but in northern cities of Kaduna and Kano. Every stop-over by the travellers produced a unique sort of danger to the travellers, which they have to overcome before continuing. They are shot at by Nigerian soldiers represented in low angle shots thus signifying their power; attacked by snakes, harassed by vigilante groups, and made to wade through rivers. Igbo, Hausa and English are spoken by the characters, depending on their location to prevent being taken as spies. The story is narrated from a multi-person perspective: Dubem, Rehia, Bako and an omniscient POV.

With a chronological structure (except for one major flashback), *Battle of Love* tells the story, set in 1967 'northern' Nigeria, of a senior Igbo soldier, Dubem (Kanayo O. Kanayo aka KOK) who falls in love with and marries a Hausa lady, Rehia at an elaborate traditional party. Unknown to Dubem, Rehia was betrothed to Bako (Segun Arinze) who appears during the wedding ceremony to claim his love. Both men are soldiers, the senior being Dubem. Although Rehia rejects Bako, Dubem's ego is wounded by Bako's rivalry and advances to his bride. A fight ensues and the loser, Bako, promises revenge before being whisked away by his senior colleague's aides. This scene foreshadows the conflict which later unfolds between the Hausa and Igbo protagonists. It also casts a glimpse at the two major ethnic groups at loggerheads in the civil war, which are embodied in Dubem (Igbo and representing Ojukwu) and Bako (Hausa and representing Gowon). Ojukwu and Gowon were the Heads of Biafra and Nigeria respectively – the warring factions.

There is a symbolic representation in the image of Rehia, the sought-after object of Dubem and Bako's desire, who both men struggle for. Each contender has to conquer the bride, a symbolic depiction of Nigeria, the fatherland that the opponents ardently wish to own yet have to struggle for, flee from and return to. Rehia, the cause of the tension between Dubem and Bako goes through difficulties herself, but has to reconcile both men for personal and collective good. She is symbolically tormented, abandoned by the transporter taking her in search of her husband, raped by marauding hoodlums and wounded by a bullet aimed at her husband, Dubem. Rehia's predicament is evocative of the ravaged Nigerian land. The destructions of the war left rivers polluted by corpses, houses and offices razed down, farmlands less arable. Indeed, Rehia has no moment of respite just as the country itself had none during the war years. Emerging

from the throes of childbirth, and bringing forth a son, which signifies hope for the war-torn country, Rekia has to contend with more losses, notably the death of her husband.

The patriarchal Nigerian society cherishes male children, over and above females. Thus, necessitating the announcement of the sex of the child, “it’s a boy”. At this announcement, the film cuts to Rekia, on the floor, regaining her composure and groping for her husband, who lies lifeless on the ground. Her provision of an heir to the throne seemingly secures her place within the royal family, but so fragile and insecure are her hope and future that its realisation (and the simultaneous realisation of her husband’s death) elicits a yell. The scene is such a powerful one that reveals the intention of the filmmaker, to call for hope. After Rekia’s yelling, the silence and expectancy that follow leads to Ogoro’s ultimate point: *you can win a battle without going to war if you dialogue and listen to one another* (personal communication, August 29, 2013). This is akin to town criers in African traditional societies who bear important messages from a king’s palace. They use a metallic gong to ‘yell’ at the inhabitants of the village who run out of their homes to listen to an all-important message. When the gong falls silent, the message is delivered with warnings or sanctions in the event of non-conformity. This is in consonance with Nigerian storytelling which “reinforce the collective mentality of Nigerian society, educating large audiences along certain established lines: developing collective memories of the past, maintaining a distance from the threatening present, and projecting life in the future” (Alamu, 2010: 166). That yell then leads directly to the sermon delivered by the king on the importance of Nigeria’s unity.

Another narrative technique is the use of a back story which manages to thrust the story forward, but it is not without loopholes. The bitterness harboured in those years of the civil war ran deep. Hausa nepotism was blatant, and had much to do with containing the perceived dominance of the Igbos in a manner similar to the Hutus’ attempts at clipping Tutsi wings in 1994 Rwanda. Hausas came to hate the Igbos and vice versa on the strength of the killings that their kinsmen had undergone in the respective locations (Gbulie, 1981). It was therefore unconvincing that a mere recalling of a childhood play between Rekia and Bako was sufficient to change Bako’s mind completely towards his sworn enemy, Dubem, and even motivate the former to orchestrate Dubem’s escape from prison and execution. Rather than try to depict real

possibilities of the period, the filmmaker injected the reason why he made the film in the first place which dwells on the ideas of hope, reconciliation and unity. It was therefore congruent with his agenda, without necessarily being a realistic portrayal of the period, to present Bako, formerly a cruel and vindictive soldier, as the helper who risks his life and military career in order to assist a 'Biafran spy' escape the custody of the Nigerian army. Several other scenes in the films use memory sequences (when a character remembers a point/another character and acts on that memory) through the dissolve to justify causality thus admitting a measure of coherence, even if narrative flaws inadvertently occur. The dissolve, a continuity editing technique, which according to Lacey (2009) "suggests the passage of time or expressively links two scenes" (p. 57) was repeatedly employed to reveal the interior state of fear of the protagonists. Such techniques in *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* linked two scenes in a remote cause and effect narrative flow. Dubem and Reikia remembered their precarious marital situation at different moments; the former sadly for their refugee status and the other fearfully.

6.5 Oil Village: Character and Genre

Oil Village is included in this chapter as a construction of a political and politicised year, 1995, for the reason that it addresses in a fictionalised way, a shadow of the Ken-Saro Wiwa story. As Mbembe (1997) argues, "the power to represent reality...implied that one was having recourse to...imagination, even fabrication that consisted in clothing the signs with appearances of the thing of which they were precisely the metaphor" (p. 153). The protest film is a thin representation of repression and injustice with images that evoked popular agitation, which fell on deaf elite ears. The subtlety with which director Kalu Anya and producer Sam Onwuka worked grew out of the insecurity of cultural producers operating in conditions of gross inequality between the state and the people. Were it not for the Censors Board and the repressive tendencies of the government, the filmmakers will have been more direct in their representation of the story (S. Onwuka, personal communication, October 16, 2013). Writing about the aesthetics of Nigerian film, Larkin (2008) argues that they "draw on the sides of African life that were downplayed in the colonial period, in the nationalist era of independence and in the discursive concept of African cinema" (p. 171). *Oil Village* is a trope of long-

suppressed underdogs framed in the image of a popular social crusader to interrogate the inadequacies of contemporary life among rulers and subjects in the Niger Delta.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was an environmental activist clamouring for better representativeness in the management of the oil resources in Ogoni land, a small community in Rivers State on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea. Ogoni and indeed the entire south-south region, is embodied in Bayama community. The film has two key features: meetings and protests. Every scene was either a meeting to celebrate political actions and ineptitude by the community chiefs or a protest by the community youth, and in some scenes, both blended to underline the filmmaker's call to action: '*Wake up and fight, Bayama!*' which was the theme song of the film. Thus, the film "wages a political critique through the language of melodrama" (Larkin, 2008: 182) and stereotypical characterization. George (Nnamdi Eze), leader of the youth group in Bayama plays the lead role and Saro-Wiwa's character, who is executed by hanging following a questionable judicial sentence by a military tribunal handpicked by General Sani Abacha (Gen Abas). UP Oil is Shell, as Kalu Anya revealed to me in an interview (K. Anya, personal communication, February 20, 2012). Eze has also played the lead role in similar protest films depicting Niger Delta crises (Agina, 2013).

The film is melodramatic. Kolker (2006) writes of melodrama as a genre that expressed rewards for virtues and punishment for crime, combines the personal with the political...while expressing other ideals of "self-sacrifice for the cause of others... and the strenuous pursuit of freedom from oppression" (p. 218). It shares the conventions of exaggerated emotions, employs lively music, partly a call to moral action and depicts some excesses among the chiefs to hook in and infuriate the audience (Larkin, 2008). It provides humour to defuse the atrocious actions of the community chiefs such as dispossessing indigenes of huge plots of land and distributing a bag of salt among many land owners in recompense. *Oil Village* is also every inch a protest film which can be discerned first from the title and then through wide shots of the delta waters, oil pipes, installations, polluted plots of land, hungry and sad faces of indigenes. The title of the film connotes a country's rich natural resources, so big as to generate three-quarters of national income. But the title 'village' (small, rural, rustic) contrasts immediately with the immensity that 'oil' evokes (at least in Nigeria). The thematic and aesthetic choices in the film are determined not only by the happenings in Nigeria's Niger Delta region,

but also in all postcolonial African states. *Oil Village* thus conveys in Alamu's (2010) thoughts "the intense feeling that urbanization and industrialization have created an excessively volatile and unstable Nigerian society" (p. 167). Further, the Head of State, Abacha (Sam Obeakheme) features when a Shell Oil worker is killed by the angry youth, thus alluding to the point made earlier on the 'strength' of violence to attract official attention (Barber, 1987).

Like many Nollywood films, characterisation is shallow. The main actors seem insufficiently motivated, without a 'life' outside the visible parts of the unfolding narrative. It not clear what families the characters belong to, what jobs they do, what schools, if any, they attend. George runs out of a modest bungalow, dressed in simple clothes, when he is needed to fight for the youth, and when the action is over, he is not seen again. The chiefs live in semi-posh houses, are richly-clad in traditional outfits, drive cars and binge on meat and beer. Speaking often about money, the evidence of which their houses and personal effects demonstrate, we neither see an office nor the transaction of licit business. In spite of this flaw, the film manages to carve out historical detail in what Ugochukwu (2014) refers to as an "unusual treatment of history" (p. 130). Without anchorage, a prologue or an epilogue, the viewer is left to decode the signs and subtexts that point to the historical figures of Saro-Wiwa and Abacha, the latter easily achieved due to the signifying presence of military uniforms and sunglasses typical of Abacha.

6.5.1 Setting and Plot

Oil Village, which is pre-occupied with a national historical subject, is a 2-part 2001 Nollywood film that tracks the long-standing battle between inhabitants of a fictional Bayama community in the Niger Delta region, the federal government and the oil prospecting multinational Shell (represented by Cliff and Wilson in UP Oil). The Bayama youth forum representing the community is aggrieved over the incessant plunder of their plots land with no accruing compensation. The village chiefs meet with executives of the oil companies at regular intervals to seal business deals. The monies remitted to the local chiefs for the development of Bayama people and their fatherland

is siphoned and directed to personal aggrandisement. It is not surprising that the community incites a youth protest and gunplay which results in multiple deaths.

Shot on location in parts of Imo State (Naze, Oguta, Nnebukwu, Mgbele and Orsu), *Oil Village* has similar characteristics in terms of location with *Stubborn Grasshopper*. It was revealed to me during an interview with Simi Opeoluwa, director, *Stubborn Grasshopper*, that Sam Onwuka the producer of both films was capable of shooting two movies at the same time and on the same set. Having written both stories before going on location, similar scenes or those that required the same actors were shot in repeated takes especially if such actors had to appear as uniformed men. That strategy was undoubtedly a cost-saving measure. It is, however, impossible to tell at this point how such actors responded to such shooting demands. This is because Opeoluwa, when prodded, declined making further comments on the practice (S. Opeoluwa, personal communication, July 7, 2014).

The film has a rural setting with its rustic look and thick vegetation, both features of the towns mentioned above. But that does not affect the national significance of its subject. It is expository in style and its historicity is strengthened by the brief feature of a former Head of State (Gen. Sani Abacha) who is called Gen. Abas in the filmic narrative. Without doubt, the themes of greed and corruption rather than militancy are flagged. Only once is the supernatural played up to indicate the supremacy of integrity over the rapacity of Bayama chiefs. But this is one out of the many perspectives from which the beleaguered Niger Delta region has been examined. Such films provide viewers the mental hooks on which to hang the memories of historical people, national and regional events and protest movements.

The town crier, informant and bearer of the king's message – delivered in Pidgin – brings to the attention of the inhabitants the resolutions from the Council of Chiefs' various meetings either with the oil company, UP Oil or among its members. This narrative technique opened up for viewers as well as for Bayama indigenes the negotiation and decision making spaces that they were not privileged to have been part of. It also revealed the derisive reactions of the local inhabitants to such announcements.

Public protests revealed the dissatisfaction of the youth of Bayama. They were excluded from every negotiation with the oil company. The king addresses the people

first before asking them what their problems were. One would have thought that he would seek to hear their problems first before any address (even though his address was brief). When fellow youths were killed, the king told them to make arrangements for their burial...not promising any aid save palace representation. It is not clear if that implies financial assistance as well. In spite of the public and peaceful protests, the king was seen to be distanced from his subjects by addressing the dead as ‘your colleagues’ rather than the typical ‘our people’

Because of its rural setting and characters, the film adopts the use of proverbs, a well-documented form of African oral tradition in the dialogues. In a critical sense, the use of proverbs in Nigerian films and particularly in *Oil Village* draws on the historical and linguistic tradition of African oratory. Nigerian, like Indian films are talky. Nayar (2008), writing about Bollywood’s oral contours notes that “nothing exists within a character that is not said” (p. 165). And it is not only the words or the speaker that matters, but the style of telling, the linguistic codes, some of which are repeated below:

A single finger cannot pick the lice from your head (at the first youth protest).

He who the cap fits, let him wear it. It is a question of trying to make yourself comfortable with your position (when Mbolo was eating voraciously).

Let me tell you, you crab who is comfortable with cool water will soon find out the difference between cool and hot water (when Osaro rejected the ₦50m in the presence of the chiefs).

Your Highness, no right thinking man dares to touch the tail of a living lion, no one (when three youths were killed and were taken to the palace)

Nayar (2008) contends that while some critics may discredit such pithy sayings as sticking to tradition, appealing to clichés and therefore bereft of originality, such expressions are in fact original because they are not “housed in personal admittances or intimate confessions, but in publicly shared truths or memories...in forms of utterances that are guarded against change because they render knowledge easily transportable” (p. 165). Elsewhere, Fabian (1997) argues that “popular culture owes its existence to highly creative and original processes” (p. 18), which reminds in a different way of Barber’s (1987) description of popular arts as syncretic, expressive and inclusive.

Several dialogic strands are used to repeat the message “*Wake up and fight, Bayama*”. The soundtrack of the film is itself a narrative on its own, half-accompanying and half-completing the unfolding visual images on the screen. Ekwuazi cited in Agina (2011) commented on the soundtrack of Nigerian films, writing that they often lack creativity because of the way they are rendered. However, Kolker (2006) reminds that in melodrama, “music provokes the emotions and made connections between what the characters on the screen and the viewers in the audience were supposed to be feeling” (p.218).

Magical realism and recourse to the supernatural is invoked when Osaro was shot in his house in an assassination ploy by the chiefs. The bullets bounced off his body without piercing it. He denies any mystical powers, and says to his assailants “when a person is fighting a just cause, God in his infinite mercies will give such a person divine protection.” This sort of *deus ex machina* is common in Nollywood (Adejunmobi, 2003), often criticised for its lack of creative resolution to problems. Turner (2006) rightly claims that “a film which arbitrarily ushers in a solution without the support of a generic convention or without foreshadowing is in danger of offending and irritating audiences” (p. 121). But the technique is also justified by filmmakers as the presence of God among Christian believers, which is prevalent in Nigeria, and which the camera has no other way of depicting (K. Anya, personal communication, February 20, 2012).

Again, *Oil Village* adopts the omniscient perspective, providing information known only to the specific characters concerned with the action and dialogue of each particular scene. The chiefs have no knowledge of the youth forum discussions and vice versa.

6.6 *Stubborn Grasshopper*: Character and Genre

An interesting parody in its shades of politics, ethnicity, democracy and history, *Stubborn Grasshopper* speaks to its audience of the political highlights of the period between June 12, 1993 and June 8, 1998: national elections and Gen. Abacha’s death respectively. In his writing on Indian cinema, Nandy (2008) points out that “the popular cinema is the slum’s point of view of Indian politics and society and, for that matter, the

world” (p. 74). Nandy’s ‘slum’ is in fact a metaphor for Barber’s ‘people’, those who are systematically denied access to the official channels of communication, the lower middle-class, Okome’s (2003) urban sub-altern (taken from Gayatri Spivak’s famous 1988 essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*) and those who “propel both the engine of civic life in Third World society and the ambitions of its modernizing elite” (Nandy, *ibid.*)

Here too, character stereotyping is deployed. The protagonist, Sam Obeakheme (Alba), portrays Abacha’s role in *Oil Village*. As Mbembe (1997) opines, “the image is never an exact copy of reality...it is always a conventional comment, the transcription of a reality...into a visible code, which becomes in turn a manner of speaking of the world and inhabiting it” (p. 152). In *Stubborn Grasshopper*, Obeakheme (Alba) and his cohorts take on the accents of the ethnic groups (particularly Hausa and Yoruba) they represented with the exception of Gen. Babangida’s character, Badmas, who surprisingly spoke with a marked Igbo accent, probably because his role was only marginal. He featured only in the first 25 minutes of the 3-hour film, and often represented in a low-angle shot. Also represented in low angle shots is the figure of Alba, the dictator.

Scholarly opinion on Babangida’s role in the film admits that the film was “surprisingly sympathetic to Ibrahim Babangida” (Haynes 2006: 528), but that seems to contradict the notion of causality in narratives. Babangida’s character, Gen Badmas, or at least his (in)action, was the catalyst that drove the story in its direction. I argue that the film was unsympathetic to his character because had he not annulled the election and stepped aside, his junior colleague, Alba, would not have stepped in forcefully – a detail the filmmaker did not want viewers to miss. Given the inordinate ambition of Alba, he probably would have sought power at all costs despite Badmas’s pleas. But, the low angle shots through which Badmas was portrayed conferred a superior position on him, and as one capable of exerting influence on others. Further, Badmas’ complicity just as Chief Nze’s and Alba’s was dramatised with equal determination, and within the boundaries of the resources available to the producer.

Mbembe (1997) reminds us that in representation, “what was important was the capacity of the thing represented to mirror resemblances” (p. 152). Therefore, the echoing of characters and voices in *Stubborn Grasshopper* leaves no doubt as to the events and people being mirrored. The images hold up their referents with admirable

and historical clarity. The characters seem but are not well motivated, and the drama plods on in a chronological order up until Abacha's death which is one of the main points the filmmaker wanted to make. Gen Alba, the lead character in this film is not a fully developed character, yet his motivations, thoughts and actions are revealed with trenchant criticism. The character flaws, inordinate ambition and sexual desire, which lead to his ultimate downfall, was played up relentlessly and I daresay, remarkably. Else, how could those years of brutality have ended without this hamartia? His obstinacy from which the film title was derived, and to which further attention is drawn in the next chapter, had plunged the country he led into the throes of economic and political instability. At the dictator's death, popular opinion described it as a "coup from heaven" (in Maier, 2000:1)

It is difficult to determine with exactitude which film genre *Stubborn Grasshopper* is because it combines the features of docudrama, melodrama, biopic and historical drama. It does not nearly exhaust the features of any one genre yet it displays with varying degrees of success, certain characteristics of each. Ebbrecht (2007) points out that the genre of docudrama possesses "extra-textual features that underline the social importance of political or historical topics and discourses..." (p. 39). Although *Stubborn Grasshopper* possesses no "extra-textual features", yet its 'documentary' properties are palpable. The facts of Abacha's private and public life are provided: ascent to power, oil deals, marital and extra-marital relationships, relationships with politicians and so on. Even some details of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections are projected. In an interview with the producer, he confided his intentions were to tell Nigerians the truth about Abacha at a time of copious conflicting reports (S. Onwuka, personal communication, October 16, 2013). Arguably, the filmmaker's opening disclaimers "all resemblance to persons living or dead is unintended" do not discredit the documentary-like features of the film, thus affirming Kolker's (2006) point which reminds us that "popular culture appears to be in a steady state of assertion and denial, of claiming the importance of what is shown and then denying that it really means anything" (p. 187). In fact, in the screening of this film before post-graduate students, some of them walked out of the venue because they said it was a "*boring documentary*" (personal communication).

Further, Haynes (2006) observes that the second part of the film fits more closely the melodramatic genre since it focuses on the protagonist's domestic affairs. Writing about Indian popular cinema, Vasudevan (2011) lists the properties of melodrama as "emphasis on loss of family, of community, and the difficulties of achieving romantic fulfilment, and an exhibited high contrivance in narrative mechanisms..." (p. 10). By exhibiting melodramatic features such as fusing the excesses of Abacha's private and public life with fast-paced music, it simultaneously slips into the 'biopic' genre, when he was at the helm of affairs of the Nigerian State. Kolker (2006) maintains that the "melodrama can be understood as an overarching narrative form that controls all films that aren't comedies" (p. 232). So, while it cannot be denied that Sam Onwuka and Simi Opeoluwa plunged into the political past to cart away the details represented in the film, it is obvious that the defining elements of several genres are at work. The film also employs mimetic conventions that provoke laughter and ridicule without wholly belonging to comedy. Although *Stubborn Grasshopper* does not provide accurate descriptions of places and dates, neither through its camera work nor dialogue, it has in the words of Haynes (2006) remained as close as possible to history:

but in general all the twists and turns of the history of the regime are represented faithfully and in detail, from the bloody suppression of the rioting in Lagos after the annulment to the forced resignation of the head of the Interim National Government, the violated understanding with Abiola, the assassinations of Kudirat Abiola and NADECO leaders, the arrests of Generals Diya and Yar'Adua, and so on. The film sticks close to the historical record in so far as it has been established, and otherwise, in cases where certitude is impossible or has not yet been established, it follows common assumptions and speculations that must not be more extraordinary than the truth (p. 527).`

6.6.1 Setting and Plot

Majority of the events depicted in the film occurred in Lagos, South West Nigeria, but the film was shot in Owerri, South East Nigeria for security reasons. The producers feared that shooting in the west, the south west or north had the potential of truncating the production schedules because as Neville Ossai, production manager revealed to me "*the military guys were still around and we did not want anybody to disturb us*" (personal communication, March 23, 2013).

Dialogue like in other Nigerian films, and as stated above, is a key technique for supplying information to the audience and taking forward the sequence of (in)actions in the narrative. The film *Stubborn Grasshopper* is no exception. Dialogue between characters Alba and Badmas, Badmas and security officer, indeed, between and among characters was frequently tainted with ethnic colourations. I add the well-utilised vox populi to the strategy under dialogue since it is a form of conversation aimed at achieving the same purpose of narrative advancement, the difference being with the nature and orientation of the addressee. Sam Onwuka and Simi Opeoluwa, producer and director respectively, wanted to express the opinions of the populace which is why the vox populi was introduced. Haynes (2006) notes that the first part of the film deployed an “elaborate apparatus for measuring public opinion”, but not the second perhaps because “public opinion had reached the point of utter disgust but also of helpless impotence in the face of the regime’s willingness to shed blood” (p. 528). The filmmaker did not spare the audience the details of Abacha’s (Alba) private life, although that did not elicit any commentary from the populace in the film.

Like in *Anini*, narrative advancement is achieved through the media. Television broadcasts are used to announce election results and later its annulment. The national newspaper, *The Punch*, with caption “PETROLEUM MINISTER SACKED FOR INEFFICIENCY” (53:20minutes) serves to reveal Alba’s wanton appointments and dismissal. In this particular case, soon after the minister tries to reason with the Head of State on the rationale behind sending petrol to other African countries when there were long queues in Nigerian petrol stations, he is relieved of his appointment. Although the newspaper caption serves its purpose, it betrays an anachronistic entry since the story unfolding is between 1993 and 1998. On the same 2003 newspaper, another caption reads “governors spent derivation fund on 2003 campaign. Before 1998, Nigerians were not even sure that another election was going to take place, let alone a campaign. In fact, it was unthinkable at that time due to the ruthless dictatorship of the political helmsman. Upon assuming office, Abacha ensured that governors were sacked and civil formations were abrogated. There were only military administrators.

The film is a mimetic presentation of Nigeria (its military government and its ethnic chauvinism) through the language of satire. It claims, in its opening, an unintended and fictional portrayal of the events depicted in the film, but as Sam

Onwuka noted, it was a strategy to escape the sledge hammer of the Censors Board (personal communication, October 16, 2013). *Stubborn Grasshopper* also adopts a strip of comedy to ease the tensions related to the task of the telling, a telling which was gruesome as it was menacing. Alba had an elocution trainer to brush up his English pronunciations which were heavily accented by his Hausa. After a couple of attempts, Alba dismisses the trainer with a wave of hand suggestive of his carefree attitude to matters of grave importance. Finally, the film also adopts an omniscient narrative point of view, supplying information which were previously generally known but now directed at a mass audience, presented with ‘insider-precision’.

6.7 *Half of a Yellow Sun*: Character and Genre

Directed by Biyi Bandele, a UK-based Nigerian theatre director, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (HOAYS hereafter) was his debut feature film on an \$8m budget, a huge amount by Nigerian filmmaking standards. The historical drama, an adaptation of Chimamanda Adichie’s novel ‘Half of a Yellow Sun’, will be treated for the purposes of this study, solely as another film rather than its fidelity (or not) to the novel. This is a strategy that places all the films discussed on equal terms: as constructions of a political past and in this instance, a portrayal of 1960-1970 Nigeria.

Bandele’s protagonist, Olanna (Thandie Newton) is well-motivated, a round character who surpasses herself both in acting and in self-discovery as she searches for a fulfilling life: academic profession and love. Missing background information on her is provided through dialogues. A strong-willed and independent woman, Olanna takes major decisions without a modicum of consultation with her parents. Her twin sister, similarly motivated is the self-conceited manager of their wealthy father’s estate. Her arrogance and glamorous lifestyle make her less attractive to the audience, which is evidenced by her comments on her necklace. Obsessed by expensive necklaces – a useful prop that attracts British Richard Churchill (Joseph Mawle) to her – she says: “the necklace will feature in tomorrow’s ‘Lagos Life’. That will be my way of contributing to our newly-independent country. It will give fellow Nigerians something to aspire to, an incentive to work at”

Another important character in this film is Odenigbo, an Igbo university lecturer, whose ideological leanings pit him against the British and indigenous non-Biafran supporters. In one of his meetings with friends and some university people, he argues: “my point is the only authentic identity for an African is his tribe.” After a brief diatribe against Britain for its political machinations in Nigeria, he drives his point home: ...but I was Igbo before the white man came.” His unapologetic Biafran stance supports the film’s overall agenda, which is to deny the Federal Military Government a voice while portraying the marginalisation of the Igbos. No footage of the secessionist’s counterpart, Gowon, was seen. Only those of the Igbo leader, Ojukwu, occasionally appeared to further confuse the non-Nigerian viewers.

HOAYS is conceived as a period drama that draws the look of the past into a 111-minute long film narrative. Without tightly focusing the concept of causality regarding the Civil War, but admirably tracking the geographical space in which the narrative unfolds, the film rapidly settles into a melodrama, exploring some effects of the war on co-habiting couples, “wherein their difficulties of achieving romantic fulfilment” (Vasudevan 2011: 10) are portrayed. As a historical text, major courses of the ethnic war were left unaddressed, leaving viewers unfamiliar with contemporary Nigerian history well out of the narrative. At the announcement of the first coup through a radio broadcast, the panic-dialogue between Olanna and Odenigbo drowned out relevant bits of information which the broadcast was meant to supply. The film’s efforts at historical construction are subsequently overtaken by romantic relationships.

6.7.1 Setting and Plot

Set in Tinapa studio and Creek town in Nigeria and London, the film begins with Nigeria’s Independence from British rule, but ends with the emotional pain associated with war-related losses of family members as Olanna and Odenigbo are separated from their parents, the first by distance, and the second death. Besides, Olanna’s twin, Kainene goes missing and hundreds more are displaced. Like *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, HOAYS uses texts in addition to maps, flags, newsreel and radio broadcasts to connect missing links for instance for viewers unable to tell Aba from Kano. It also projects the war as buffeting the lives of four lovers and rivals who must separate and

unite as the battle rages and bates in their locations. HOAYS does not provide the catharsis of the other two films. It wanders curiously through south eastern Nigeria, and Kano to reveal mindless killings, the brutality of the northerners which seems to project a present day Nigeria ridden by the bullets and bombs of the terrorist group, Boko Haram. It is Olanna (and sometimes in Odenigbo's company) who travels the most as dictated by her emotional dispositions.

Plot points were advanced through the radio broadcasts and newsreel, but twice the audio broadcasts are suppressed by background music or character dialogue, losing important historical information. The Civil War breaks out while Olanna is in Nsukka with her lecturer lover, and although their relationship is tried by infidelities and parental disaffection, Olanna's devotion to Odenigbo strengthens. Foreshadowing was a technique repeatedly deployed in the narration. In the film's opening, national independence foreshadowed that of Biafra; Odenigbo's mother's tirade at her first meeting with Olanna prefigured the war on the levels of class and ethnicity. The twins' separation foretold Kainene's loss.

The cinematography is excellent and delicate; long takes ensure visually appealing frames while the shot/reverse shots reveal professionalism yet to be accomplished with finesse in Nollywood. The closing credits give away the foreign crew thus accounting for Guy Lodge's description of HOAYS as a film that "exudes BBC-style polish." There are numerous wide shots internally and externally partly to bring all the subjects and objects into focus (Kolker, 2006). Thus, suggesting that HOAYS frames all human conditions, especially the class divide and the vulnerabilities occasioned by war. Such shots capture the Independence party celebrations, the new Biafran State celebrations and the war scenes. The camera work symbolically tells the story of the minority in Nigeria: where they live, how the political class treats them and how they react to imperative societal pressures.

From the foregoing, the narrative texture of Nigerian films is similar in many ways regardless of genre. More attention is given to setting, costume and dialogue than any other aspect of the construction. Location and set design are important, but not as much as dialogue presumably because the story is in the dialogue. Arguably, the narratives appear to lack depth due to their superficial characterization, but as Okome has argued, the filmmakers speak to deep-seated anxieties which are imposed on them

by the postcolonial order of society and governance. The use of media outlets to substitute and fuel dialogue is useful, gaining grounds and lends reasonable credibility to the narratives.

This chapter has examined the different narrative techniques employed by the filmmakers in constructing the past. It approached the films individually, with varying depth, to account for the nuances reflected in each film. The narratives and their modes of telling are indicative of the common features of the Nigerian people; however, the films that deal with the political history of Nigeria show no marked differences in their processes of narration from other genres of film. The only difference is the use of footage and newsreel. In the previous chapter, it was pointed out that certain factors prohibit filmmakers from political history. One of the ways by which they have overcome those inhibitions, particularly censorship, is by disguising and allegorising the characters and events represented, by the use of anchorage sub-texts and other elements. Therefore, unmasking the narratives and how they signify as this chapter has demonstrated is useful to the overall debate of narrating problematic histories.

CHAPTER 7

IDEOLOGICAL READINGS OF THE FILMS

7.1. Introduction

“... for the majority of African people, the arts are the only channel of public communication at their disposal” – Karin Barber 1987:2

Obvious from the last chapter which addressed the narrative techniques of the videos, is that Nollywood narratives are similar in content and form. Re-constructions of the past are conceived as stories in much the same way as other narratives – romantic dramas, comedies, cultural epics and so on. But putting together such films on meagre budgets admits compromises which are embedded in the dialogues. Such dialogues may contain ideological nuances which this chapter seeks to uncover. In this section, the films being studied as past political constructions are presented in response to the third research question guiding the thesis: in what ways do the films promote or subvert the dominant ideology of the historical period they represent? By projecting a certain ideology in video films, others are invariably muted or repressed.

What these films have in common is that all are made in contemporary times but set in the background of one military dispensation or another within the post-colonial period of Nigeria (1967-1998). Taken together, they portray images of military-led Nigeria as a country in search of nationhood but without what one might call an ideal thought leadership. Such glimpses of the past are refracted in the country's current political landscape with the single difference being that civilians are now at the helm of affairs. There are ethnic affiliations and tensions in all films. Dissimilarities border on the uniqueness of each military regime and other institutional differences that each military dictator allowed. Read as the filmmakers' voice in national discourse, the films do not attempt to portray blow-by-blow accounts of the past with the mild exception of *Stubborn Grasshopper*, but to lend their voices to national conversations, as one filmmaker Sam Onwuka said, “*I wanted to say something about Abacha*” (personal communication, October 16, 2013). As Barber (1987) notes, the arts are the media through which ordinary people speak to power as well as to themselves. And “in extreme cases, meaning is communicated simply by the fact that the performance takes

place at all in very repressive regimes, simply continuing to come together to perform and participate is a statement of identity and defiance” (p. 2).

Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria’s first president (1963-1966) defined ideology as a body of assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociological programme (Azikiwe, 1979: 1). Brummett understands it as “a systematic network of beliefs, commitments, values, and assumptions that influence how power is maintained, struggled over, and resisted” (2010: 99). In their study of ideology in contemporary Hollywood cinema, Ryan and Kellner (1988) point out that thematic and formal narrative conventions are ideologically motivated, and while a reading of such conventions might yield deep insights to American politics of a given period, the political movements might equally inform the thematic engagements of Hollywood. While both authors state that not every Hollywood narrative film is ideological, they do affirm that films make social and political arguments about history and about the cultural contexts from which they originate, are disseminated and consumed. Kellner (n.d.) goes on to develop these thoughts by calling prudently for a multi-perspectival approach to ideology critique, and at the same time cautioning against incompatible methodological strategies for the sake of multiplicity. This chapter follows Kellner’s position because his proposal recognizes that ideology critique must demonstrate awareness of the specific task and goals at hand and therefore adopts a contextual, post-structuralist reading of the films to unpack the ideologies that they speak to. This is because Kellner admirably moves beyond a monolithic notion of ideology as class domination, which positions the concept as the identification and rejection of the economic interests of the capitalist class. Instead, he calls for a broader understanding of ideology discourses since ideology is embedded in figures, concepts, images, theoretical positions, myths, genres and the cinematic apparatus. Thus highlighting the benefits of “the exploration of how ideology functions within popular culture and everyday life and how images and figures constitute part of the ideological representations of sex, race and class in film and popular culture” (p. 3).

The idea of ideological critique in the following sections also draws from Barber’s (1997a), and Brummet’s (2010) thoughts with emphasis on the prevailing cultural and secular ideologies as well as the political culture of Nigeria as depicted in the films. Barber draws on Pierre Macherey’s insights to analyse the ideological

materials inherent in two Yoruba plays on oil wealth in Nigeria. For Barber, an author's "themes, conceptions and language constitute ideological materials that are available in the particular position in society that he or she occupies" Such ideological materials are employed to furnish the work of art with an author's "harmonizing intent" (Barber, 1997a: 92). I interpret Barber's harmonizing intent as Brummet's "web of convictions" (p. 99) that authors have, which Kellner argues are manifested in themes, conceptions and language. And, it is important to point out too that Kellner makes reference to ideology being hidden in themes, conceptions and language as well as in "cinematic apparatus and strategies" (p. 9). If, as Lacey (2009) observes, "the power of ideology lies in its ability to present itself as natural as common sense" (p. 108), then ideology in the sense used here is culturally and contextually derived, employing class distinctions, ethnicity, and other determinants of economic power in Nigeria with caution. Brummet (2010) argues that ideology is thrust forward through arguments, which the producers of popular culture wish the consumers to assume or believe. Meaning is socially constructed (Hall, 2013; Lacey, 2009; Marenin, 1987) by filmmakers and audiences. Having sketched a useful concept of ideology, attention is now turned to poststructuralism as an enabling ideological paradigm to Nigerian films that depict the past.

Poststructuralism accommodates a contextual critical approach and calls attention to several elements within a film text which other theoretical approaches, notably structuralism, ignore. Kellner argues that:

a text is constituted by its internal relations and its relations to its socio-historical context and the more relations articulated in a critical reading, the better grasp of a text one may have. A multiperspectival method must necessarily be historical and should read its text in terms of its history and may also choose to read history in the light of the text (n.d: 18).

Poststructuralist film theory grew out of the deficiencies inherent in structuralism. Reading a film solely through its internal structures often disregards the plurality of meanings encoded by filmmakers and decodable by viewers, a point which Hall (2013) made. It also negates the socio-cultural contexts from which the cultural productions emerge and in which they are consumed. Further, a single ideological reading of texts suggests that meanings are one-sided or absolute. They are not. As such, the readings below posit that Nigerian video films are contested terrains that represent multiple

underlying conflicts and control of power within Nigeria (Barber, 1987, 1997a; Haynes and Okome, 2000; Kellner, n.d.). These films are direct addresses to political power but they also x-ray slums and launch missiles at the lower class who are just as gullible, and occasionally as intoxicated by power and ethnic chauvinism.

To buttress the point of reading the videos as bottom-up and horizontally, Karl Maier counters Chinua Achebe's famous expression on the problem with Nigeria being that of failed leadership by quoting Ishola Williams: "a leader does not come from heaven; he comes from a group of people. If the people are good followers, they will choose the right leader." (Maier 2000: xxviii). Hence, to grasp the political constructions in the videos, one would have to understand the governments over the years and perhaps, more importantly, the people because as Kellner argues, "texts require multivalent readings that will unfold the contradictions, contestatory marginal elements, and structured silences of the texts" (p.12). We would also have to understand what the film assumes and promotes as well as what it silences and subverts. Within the films under study, there are subversive elements that challenge the filmmaker's claims, to such an extent that the text is not entirely under the control of the producer (Barber, 1987).

7.2 Films 1-3: *Battle of Love*, *Across the Niger* and *Half of a Yellow Sun*

7.2.1 Ethnicity, War and the Quest for National Unity

Ekwuazi (1991) in *Film in Nigeria* wrote, "as of now the Nigerian Civil War may be something of a taboo subject, but a safe prediction is that this will not always be the case. In the course of time, Nigerian filmmakers will break into this hitherto forbidden territory..." (p. 166). Ten years later, the prediction is realised by Nigerians, although later in 2003, Antoine Fuqua directed *Tears of the Sun* (2003), which is an American portrayal of western aid during the Nigerian Civil War. *Battle of Love* is the first Nigerian video film to venture into the memory of the Nigerian Civil War, and for that it occupies an important place in the entire collection of Nigerian video films. *Across the Niger* was made as an after-thought and on the strength of the success of *Battle of Love*, which is a typical practice in the production of Nigerian video films. It is interesting however, that the success of both films was not sufficient to attract other

Nigerian filmmakers to explore the same or similar conflicts in the band wagon attitude characteristic of Nollywood (Amata, personal communication; Novia, 2012). Up to date, the only other Civil War film is *Half of a Yellow Sun* because as Achebe (2012) once pointed out, one has to be bold and courageous, even daring to approach the memory of that 3-year long battle.

There is a growing body of literature on the origins, nature, and dynamics of ethnicity in Nigeria. The films discussed in this section, *Battle of Love*, *Across the Niger* and HOAYS have no other focus than that of flagging the prominent position that ethnic chauvinism occupies in national and political life in Nigeria. What ideological positions do *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* promote or subvert in Nigerian politics and history? The following paragraphs attempt to put the notion of ethnicity in Nigeria in perspective. In addition to that, ethnic chauvinism, the belief that one ethnic group is culturally superior to that of others, and that political leadership must emerge from one's ethnic group regardless of electoral procedures or other dictates of the rule of law, is examined.

In 1967 Nigeria, the political and ethnic rumblings that began in the 1950s and particularly in the mid-1960s with two coup d'états erupted in a violent two and half year war. The tensions were the result of fear of dominance by one ethnic group over the other. I underline the word ethnic because the idea that one is Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa or belongs to any other tribe has indelibly marked the life and culture of the Nigerian people in the political or non-political sphere. Marenin (1987) attempts to 'theorise' political culture by alluding to several distinct features one of which is "the view that competition, manipulation, and self-interest are the essence of politics" (p. 268). Omitted from this idea is the fact that most competitions or manipulations are negotiated on the premise of the contender's ethnic group.

The first Nigerian coup, in Jan 1966, saw the murder of Ahmadu Bello (Northern Nigeria Premiere) and Tafawa Balewa (Nigerian Prime Minister), Hausa civilian men in government. The coup was executed by young Igbo soldiers with Major Chukwuma Nzeogwu as the key plotter. A senior military Igbo officer, Ironsi, took over government. Ironsi was said to have delayed the execution of the coup plotters, and surrounded himself by Igbos through administrative appointments. In the North, the apprehension of the coup plotters was greeted favorably in certain quarters and in

others, with a studied silence. This gradually changed to resentment, culminating in the May 1966 riots throughout the North during which most Easterners residing in the North were attacked and killed. This is what is referred to in most war literature as the pogrom.

On the 26th of July, a counter coup which saw the death of Ironsi was staged. Gen. Yakubu Gowon took over power. This vindictive move by the northerners further deepened the ethnic acrimony in the country and placed Nigeria not on the brink of war but right in the middle of it. For as Colonel Emeka Ojukwu, Head of the Eastern region said, “we are finished with the federation; it is all a question of time” (as cited in Atofarati, 1992). Neither the 9th August 1966 peace conference nor the early 1967 conciliatory meeting of the Supreme Military Council in Ghana could reunite the country. The Igbos had suffered brutality at the hands of the Hausas with the few survivors returning as refugees to the East at the behest of Ojukwu. Officially, the war did not begin until Ojukwu declared the Republic of Biafra on 30th May 1967. The two entities – Federal Military Government of Nigeria and Biafra – spent the month of June preparing for what is today called the Nigerian Civil War (also known as the Biafran War).

It is this political situation that formed the background narratives in *Battle of Love*, its sequel, *Across the Niger*, and HOAYS. The war was portrayed with varying degrees of Igbo representation and less of the Hausas. HOAYS does not portray the Hausas at all. Indeed, it is curious that since 1970 when the war ended, it is the Igbo narratives that have largely occupied literary and artistic attention. In HOAYS, cinematic presence is denied the opposing ethnic group, a move which is as ideological as its portrayal in the first two films. If as Brummett (2010) points out, ideologies are read through arguments, and “arguments make claims about what people should do and assemble reasons, evidence why people should do those things” (p. 99), then HOAYS invites us to see the Hausas and non-Biafrans through bombs, guns and machetes. Through its cinematic optic, they are silenced and repressed. Not a single Nigerian soldier or Hausa is visible in HOAYS unlike in *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* in which brutal northerners are juxtaposed with humane ones; vindictive ones changed to selfless ones, even martyrs. One reason for that may be that the Igbos were the less powerful of the conflicting parties with less sophisticated weapons, fewer soldiers and

trained personnel and without the immediate Western backing that Nigeria had at the time (Achebe, 2012). The three films converge at certain points in their unity of narrating Biafra, yet there is a marked divergence in their ideological leanings.

The Igbos were severely disadvantaged, hence they attracted more sympathy. Another plausible reason is that the narrators are either Igbo or are from a minority ethnic group, Urhobo. The story concept of *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* were Kingsley Ogoro's (producer), even though he hired writers and directors to execute his idea. Another portrayal of the Civil War, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, was originally written by an Igbo. This underscores Okoye's (2007a) point on the narrators projecting their own versions of the story which are often constructed through their peculiar positions, personal circumstances and are unlikely to conform to official narratives. He states that, "when the oppressed people undertake the reconstruction of their past, the writing of their history, they contest the official versions by presenting another perspective, one which is also inevitably discursive and ideological" (p. 3).

Thus HOAYS, set in Calabar and London, on an \$8m budget (£5.1m) differs in its own representation of the war because unlike Ogoro, Bandele (director) does not envision a new or better Nigeria. Nationalist sentiments are not within his frame of narration. In fact, the film seems to uphold an alternative nationalism to "One Nigeria", one which seems to challenge the disruption of Ojukwu's formation of an independent Biafra. Odenigbo's character embodies this, which is reflected in his emphatic comments: "my point is that the only authentic identity for an African is his tribe. I am a Nigerian because the whiteman created Nigeria and gave me that identity...but I was Igbo before the whiteman came" (HOAYS 24:14). Furthermore, he disagrees loudly with Adeabyo when she says that secession is not the option to security. Chukwuma Okoye (2007a) submits that "historical texts are discursive and fundamentally ideological for they are positioned renderings intended to align the reader with or against other contesting positions. These texts thus defend the position of their producers but marginalize those of others" (p. 3). HOAYS marginalises voices like Adebayo's. Bandele denies viewers a northern version of the war by adopting a predominantly Igbo narrative to tell the story of marginality which does not lead to a new or better Nigeria. Why should it? One may ask. Okoye provides an answer, because its occupants have not always consented to "staying together or pulling apart. When the

oppressed people undertake the reconstruction of their past, the writing of their history, they contest the official versions by presenting another perspective, one which is also inevitably discursive and ideological.” (p. 3). This is also corroborated by Lacey (2009) who states that “[texts] suggest rhetorically that they are offering a window on the world” (p. 104), whereas their values are hidden beneath the images, dialogues and gestures.

Conversely, *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* clearly had an agenda for unity and reconciliation with the ‘One Nigeria’ mantra they adopted and used frequently while the films lasted. The Hausa and Igbo couple (protagonists) must overcome the ethnic prejudices of their respective families in order to get through the war as Prince Dubem (the Igbo soldier) had to flee the north, leaving his wife Rekia, (Hausa) behind to wait for his return (whenever that would be) and to the romantic advances of a rival lover, Bako (a Hausa soldier). It must be recalled that *One Nigeria* was the title of a documentary made in 1969 by Ola Balogun, one of the earliest Nigerian filmmakers. This unification agenda subverted ethnic chauvinism to promote the ideal that marital and familial relations, and by extension, national life were superior to ethnic differences.

The two lovers Dubem and Rekia symbolise the warring factions of the country – Igbo and Hausa – who must unite for a new and stronger Nigeria to emerge in Ogoro’s vision. Indeed the fruit of the inter-ethnic marriage is multiple deaths including Dubem’s and his uncle’s but not before Dubem’s son is born from his Hausa wife. It is through the child’s grandfather (the king of the village) that the filmmaker’s meaning is intensely realised. He apologises to Dubem who, after listening to his father’s apology finally dies by the bullet from a kinsman. It was a particularly emotional scene where the camera pans the landscape from Dubem dead on the floor, to his wife also on the floor where she was delivered of her baby, to the lady formerly groomed to marry the prince who now cuddles the child of the woman she hated and to the king. This construction of lovers fleeing from hateful murderers in the north at the outbreak of war signifies the pursuit of a stable and illusory Nigeria. The pursuit has many losses yet it had to be undertaken if a new Nigeria, as elusive as it appears to be is to emerge. Writing on nationhood, Okoye (2007a), notes that it is “an elusive ideal perennially imagined and pursued in spite of, or perhaps even because of the impossibility of its

realization” (p. 2). The argument in the films is clear at times and at other times, somewhat muddy.

In *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, the Hausa northerners are positioned as the hateful, barbaric insurgents who charge into people’s homes and charge out with blood-stained machetes. Methodically and obdurately, they murdered innocent Igbo civilians regardless of the times and spaces of encountering them – at homes or in the streets. This depiction, while not appearing gruesome on the screen signals the 1966 massacre of the Igbos in northern Nigeria. In fact, one of the killings is done off-screen; only the sound of a gun-shot is heard. But the filmmaker is intent on a united Nigeria. Therefore, he strains to de-emphasise the killings by providing what he calls “*a balanced picture*” (K. Ogoro, personal communication, August 29, 2013) at the end of the film. At the end of *Battle of Love*, a Hausa man, Bako, who had earlier ordered the torture of Dubem, now assists the couple’s (Dubem and his wife) escape. Ogoro was by that, alluding to the idea that although the northern collective spearheaded the Igbo massacre, which led to the war, there were still a few humane ones who knew how to rise above regional and ethnic grievances. The northerners were portrayed as malicious and sympathetic at the same time, but the same can hardly be said of the Igbos who were cinematically positioned as perpetrators of internal strife, within their own communities.

7.2.2 Intra-ethnic Conflict

The supremacy of the Igbos argued above is turned on its head in the intra-ethnic conflicts portrayed in the films. Such conflicts depicted in *Across the Niger* are not of the same scale as the well-known known ones in Nigeria such as the Aguleri/Umuleri, Tiv/Jukun or Ife/Modakeke. It was neither a battle for land, territory or other natural resources. It was the result of inordinate greed and the desire for political favours. It was not ethnic chauvinism but another manifestation of Marenin’s (1987) political culture: the pursuit of self-interests.

In spite of Ogoro’s idea of a balanced picture, it cannot be said that the Igbos were depicted equally because of the intra-ethnic conflict sown into the narrative fabric. Whereas the Hausas are at war with people from a different ethnic group, the Igbos are

not only at war with the Hausas, but also among themselves, with their kinsmen. Although the filmmaker tries to portray the easterners in the full scale of their strengths and weaknesses, the concept of treachery introduced on eastern soil and among family members at war times reflects an alternative reading of the Igbos during the war period. For it turns the narrative into an unintended castigation of the Igbos, one which Ojukwu, the secessionist leader had to contend with. A member of the Igbo king's cabinet provides intelligence to Hausa soldiers who are bent on decimating the Igbos. The same man sends his niece unsuccessfully to seduce the prince so that her entry into the royal family – by marriage or contrived pregnancy – will ensure a dignified position for him in future. It is this same man's bullet which was aimed at Rekia, Dubem's Hausa wife, that accidentally kills Dubem, the prince. In two scenes before this catastrophic scene, and following his family's rejection of his Hausa wife, Dubem foreshadows this intra-ethnic conflict when he said in Igbo, "after fighting in the war front, do I return home to continue fighting?" A close-up of Dubem reveals facial displeasure not associated with the character while on 'enemy' grounds in the north. What the filmmaker effectively constructs is a people at war with themselves and with their neighbours thus instituting a culture of fear and suspicion among kinsmen. This mildly challenges Marenin's (1987) political culture, which he notes reflects "a strong commitment to communal norms and affiliations" (p. 268).

The fear of 'ethnic' domination that pervaded Nigeria in the 1960s parallels Odenigbo's mother's fear in *HOAYS*, thus leading to an attack against Olanna at their first meeting. That attack was not a private tirade between Mama and Olanna alone. It was done in the presence of two other Igbos – Amala and Ugwu – in a shot/reverse shot that polarised the educated and the illiterate, the traditional and the modern, typical of Nollywood narrative conventions. With Ugwu and Amala behind Mama as she lambastes Olanna, the world of the illiterate seems to evoke the 1960 fear of domination, this time by an educated 'stranger'. The fact of Olanna's ethnic identity is in fact of no consequence at this point in the narrative. What matters is that her boldness in moving in with her lover, an unheard of practice in 1960 Nigeria, must be strongly resisted. Mama's struggle for power over Odenigbo, then, is everything and is pursued by every means (Claude Ake in Maier, 2000: xv), particularly her verbal strength and her status as mother in Odenigbo's house.

7.3 Film 4: *Anini*

7.3.1 Ideological Positions in *Anini*: The Environment vs. the Individual

“The Anini story is both street and political theatre: a small man challenging the power of the state and its corrupt minions, and succeeding. That Anini threw some of his gains to the crowd makes the play even more real, as if the actor and the observer merge in the flutter of Naira notes across the proscenium's edge” (Marenin 1987: 270). The point omitted by Marenin here is that it is not a small unaided man that challenges the government, rather it is a small man empowered by the agency of paramilitary forces and the political elite. This is an important consideration as it also zooms in on the filmmaker's agenda.

Anini's life in the city is complicated by the company he keeps not by the decisions he makes. Such company are not decided on by the protagonist; he finds himself among them. The argument put forward by the filmmakers is that it is not Anini's fault, but rather his environment, the Nigerian system and factor that corrupt him. His opening address while on a hospital bed is a disclaimer, “I did not plan to steal for one day”, a pronouncement which seems to extenuate his vices and position him as a victim of a debilitating society. Even Anini's attorney at the end of the film while addressing the judge on his client's behalf says that “Anini was acting under divine obedience and therefore without complete free will”. Such deterministic portrayal betrays a common trait in the Nigerian socio-political sphere in which an external factor is often held to be responsible for the social and political ordering of the society rather than internal personal traits. An evidence of this is found in Okwudiba Nnoli's (1980) argument in *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* in which he states that “in Nigeria, the colonial urban setting constitutes the cradle of contemporary ethnicity” (p. 35). He goes on to argue that the British are responsible for Nigeria's socio-political status today.

Twenty years after the official exit of British colonial rule, during which time Nigeria had six indigenous Heads of State and Presidents, ethnicity was still referred to as an instrument of colonial governments in the negative sense. Even if the colonial legacy of ethnicity was detrimental to the political ordering of the state, six successive governments are sufficient to undo the trappings of ethnic chauvinism. Furthermore, Onyeozili (2005) reported that “imperial policing orientations and preoccupations have

been maintained and strengthened by postcolonial governments in Nigeria” (p. 36), without providing adequate reasons for the decisions to maintain and strengthen the colonial practice. He goes on to suggest that the retention of colonial practices might be responsible for the anomalies encountered in state apparatuses such as the police. These positions are indeed problematic because they do not provide evidence for such claims, but they do buttress my point on the Nigerian tendency to hold external factors accountable for personal or collective inadequacies.

There is a theme of ‘friendship’ running through the entire narrative, which lends credence to the argument that in *Anini*, the individual is disempowered. Anini is taken to Benin from his home town by a friend, Marcus; he acquaints himself with Amos at his first workplace. Amos later becomes the friend that initiates him into robbery. During a police raid in a hide-out for gangs, Anini gets arrested and Amos disappears. While in prison, he is bullied into becoming friends with Kingsley Eweka’s gang on the strength of his driving skills which he reveals upon interrogation by Eweka himself; he also becomes friends with George Iyamu, the police officer, who double-crosses him. Each friendship leads him to the next one. When he is caught by the police, he is in the company of a lady friend. Even the last two important scenes in the film, Anini is accompanied by his gang and Iyamu. Similarly, the friends who introduced him to the good life also led him to petty malpractices, and later, to organised crime. Through these friends, the filmmaker subtly apportions the blame of Anini’s descent into crime to his friends – they make him ‘prosper’ financially while at the same time, they place him at loggerheads with his society and the state. Barber’s (1987) comment on the extent on meaning in texts is illuminating: “Texts generate surplus meanings that go beyond and may subvert, the purported intentions of the work. Thus, never wholly under the artist’s control, they have the capacity to pick up subterranean currents of thought that society itself may be unaware of” (p. 4)

According to Marenin (1987), it was clear that “there was little about Anini or his acts which set him apart from the myriads of other armed robbers and gangs which operate in Nigeria, seemingly without much hindrance from the police” (p. 261). Anini was an ordinary citizen on whom the folk-hero status was imposed. He was framed by the media as an ‘outlaw’, ‘The Law’, ‘the magician’ (Marenin, 1987). From the argument above, and drawing from Marenin’s observation, Anini did not solely

challenge the state and the government and succeed. He was ‘empowered’ to do so by the corrupt police officers who fed him weapons and security intelligence, and this is exactly the position reflected in the film because as Lacey (2009) remarks, “texts conceal their values in order to convey an argument without appearing to do so” (p. 104). Although the film does not show this, Anini and his gang revealed after their arrest that Iyamu had provided them with information that facilitated their bank robbery. Olurode (2008) in *The Story of Anini* points out that “Iyamu did supply Anini with both information and ammunition – the two most vital resources in the world of crime and ironically also in the world of crime detection and prevention” (p. 75). In fact, there is sufficient evidence to discredit his supposed magical powers (Marenin, 1987; Olurode, 2008) since the purported powers failed after Iyamu was arrested and kept out of circulation, and could therefore not feed Anini more information.

The point here is that the individual is disempowered in *Anini* through the denial of his free will and the accentuation of environmental/external factors (Lacey’s concealed values). Throughout the film, he initiates actions that are only reactionary in intent. Things happened to him; he did not make anything happen. Arguably, his lack of education may have stripped him of initiative but the supermarket he owned in another city, Ibadan, does seem to contradict the idea of his lack of initiative. Even the decision to settle scores with the police after his friend and mentor was killed was motivated by Iyamu’s (the police officer) treachery. It was a vengeful decision borne out of anger and frustration. To crystallise the point on Anini’s re-actions, the film director responded to his vision in telling the story of Anini thus: “*we wanted to tell a story about a character that existed and to see this character from the challenges of his environment and to see why he became who he became*” (F. Amata, personal communication, February 16, 2012).

7.3.2 The Politics of Policing Crime in a Post-colonial State

The Police in Nigeria has never been regarded with much respect (Onyeozili 2005; Hills 2008). Even the slogans conspicuously displayed in various police stations, ‘The police is your friend’, has failed to attract popular goodwill towards this group of law-enforcement agents. During Nigeria’s Second Republic (1979-1983), the size of the

police force was increased from 10,000 to 100,000 with a consequent growth in staff, weapons and equipment expenditure (Falola and Heaton, 2008). As at 2008, Hills (2008) observed that the number had grown to 325,000 thus enabling the government to employ the police in curbing opposition, often through violence. In October 1986, the Police Force was restructured under General IB Badamosi's administration to have 5 directorate arms namely operations, criminal investigations, logistics, supplies and training (Enwefah, 2012) thus justifying the increase in expenditure. It was in December that year that Lawrence Anini was arrested by the police, in a way restoring public confidence in the police force. Amata's film does not leave out the moment of the arrest thereby delivering what arguably is a balanced portrayal of the Anini story and the police force.

Anini was produced in 2005 when the Inspector General of Police (IG), Mustafa Balogun, under President Obasanjo, was dismissed from office to face charges on corruption, electoral violence and money laundering. Upon Balogun's dismissal, Sunday Ehindero took over the affairs of the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) from January 2005 until 2007 when Obasanjo's tenure ended. As soon as Ehindero stepped in, he began large-scale police reforms which were mainly supported and approved by Obasanjo who, as Hills (2008) points out in her broad review of the police in 2005, gave heed to popular demands for police reforms. Therefore, the film *Anini* was greeted with open arms since it was a tacit acquiescence to the much needed police reforms in contemporary Nigeria.

Hills (2008) observed that policing Nigeria is an arduous task, often compounded by high urbanisation rates and teeming unemployed youths when compared to the 325,000 policemen serving a population of 150M. But the more important issues that render policing somewhat nightmarish are "insufficient funding, lack of resources and training, poor working conditions and low pay" (Hills, 2008: 218). To demonstrate this, Hills compares the offices of the police station in Garki, a suburb of Abuja, the capital city, to the affluent government office spaces not too far from the police station. There is a stark contrast between the spaces which screams of inequality and imposes psychological torture on the police officers who are on the lowest rungs of the ladder. The scenario is one of privilege versus deprivation; the privileged positions are to be coveted, but only if police officers act violently or dishonestly (Hills, 2008).

“Corruption is endemic at every level, with the police regularly heading Transparency International's list of the most corrupt institutions in the country” writes Hills (2008: 219), a position which Onyeozili (2005) corroborates. In the light of these, *Anini* is a response to why and how crime thrives in post-colonial Nigeria. It is a deep assessment and commentary on the status quo which offers viewers avenues for understanding the dynamics of policing crime in Nigeria not just in 2005 but nearly ten years down the line. The filmmakers projected salient commentaries on the political order of the Nigerian state through the lens of *Anini*. I argue that *Anini* brings to the fore some of the most debilitating effects and costs of governance to the Nigerian people – when the supposed protector becomes the tormentor (Mbembe 1997, 2002). Inter-state travel within Nigeria in private automobiles is slowed down due to roadblocks mounted by policemen. This conforms to Hills’ (2008) argument that police corruption “ranges from the constable who extorts ₦20 (8p) from motorists at checkpoints – and most drivers arrive at checkpoints with ₦20 in their hand – to the senior officers who take their subordinates' allowances” (p. 219). The sums of money extorted from innocent travellers are often higher than ₦20, and in most cases dependent on the negotiation skills of the traveller. An omission by Hills, however, is that popular wisdom attributes these extortions to the poor salaries of the policemen, and to allow an exercise of power by the agents of the state who otherwise find no legitimate means of asserting their presence.

An understanding of this practice therefore is necessary to shed light on the nature of police extortions from armed robbers. *Anini* admits viewers into the negotiating space between robbers and policemen. The film has a lot to say about the operations of the NPF in 1986 when the film was set, and today, twenty eight years after *Anini*’s execution. In a poignant scene in which Anini laments his distressing encounters with the police to his girlfriend, the dynamics of ‘policing’ crime are summed thus:

Look o, the same police wey dey give us information,

Na the same police wey dey give us gun.

Na the same police wey dey give us ammunition

And na the same police wey dey harass us.

And if we no settle police

Na im be say police catch armed robber

In other words, armed robbers are apprehended only when there is no transfer of money or when one of the robbers threatens to undermine the directives received from their police-informant. That was the case of Dis-is-me (Segun Arinze) whose refusal to suspend robbery operations due to pressure on ASP George brought about his murder by the latter. Undoubtedly, this submission, while not representing the totality of the position of the NPF, does underscore the complicity of some police officers in criminal operations.

After the ₦50,000 wey I give ASP George,

dey still kill Kingsley and Kele...no, no, police, police, police, wetin! eh

For this town, no be for this town?

I go show all the police wey dey this town na me be Lawrence Nomayagbon Anini.

I go use their blood paint wall...

Further, when innocent people report crimes to the police station, the policemen are known to alter such cases to make the complaints look dubious, often to protect powerful interests. Onyeozili (2005) aptly describes this phenomenon together with other factors that militate against the preservation of law and order by the police. Among such factors, he highlights god-fatherism, nepotism and ethnicity as well as other questionable practices associated with the police (pp. 40-44). While other official institutions in Nigeria may and can be accused of god-fatherism and questionable practices in varying degrees, its perpetuation by the Police Force reveals an alarming situation in which the sacredness of lives and property is severely threatened by its constitutional protectors. It is this reason that results in a near absolute lack of confidence in the police, a point made by Onyeozili, Hills and other social justice researchers.

More recently, the politics of policing crime has taken other dimensions in Nigeria. Another indication of god-fatherism and political culture in operation is that the terrorist group, Boko Haram, has defied eradication because of alleged links with the

political elite. Some efforts by the NPF and the Nigerian army have proved abortive owing to perceived political interests by the wealthy class of politicians. James Forest, in his lucid report on Boko Haram, confirms links between the Islamic sect and elitist northerners:

The group's financing has also been allegedly linked to specific individuals with power and access to resources. Given the extensive system of patronage in Nigeria, this should come as no surprise. Several of these individuals have been arrested, but some were killed before any judicial process could determine their guilt or innocence. For example, on 31 July 2009 Alhaji Buji Foyi – former Borno State Commissioner for Religious Affairs – was arrested and taken to Police Headquarters in Maiduguri, where he was publicly executed on 31 July 2009...(Forest, 2012: 71)

This sort of cronyism sticks out in the film, *Anini*, like a sore thumb. Forest provides considerable details of other similar support from political and economic support that further sheds light on the *Anini* story. This exposes the full picture of the 1986 scenario given that Kingsley Eweka (Baba K in the film) was the son of the Benin Monarch at that time, although it was pointed out by Henry Legemah that the royal family had no direct involvement in the armed robbery operations. Legemah added, “*there was no controversy whatsoever; yes, Kingsley was royalty but he was a Judah and that was all*” (H. Legemah, personal communication, May 29, 2014)

According to Hills (2008: 223), “the starting point for any discussion of policing in Nigeria is that the Nigeria Police’s primary task is regime representation and regulation, rather than serving the public as such.” This is in consonance with the point on inequality which this section makes, and which is supported by Marenin’s (1987) political culture as “alienation from the state and society in general” (p. 268). The level of economic inequality and political class dominance in Nigeria is high. It is aggravated by government executives who use public funds to disproportionate private gains. In the film, the police commissioner shot by *Anini*’s gang is flown abroad for treatment while hundreds of others attacked and maimed by the same gang are left to receive medical treatment in poorly-equipped hospital facilities and sometimes, at the hands of unpaid physicians. In fact, the police became more determined in the plot to unravel the mystery of *Anini*’s operations after the “embarrassment” of shooting the commissioner. Further, it was also only when Gen. Badamosi, the Head of State, queried the Police IG

on Anini's whereabouts (Marenin, 1987) that search efforts were intensified. Just as the Nigeria Police is undeniably accountable to the political elite, so are other state apparatuses such as the Censors Board and other film agencies.

7.3.3 Probing the Past against the Present Realities

Owing to the recent practices of the National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) in which films that satirise the government or its agencies are prohibited from exhibition, the filmmakers have had to adopt alternative ways of representing the political past. The argument here is that *Anini* is a productive way of reconstructing the past to make social and political commentary without drawing the ire of the Censors Board given the on-going censorship mechanism. The filmmaker focuses on a villain's attempt at disrupting the orderly co-existence of citizens while indicting the police in its complicity. All wrong doers are exposed even if they are not prosecuted. Henry Legemah, the film producer, received a letter of commendation from the Censor's Board after it received the application for classifying the film. Would the Board have commended him if he had focused solely on and victimised the police? Would it, if he dwelt only on Gen. Badamosi or the Bendel State Administrator? That is to be seriously doubted. In an atmosphere of stiff opposition to any idea of talking to or about the government, *Anini* offers an alternative in the way described by Barber (1987). Other Nollywood films especially the ones discussed in this work did not receive a similar commendatory message from the Censors Board.

Censorship has also been understood in terms of its utility as some filmmakers are kept on their toes, thus making them answerable to the censorship officials and their audiences for the images and sounds they project. This idea, espoused by Rajinder Dudrah and Jigna Desai (2008), implies that censorship needs not always be conceived as a "repression, negation and erasure" of creativity; but rather, as a productive tension between state power and indigenous creativity (p. 6). This is even more pronounced now that it is more fashionable to speak more of classification rather than censorship. This means that filmmakers must take cognisance of such current realities when negotiating the past.

7.4 Film 5: *Oil Village*

7.4.1 Filming the Saro-Wiwa Story: A tip of the Iceberg?

What *Oil Village* tells viewers about the most important natural resource of the most populous African country is reminiscent of Barber's (1987) warning that the "genres billed as entertainment usually talk about matters of deep interest and concern to the people who produce and consume them" (p. 2). It is a "popular reaction to the petro-naira" to borrow the title of Barber's (1997a: 91) essay on the subject. The film deals with the issues surrounding the politics of crude oil in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, and all of the vocabulary and ideological discourse about the region: wealth, revenue, poverty, marginalisation, deprivation, corruption, and pollution.

In 1979, Eddie Ugbomah made a film on oil and the delta titled *Oil Doom*. From the synopsis the filmmaker provided me with after an interview with him, "the film is the story of oil Nigeria (sic) where the owners of the land are killed and denied their birthright" (E. Ugboma, personal communication, August 2014). The film was inspired by the early 1970s oil boom in Nigeria, which was followed by gross mismanagement. Barber (1997a) argues that oil wealth was not the result of hard work or merit, but was a feature of commercial capitalism that enriched government officials and middlemen from the private sector. Graham Furniss articulated the point carefully:

With the major rise in world oil prices in 1973, Nigeria began a decade of unparalleled expansion. Huge amounts of hard currency oil revenues were accruing daily to the central government coffers. Bureaucracies at national, state and local level burgeoned and money was easily to be made through government contracts (Furniss, 1996: 4)

With the increase in government revenue came an "enormous rise in state expenditure" (Falola and Heaton, 2008), which led Ugboma to predict through his film, that if the expenditure remained unchecked, the boom was sure to cascade to a doom. Naturally, he was criticised severely in different quarters for making such "prophetic and problematic" statements (E. Ugboma, personal communication, August 24, 2014). Such criticisms awaited Sam Onwuka and Kalu Anya, who like Ugboma were critical of the government and the multinational oil companies for their conspiracy against the Niger Delta indigenes.

Oil Village was inspired by the well-known and widely-documented narrative of the last years of the environmental rights activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa. In Nigeria's petroleum-dominated economy in the 1990s, the activities of the oil companies, notably Shell, backed by the government often led to ecological hazards. A number of Nigerians, especially Saro-Wiwa could not stand unconcerned at the land and water pollution caused by Shell. His protest to preserve the lives and land of the Ogoni (a small community in Rivers State of Nigeria) people from further destruction led to his conviction and death by hanging in 1995 by Gen. Abacha, who authorised and hand-picked a tribunal for that purpose. The film fictionalises a tiny bit of these events to enable viewers create a vision of the fate of opposition voices in the Abacha administration.

The film's portrayal of Saro-Wiwa is marginal, reserving only the second half of the story for the figure of the Ogoni activist. Two reasons for that are proffered. First, the filmmaker's budget was restrictive. At the time the film was made, film budgets were below ₦1m (£4,000). Second, research on a full Saro-Wiwa film would have demanded more time and skills which were not common in 2001 when the film was made. Indeed, in the first part of the film, nothing remotely approximates Saro-Wiwa. Kalu Anya, director, reported that they had the environmental activist in mind but were wary of mixed reactions and especially the Censors Board so they didn't want to give away the focus at the beginning. Much more happened to Wiwa that Kalu and Onwuka do not let viewers see. "These...gaps, are equally significant because they represent the silences, the things the text cannot say, thus revealing to the critical reader the limits of a particular ideological position" (Barber 1997a: 92).

Like many Nollywood films dealing with real events and people, *Oil Village* is a tip of the iceberg because the full scale of the occurrences in the Delta region is not transmitted in the film. Infact, it falls far short of the realities. But the film is useful in showing up the capitalist ideals of private wealth at all costs, whether it be legitimately acquired or not. It is in fact the ruling class that has total control of the material resources and as depicted in the film, circulates the resources among very few hands, who fail to see the rationale in engaging in productive work when greasing the wheels of the export-import economy is so often much more lucrative (Barber, 1997a: 93). The

majority are dispossessed of land and the means of making any living (Barber, 1997a; Furniss, 1996).

As a tip of the iceberg, *Oil Village* problematises Brian Larkin's (2008) "aesthetics of outrage" in which he claims that Nollywood films are "based on continual shocks that transgress religious and social norms and are designed to provoke and affront the audience" (p. 184). It is ironical that, contrary to Larkin, outrageous events – such as 100,000 people's means of livelihood being wiped out within days due to massive oil spillage – are downplayed and portrayed only through dialogic exchanges as in *Oil Village*. One filmmaker provides an explanation for the displacement of the "aesthetics of outrage", "*These actions which are meant to sensitize the viewers are difficult to film because of financial constraints and security reasons*" (F. Okoro, personal communication, April 6, 2013), and also possibly because the Nigerian audience is already familiar, through local and foreign documentaries and other media, with the images of devastation common in the Niger Delta.

In another sense, Larkin's (2008) aesthetics of outrage is uprooted from the reaction shot and embedded in the dialogue, which mirror their capitalist sentiments. That personal wealth acquisition is the prerogative of the 'community elites' is evidenced in their language and their conception of leadership. The moral transgressions and excesses which Larkin writes of are located in the actors' conversations, in the rhetoric of dialogue and soliloquy. Granted that *Oil Village* is a tip of the iceberg in comparison to the Saro-Wiwa story, it is difficult to assert Larkin's position regarding this film and others discussed in this research. Indeed all of them present the crux of the history and period they enact through dialogue rather than through shots that provoke "bodily reactions of revulsion" (Larkin 2008: 190). But they retain Larkin's moral and social aberrations through their visions of modernity. In this sense, I argue that Larkin's analytical position is useful to the extent that it employs boundaries and categories of films rather than blanketing all southern Nigerian films as embodiments and elicitors of outrage.

But the dialogue here is different from that analysed by Barber since it carries with it images that promote the capitalist agenda and images that inscribe themselves as sites of tension and dissonance. *Oil Village* subverts the first and promotes the second. In the first, chiefs drive cars, hire and fire employees, give £20,000 (₦5m) gifts, and are

the only ones capable of speaking the white man's language. In the second, a group of young men are transformed into resistance fighters, crusaders of justice and even distribution of resources.

7.4.2 The Filmmaker's Lament of Delta Spills, Inequality and Injustice

The role of the filmmaker and what ideology he promotes or subverts is a function of his own background and contexts of production. Ideology is also conveyed unconsciously. A good number of the films portraying the Niger Delta are made by Igbos or ethnic minority filmmakers as pointed out by Agina (2013). These groups of people feel obligated to tell the stories that the government at federal, state or local levels fail to tell. Most of the narratives are spawned through the voices of displeased people who want a greater participation in the distribution of income generated from crude oil taken out of their plots of land.

In addition to lamenting the oil spills, Sam Onwuka in *Oil Village* explores the twin concepts of inequality and injustice, which are the most important elements that the film invites viewers to consider. Inequality is perpetuated by the chiefs of the Bayama Community Development Committee (BDC) who, because of their privileged position in the royal cabinet, control the funds allocated to the community for its multifarious development projects. The chiefs sit at a 'meeting' to distribute the cash among themselves. When Osaro, the voice of conscience is presented with his, he cries, "if I who has (sic) no oil well get ₦50m (£179,000), what about those who own the oil wells?" The BDC executives reprimand him immediately. Later, they try unsuccessfully to kill Osaro. The film continues with the chiefs meeting regularly to share more spoils and discuss no development projects. At one meeting, they plan to scuttle the federal government's intervention in the distribution of funds for the youth projects. The youths are by now frustrated. It is not long before they take to armed struggle and resistance.

The plots of land desired by the oil companies are valued and their owners are to present themselves to the BDC to claim the equivalent in cash. These land owners are offered incredibly less sums of money. For instance the man who is owed ₦1m (£4,000) is offered ₦10,000 (£36), - one-hundredth of the total. It is not only the land owners who are incensed by this conduct. The entire youth forum is supportive of those

dispossessed of their property, not by the oil companies, but by the chiefs purportedly representing them. A woman exclaims, “~~₦~~5m (£17,900) cannot restore the life of my husband who died of “heart attack when his cocoa and banana plantations were taken away from him.” Again, the aesthetics of outrage is demonstrated through words. One who is owed ~~₦~~50m (£179,000) is offered ~~₦~~50,000 (£179) while the fictitious names and persons organised by the chiefs are paid the largest sums of money, ~~₦~~100m (£358,000) and ~~₦~~80m (£286,000), under the watch of the government official. Such is the response of the government both in the past and in present times. It often makes a move to redress the grievances of the people, but does not see the process through. Hence, the government staff is inert; no critical investigations of the payments and non-payments are made. In two scenes, he sits, watches, listens and does exactly what the Bayama Development Chiefs ask him to do. In fact, one of the community youths calls him “a goat because the whole illicit transaction was committed under his nose and he could not see it.” It is this sort of deprivation and injustice that largely accounts for militancy in the Niger Delta regions. The film projects a class struggle wherein the dominance of the upper class is framed as dubious, undemocratic and pretentious, all of which are the result of oil spillage and their reactions to it.

7.4.3 Explaining Violence and Militancy in the Delta

Maier’s (2000) observation on power and violence is illuminating. In Nigeria, everyone is ‘power-thirsty’. They want to jump queues, get through the traffic before anyone else, and be rewarded financially for little or no favours at all. Hence Maier’s understanding of the people and government of the country is summarised thus: “stake a claim over a piece of territory, a government office, or an oil field and use your authority to obtain financial reward” (p. 40). There could not be a more apt description of the Niger Delta scenario. A common feature of the Delta region is one fraught with physical, environmental and psychological violence caused by political domination and marginalisation. Incessant pleas by the local inhabitants of Bayama in *Oil Village* fell on evidently deaf ears. Indigenes are left without an option but to take up arms in order to gain attention. The government responds with counter attacks and the restiveness of the mostly unemployed youths is fuelled. In other protest films of the Niger Delta genre, the inhabitants kidnap oil workers to continually make themselves heard (Agina, 2013).

An exchange of fire between Bayama youths and the oil workers leads to the death of three Bayama youths. Upon assembling the corpses in the palace before the king and chiefs, they are told to go and bury the dead while inaudibly adding ‘so that we can continue to feed off you’. In the next scene, the protesters donned militants’ garb, brandished leaves, machetes, and had red pieces of cloth tied around their heads, thus heralding their readiness for armed struggle. The Niger Deltans live in squalor and not too far away from them, there are mansions and luxury facilities built on their natural resources. Their grievance is aggravated by government efforts to silence their initially-peaceful protests. *Oil Village* clearly traces, through peaceful negotiations to vengeful killings, the paths that lead to militancy. Three deaths lead to another in the opponent’s camp and even the chiefs cannot stop the spiralling effects nor can they remain untouched for much longer periods. Ogundiya (2011) provides a clear outline of the issues of neglect that lead to militancy in the oil-producing regions and fuel the violence therein. Soon, the chiefs are the target of the now-vicious youth group. The result of their death is the tribunal that claims the lives of the protesters by hanging.

“Because national revenues...were distributed on the basis of population and not according to where they came from, minorities in the delta had little to show for the riches literally gushing from their land” (Maier 2000: 54). *Oil Village* thus argues that in this context, the situation in the delta is not the result of a single governmental/multinational (or non-governmental) policy such as revenue allocation or misconduct. It is an upper class domination and struggle for the power –even through violence – once possessed by colonial rule (Mbembe, 2002). The film’s optic navigates through numerous historical factors such as financial impropriety, inordinate greed and government inertia, to signal past and present marginalisation in the region and thus echoes what Barber (1987, 2014) called the voices of those who are denied access to official channels of communication. Such minorities did not only own the land from which oil was extracted, they also had their livelihoods tied to it. As fishermen and farmers, they depended on the continued fertility of the river and soil to eke out a living. But with the violent dispossession of their land, the marginalised and aggrieved indigenes resort to armed struggle, which makes the film a political exposé on the roots of militancy in the affected region.

7.5 Film 6: *Stubborn Grasshopper*

7.5.1 The Metaphor of the Grasshopper & 'Wahala' in Onwuka's Artistic Vision

That Nigerians' economic problems – past and present – were caused by the military (Ajayi, 2007) is one of many arguments espoused in *Stubborn Grasshopper*. Directed by Simi Opeoluwa and produced by Sam Onwuka, *Stubborn Grasshopper* is a 2001 portrayal of the private life ('unofficial history'), and last years of the late Gen. Sanni Abacha (Sep. 20, 1943 – Jun. 8, 1998), former military Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in Nigeria (Nov. 17, 1993 – Jun 8, 1998). The film begins with a slim portrayal of the 1993 presidential elections, and voting. Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (Gen. Badmas, in the film) and Abacha's predecessor is seen in a low angle shot walking to the polling both to vote. As he strides along, the ballot boxes with 'WEC – *Wahala* Electoral Commission' boldly printed on them are visible.

To equate Abacha to a grasshopper, and Nigeria to the Republic of *Wahala* – as portrayed in the film – are at once instructive and satirical. Sam Onwuka, alludes to an Igbo proverb that reads: *ukpana ukpoko gburu, nti chiri ya*, that is, 'the grasshopper killed by a train is a deaf one'. The Igbos used the proverb to refer to various kinds of obstinacy. A moving train is said to 'warn' the living creatures on its tracks before approaching them. Therefore any creature caught on the rail must either be deaf or stubborn; whatever the case, it gets killed. For Onwuka, it is the obduracy demonstrated by military heads of state that plunged Nigeria into its numerous political problems '*wahala*', and consequently, they too must face their demise. *Wahala* is both the Yoruba and pidgin for a confused state of problematic events. Official and unofficial versions of Nigeria's political past are interwoven in this narrative to provide a glimpse of the country's *wahalas* – specifically the authoritarian ideology on which the military based their leadership – and what the filmmaker called the "truth of the Nigerian situation" (S. Onwuka, personal communication, October 16, 2013).

Onwuka's metaphors are instructive and original. Like the grasshopper, Alba knew when to leap away from trouble so much so that only an internal force – the machination of his cronies in the film – is able to bring him down. Joseph Obi's analysis of Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* is useful to this analysis. Of the novel, Obi writes that it uses characters of various walks "to undermine a brutal and corrupt regime headed by

an alliance of military men and civilians. Their main strategy is the surreptitious reeducation and politicization of the commonfolk...”(Obi, 1994: 407). The film’s metaphoric construction of Nigeria tells of dictatorship all over Africa by employing the qualities of the insect. Voracious, active, quick in flight and migratory, grasshoppers are practically insatiable and are able to eat up to 16 times daily. This parallels Abacha’s (Alba) rapacious appetite for wealth, power and debauchery, his speed in identifying and exterminating opposition, and his reluctance to be dissuaded from his political ascent even by former military heads of state (Egya, 2011; Maier 2000; Soyinka 1996; Obi 1994).

Abacha’s obstinacy and authoritarian outlook is depicted in several scenes in the film: when he insists on being the next Head of State after Gen. Badmas in spite of the latter’s dissuasive pleas. It is important to note that Abacha, and in fact the military, did not have any business ruling the country in 1993 because elections had been held and the president elect had been announced. His ambition led him to scuttle the on-going democratic process in order to occupy the Aso Rock Villa (the Nigerian Presidential Complex). He is repeatedly framed as an intolerant and fearless man particularly after a pronouncement, when he puts on dark sunglasses and stares into the camera in a close-up. Next, when there were riots on the streets due to the annulment of the election, he remains adamant. His response to his predecessor was that “there would always be casualties for every rise to power.” Later, when his economic policies caused a nationwide fuel scarcity, he rejected the reform proposals from his advisers and instead fired and murdered some of them. So, Onwuka’s idiomatic description was not only fitting, but was also illuminating in characterising the Nigeria that the military envisioned.

7.5.2 Babangida, Abacha and the Rhetoric of Democracy in *Stubborn Grasshopper*

The military never took their eyes off political power or governance. “The focus on superficial dimensions of liberalisation overshadowed a more sinister programme that involved dismantling institutions of civil society, entrenching arbitrary rule, and totally militarising the political landscape” (Ihonvbere, 1996: 198). The transition to civilian rule which the military advertised for over a decade was simply a rhetorical device

aimed at distracting the populace from their real agenda. From the film, it was clear that the promise to deliver the country to a civilian president was a façade.

Babangida steps aside within the first half of the film making it truly an Abacha (Alba) story. Nigerians therefore awaited the swearing in of the president elect, and the definitive return to the barracks of the military executives. National events took a different and unexpected turn, however, when 11 days later, Babangida announced the annulment of the election results. He claimed that only an insignificant number of the country's population had voted. The protests in Lagos, and most of South-west Nigeria in support of Abiola, were massive... Even Soyinka echoing Achebe later wrote:

On June 23, 1993, the day of the arbitrary annulment of the national presidential election, the military committed the most treasonable act of larceny of all time: It violently robbed the Nigerian people of their nationhood! A profound trust was betrayed, and only a community of fools will entrust its most sacred possession – nationhood – yet again to a class that has proven so fickle, so treacherous and dishonourable (Soyinka, 1996: 8-9)

In the above statement, Soyinka censured both the ruling government and a fraction of civilians who believed that Babangida and later, Abacha acted for the interest of the people by delaying the hand-over to civilians. The film was so popular when it was released that it boosted the acting career of the lead actor, Sam Obeakheme, who was reported to have said that playing Abacha made him famous. This popularity contrasts Onwuka's unsupported claim that the film sparked protests at its release, especially when read in the light of Haynes' (2006) assertion that "Abacha had no real friends and consequently attacking his regime once it was over is politically safe" (p. 529).

The main point here is Abiola's contested political mandate and the failure of two successive military regimes to honour his electoral victory. The military only paid lip service to the idea of a democratic Nigeria. It was not to be, at least not through their actions. The late General Sani Abacha came into power in the Nigerian state after he masterminded the seventh (and final) coup d'état in the nation's political history on November 17, 1993. It was a period during which he ousted Chief Ernest Shonekan, Head of the National Interim Government, from power under the guise of state insecurity. This happened four months after Shonekan took over power in Aso Rock. Admittedly, Abacha had been called upon through personal letters and editorials from

the civil society to restore the June 12 elections result and guide the country back to civilian government. Earlier, Shonekan had been selected because he was from the same ethnic group as Abiola, and put in charge of the government by General Ibrahim Babangida, following international pressure to hand over to a civilians.

Stubborn Grasshopper re-enacts the events that led to the annulment of Nigeria's fairest democratic elections throughout its political history in 1993 by Abacha in an autocratic move akin to Mbembe's (1997) description of Camroonian Paul Biya. It chronicles with little disguise the ascent to and exit by death of Abacha in 1998 with snapshots of events that occurred during the period. Through a semi-violent/bloodless coup, Abacha ousted the Head of the Interim Government and declared himself the Head of State. The figure of Chief Moshood Abiola, winner of the annulled elections, is depicted in the film to highlight the objectionable regime of Abacha and his hit men. In 1994, when Abiola in a similar move, declared himself the President-elect of Nigeria by virtue of his victory in the elections that year, Abacha had him arrested and jailed for treason.

When Cash (Abiola's character) is given audience, he is first caught asleep. Although Abiola embodied the civilian elite, he was perceived by many as inefficient and politically inept (Maier, 2000). Alba says to Cash, "I told you we are ready to give you contracts in place of that (his mandate)." But Cash rejects the offer, and after Saleko is thrown out in a November 17, 1993 bloodless coup by Alba, he declares himself president at the suggestion of Chief Nze. Frantically, Alba asks for Cash's arrest. At this point, WADECO intervenes. Alba is notified and he asks Terror (Clem Ohameze) to control the situation, his euphemism for eliminating any threatening voices. Images of pistols changing hands were rife in *Stubborn Grasshopper*. Dissident voices were immediately silenced by murder to deter further protests. Such was the language of the military that Nigeria witnessed in the 1990s, which *Stubborn Grasshopper* took to the screen.

7.5.3 *Stubborn Grasshopper*: Political Violence, Corruption and the Military

By political violence is meant aggressive acts meted out to civilians by those in power or their agents. Political assassinations grew in Abacha's time, among them was

Abiola's senior wife, Kudirat Abiola (Cash's wife in the film) played by Eucharia Anunobi. A major murder operation is planned in which Alba's son (Ramsey Nouah) gives the orders. This takes place in Lagos and thereafter the operators were compensated with ~~N~~20m (£72,000) each and instructed to "leave the country and lie low till tensions reduce". Abacha's top security aide, Hamza al-Mustapha, (Major Terror, in the film) was to accompany the soldier to Lagos and hand him over to the Police Commissioner who was a supporter of the military government. Thus, criminal offenses were perpetuated and hushed among the political elite.

A lot of money was earned in foreign currency during the military regimes and a lot more was equally squandered. Without revealing the staggering sums of money in question, Soyinka (1996) narrated the cement scandal of the 1970s and 80s, in which Nigerian military government had to pay demurrage for delayed vessels of cement in the ports of Lagos which stretched "fifty nautical miles away" (p. 81). The total amount of money paid by the government during the period was "at least a hundred times the annual budget of several African nations put together" (p. 81). In *Stubborn Grasshopper*, Alba is heard saying to his sons, "grab what you can, now that I am the Head of State". Government money was treated as personal asset, without consultations. Maier (2000) described the cash flow succinctly: "General Sani Abacha [ran] Nigeria not so much as a country but as his personal fiefdom. Billions of dollars were siphoned off into overseas bank accounts controlled by Abacha, his family or his cronies, while the masses simmered in anger at their deepening poverty..." (p. 3). An instance of Maier's claim was played out in the film as the Republic of Malebo deal (referring to the Malabu Oil Deal), which entailed sending oil from Nigeria to another country on the basis of personal friendship with Abacha (Alba). The Minister of Petroleum advises against the move to Alba's fury. On hearing this, the CSO suggests that the minister be relieved of his duty since his retention in office is perceived to undermine the dictator's authority.

Before the petroleum minister's dismissal, Alba meets with him to discuss an oil business transaction, in which the latter says he has paid in \$20m dollars to his foreign account through his son. That amount, the minister says, is affecting the importation of refined products, resulting in the shortage of fuel. Alba's response is, "ask the masses to wait...if they can't, we'll use force on them." This scenario was well reflected years

before by Fanon (1961) who wrote that post-colonial national leaders are “completely ignorant of the economy of their own country” (p. 151) because their understanding of nationalism is simply the “transfer to the natives the unfair advantages that were the legacy of the colonial period” (p. 152), and later by another postcolonialist, Soyinka, when he wrote:

Abacha has no idea of Nigeria. Beyond the reality of a fiefdom that has dutifully nursed his insatiable greed and transformed him into a creature of enormous wealth, and now of power, Abacha has no notion of Nigeria. He is thus incapable of grasping what is being said to him by some entity that speaks with the resolute voice of the Civil Liberties Organization, the Campaign for Democracy, the National Democratic Coalition, the market women, civil servants, student unions, labour unions, the press and so forth. None of these could possibly be part of his Nigerian nation, and it is only by eliminating them in *toto*, by silencing such alien voices, that Nigeria can become the entity that he recognizes (1996: 15)

Soyinka’s comments summarise the political situation of the country which informed the production of the film. Alba saw nothing other than his political ambition and rise to power. Neither internal pressure nor lobbying by the organisations mentioned by Soyinka above nor external pressure implied in the letter from the “international community” shown to him by Badmas, his predecessor, was capable of changing his mind. The filmmaker thus frames Alba’s military ideology as irrational, unjust and in the words of Obi (1994), as “life-negating... aberrant...ruthless and convulsing with carnage” (p. 407). Similarly, Egea writing about poetic response to the military period of Babangida (Badmas) and Abacha (Alba) noted “that these dictatorships are considered the highest point of military oppression in Nigeria may have accounted for the elevated levels of rage and mournfulness among...poets. Most of the poets, themselves unfortunate victims of the oppression...” (Egea 2011: 50).

Without a good knowledge of Nigeria, and especially the country’s political history, the film *Stubborn Grasshopper* would be lost on the viewer, one of the evident flaws of Onwuka’s attempt at constructing a political past. Just as Soyinka’s *Open Sore of a Continent* is a puzzle to a foreign audience, so is the film which, although it disguises Nigerian history under Abacha, arguably reflects deeply that period of heightened political despotism, one in which Soyinka himself was a victim. The film was made at a time when a foreign audience or Nigerians in the diasporas did not matter

much in the politics of distribution and exhibition of Nigerian film. It simply addressed an issue and a period, which the filmmaker believed to be in the front burner for most Nigerians because it dealt directly with their means of livelihood, daily transportation, health and security. Curiously, the depiction of these disturbing political situations has not favourably altered the socio-economic lives of the filmmakers or the audience. Arguably, the film generated conversations and controversy at its release (S. Onwuka, personal communication, October 16, 2013), but its immediate effect on social change or a more democratic system of governance is yet to be seen in spite of civilians' control of power.

7.6 In Conversation with One Another

This section reads the films together, in conversation with one another and as a unified whole through which filmmakers construct a political history of Nigeria between 1967 and 1998. A common thread that runs through the six films is the military confines within which each film is set. It is important to note, however, that the 32-year period was not entirely military-led.

Between 1979 and 1983, Shehu Shagari was elected 6th president of Nigeria, until he was overthrown in a bloodless coup by Ibrahim Babangida. And in 1993, Ernest Shonekan served for three months as the Interim National Government leader until an Abacha-led putsch forcefully ushered him out of office alive. Barring these two brief periods, the military had a stronghold on Nigeria, which is why military ideology can be read in the films and the films as Haynes argued could only see the light of day from the post-military era. As far as state organisation goes, the military subscribed to forceful exercise of power, subjugation of the country, authoritarian domination, suspension of the constitution and the deployment of socio-economic factors to entrench control (Ajayi, 2007: 1-8). In fact, because the military have controlled political power for half the period of Nigeria's independence, Ajayi suggests that democratically elected leaders have little but military styles of leadership to adopt.

The last addition to the selection of films, *HOAYS*, begins with Nigeria's independence in 1960 but runs quickly to the military coup that defines the political situations mirrored in the other films. The authoritarian ideology then is alive in the

films, milder in *Anini* and less so in *Battle of Love, Across the Niger* and *HOAYS*. It is at its least mildness in *Oil Village* and *Stubborn Grasshopper*, both of which envision the full wrath of the military in the Nigerian state.

The civil war that formed the background of three films has also received conflicting and contesting reports in a large volume of academic and journalistic writings. Claims and counterclaims surged forward, personified in Odenigbo and Ms. Adebayo's (*HOAYS*) dispute over the coup and subsequent war. Olanna's symbolic intervention to calm frayed nerves did not amount to much just as interventionist efforts before 1967 within and outside Nigeria proved abortive. Each faction defended its own position without heeding the complexities of ethnic, religious and regional ideologies that successive military efforts defined and deepened.

In the Nigerian political structure and culture, the military intervened for different reasons through successive coup d'états. According to Ajayi (2007), "the parochial activities of regionally-based political parties and their acrimonious struggle to control the centre also threatened to pull the nation apart many times before the military took over the reins of power in 1966" (p. 37). Similarly, Keith Panter-Brick observed the fall out of politicians arising from 1964 federal and 1965 regional elections, and the resulting breakdown of law and order in the regions (particularly the west) "were clearly the prelude to further more desperate measures involving in all probability the use of the army" (Panter-Brick, 1970: 14). Both authors highlight the severe regional conflicts brewing in the newly-independent nation, but also allude to personal interests and ambition disguised as party positions. Whatever the intention of the army, Ben Gbulie, one of the five plotters and executors of the January 1966 provided his own account:

The truth of the matter, of course, was that the January coup was a coup of the progressive elements of the Nigerian Armed Forces – an intervention clearly necessitated by the breakdown of law and order in the country. It was therefore neither an "Igbo affair" nor, for that matter, the affair of any other ethnic group connected with it. It was essentially a symbiotic operation conducted, in spite of its apparent shortcomings, in the best interest of the nation" (Gbulie, 1981: 152)

This supposedly 'noble' and corrective claim, visually absent from the films, did not remain so owing to the multiple interpretations it received from political observers and

analysts including army officers of the period. In fact, it opened the flood gate to Yakubu Gowon, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha – all former military Heads of State – to prolong their stay in political office after overthrowing the so-called corrupt leaders. The destructive repercussions of war were repeatedly mouthed by Dubem and his travelling comrades (*Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*) as well as by Odenigbo and his cronies (*HOAYS*) without directly connecting those pronouncements to the military intervention that led to the state of events they found themselves in. Worthy of note is the military background of Dubem and his fellow travellers, but not in any one instance in the film did they attribute their predicament to the actions of their colleagues. So, there is a paradox in which military arrangements are at once criticised and lauded, subverted and promoted. Poised as the hero through whom the ‘One Nigeria’ mantra becomes a reality, Dubem is himself a blind and uncritical promoter of military ideology. He focuses on ethnic differences as the cause of the Nigerian scourge and de-emphasizes or completely ignores the military forces that dismantled the country whose creed he professes. Civilian Odenigbo on the other hand maintains strong ethnic affiliations which suggestively discountenances other ethnic groups (evidenced in his bickering with Adebayo, reported above) and the military.

In Anini, the military is virtually absent. But the impact of their directives was evident in their subordinates’ actions. The directives ensured that their authority was maintained, and any threat to its maintenance was carefully resisted even if through violence as Mbembe (2002) aptly reminded. Thus, the threat to Babangida’s military administration posed by Anini and his gang was the motivation for the redeployment of army officers and policemen in the city where the armed gang operated. Non-performing officers and those killed or wounded by Anini were substituted in the hope that their replacement would institute the ‘order’ that was necessary for Babangida’s continued stranglehold. Such redeployments like Parry Osayande’s and Eddy Edion’s are hardly greeted enthusiastically by the affected individuals. They were and still are the indirect means of exerting control, and have been transferred to democratic governments. Edion’s transfer from the Lagos Zonal office of the film Censor’s Board to Bauchi State parallels the military redeployments because “anything that did not recognize this violence as authority, that contested its protocols was savage and outlaw” (Mbembe, 2002: 26). Thus, Edion was the outlaw transferred because of his divergent

opinions on *HOAYS* from those of Patricia Bala, the Board's Director General. Bala's actions insinuated an arbitrariness informed by ethnic-colourations.

In *Oil Village* and *Stubborn Grasshopper*, arbitrariness was not the only feature of military ideology; authoritarianism, commercial capitalism and political 'godfatherism' loomed large. In both films, and as shown in their individual discussions above, Mbembe's description of the postcolony is evoked. Whether through the community chiefs in *Oil Village*, and later through Abacha as depicted in the film, or again as through Alba (Abacha) in *Stubborn Grasshopper*, "at any moment, [they] usurped the law and, in the name of the state, exercised it for purely private ends" (Mbembe 2002: 28). Such private ends were often financial, leading to a steady decline of the Nigerian economy, without consultations, collegiality, negotiations or consensus. That Nollywood filmmakers, popular artists and those formerly criticised as being apolitical, are the bearers of these disturbing historical and political truths is reflective of Barber's description of the social positioning of the Yoruba travelling theatre workers:

[they] (primary school, informal sector) took a solicitous but superior attitude to the mass of the people, seeing their own role as being to educate and enlighten them, while respecting the custodians of cultural traditions; they claimed a status akin to that of a preacher, a teacher, or a journalist and saw themselves as more effective in these roles than the university dramatists (2014: xviii)

Hence, the comments of the filmmakers interviewed corroborate Barber and profoundly reiterate the key points of this research: that the filmmakers are neither apolitical nor ahistorical, that they have delved into their country's deep and dark past to mine the narratives, which they have constructed through the usual Nollywood story-telling narratives, and that the stylistic modes and conventions of narrating the past, couched as they may be for censorship reasons, reveal the society from which they emerged. And that such narratives are infused with the personal traits of the filmmakers.

The techniques of handling the films may raise ideological questions too as in some cases the unintended jump at the viewer. *Anini* was produced to highlight the antics of a "common criminal" but I argued above that a critical reading of the film unravels a celebratory approach to the business of armed robbery and particularly to the Lawrence Anini episode. *Oil Village* claims to tell a Ken Saro-Wiwa story, but that is

not made visible till the second instalment of the serially-constructed film. *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger* are motivated by a united Nigeria agenda yet they fail to problematize the military's role in the pursuit of 'One Nigeria'.

Ajayi (2007) and Falola and Heaton (2008) agree on the authoritarian rule of the military, seeking "to maintain power through oppression, coercion and the manipulation of the democratic process" (Falola and Heaton, 2008: 209). Even when the military handed over power in 1979 through elections, there was widespread belief that they had a vested interest in determining their successor (Ajayi, 2007), partly to cover their tracks and partly to perpetuate the indirect rule employed by the colonial government. Widespread rumours had it that the military was responsible for hand-picking the successor. The relationship between military rule and colonial regime was drawn by Mbembe in the following words:

the lack of justice of the means, and the lack of legitimacy of the ends, conspired to allow an arbitrariness and intrinsic unconditionality that may be said to have been the distinctive feature of colonial sovereignty. Postcolonial state forms have inherited this unconditionality and the regime of impunity that was its corollary (2002: 26).

Another common thread in the films is ethnicity, ethnic chauvinism and regional politics: for good and for ill, which has been discussed above. Before Nigeria's independence, political parties were organised along ethnic lines and on the basis of godfatherism. As a pro-Biafran film, *HOAYS* was ethnically-skewed with the patronage system given a marginal representation at the Independence Day lunch in the twins' home. In *Oil Village*, the community chiefs appointed grass-root folks chosen from the protesters' ethnic groups to advance their pillaging course. In *Stubborn Grasshopper*, both military heads, Badmas (Babangida) and Alba (Abacha) selected civilians from civil society groups and planted them strategically among the populace both to gather intelligence on public opinion but also to placate the disaffected members of their ethnic groups, particularly the Yorubas.

This chapter has attempted ideological readings of the films, which uncovered intended and unintended accounts of the portrayal of history in video films. As was shown above, the films are reflective of the ideological projects of the period each of them depicted and the period that produced them. It is informative to read the films in conversation with one another because of the common themes that they embodied. The

main point is that films are ideologically rendered, and ought to be read as such if the texts and subtexts are to be constructively deconstructed. As pointed out above, and inspired by Kellner (n.d.), the readings did not adopt as monolithic understanding of ideology either in the Marxist, Hegelian or any other notion for that matter. It simply drew out, from the political culture prevalent in the country of study, the glaring and less glaring systems of beliefs, themes, conceptions and language that reveal how power is acquired, maintained, struggled over (Brummett, 2010) or even ceded. That popular art forms such as video films are ideologically positioned revealed the validity of Barber's (1987, 1997a), Okome's (2003) and Okoye's (2007a) thoughts on non-elite expressive art forms debating matters of deep interest where official channels of communication are closed to them.

CHAPTER 8

JOURNALISTS' RECEPTION OF FILMS

8.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed that while the filmmakers approached their stories with particular agenda, some actual representations were shot through with meanings other than those originally intended. One of the important contributions of this study is the idea that film-filmmaker-audience is a viable way of understanding the cultural productions and contexts of production in Nollywood, broadly understood. No study, however, has adopted as a method of enquiry the triangulation of films (textual analysis), filmmakers (interviews) and audiences (mainly interviews rather than survey). This chapter examines in a novel way the reception of 'history' in Nigerian films through the agency of journalists. It does not attempt to provide journalists' readings of the films dealt with in the last three chapters. Rather, it focuses on a broad portrayal of the past in Nollywood films as perceived by journalists whose affinity and participation in the industry place them in a more privileged position of viewership than most other audiences.

As identified above (chapter 3), previous Nollywood studies have either focused on one aspect of the industry or on multiple aspects taken together. Textual analyses have dominated the study of Nollywood. There have been few audience and reception studies of Nigerian films; presumably because both are more complex research procedures as Jackie Stacey (1993) rightly observes. Audiences are so diverse, difficult to gather in a location, often unwilling to participate in a researcher's data collection process, not to mention their ever-changing tastes and preferences. It thus becomes necessary to assess their reception of films in places where they would ordinarily be: either in a beer parlour (Okome, 2007) or in a tertiary education institution (Agina, 2011). But that marginalises those audiences who are neither found in beer parlours nor in higher education centres. This brings to the fore, the question related to who the audience is and how an audience might be identified. In defining an audience, Barber (1997b) espouses among other ideas that of a "listener's intentional orientation" (p. 362). This suggests deliberateness in giving one's attention to a spectacle, a moving image, in addition to being prepared to associate meaning to that spectacle or image. In

a sense, an audience assumes the space between a moving image and its ‘meaning’, without implying any homogeneity in and of that meaning.

After isolating a very small number of films that suited my selection criteria, viewing them repeatedly, speaking with the producers and directors of those films, and even analysing some in a recent publication (Agina, 2013), I was keen to enter the minds of an audience who were “intentionally orientated” to the film industry at the time of their production. Barber pointed out that:

the best reason for studying audiences is that they have a hand in the constitution of the meaning of a performance, text or utterance. Cultural historians or anthropologists who study texts and performances in order to understand what people think need to look not only at the utterance but also at the interpretation of that utterance” (1997b: 356).

The films were made between 2001 and 2013. The question, ‘how did, and how do people react to films like the *Battle of Love/Across the Niger*, *Stubborn Grasshopper* or *Anini*, for instance?’ engaged my attention for a long time. My reasoning was that the audience component would round-out the discussions on the topic: Nigerian filmmakers and their construction of a political past.

However, measuring the reception of the films under investigation in this research posed a problem. Since the films were released between 2001 and 2013, it was difficult to assess what was said or written about them at that time. Efforts to gather information from newspapers that ran sections on Nigerian films at their release proved abortive (because of the lack of preservation culture. Even leading cultural journalists such as Steve Ayorinde and Shaibu Husseini could not provide any). No less problematic was gathering people – in ‘unnatural’ or contrived situations – to watch the films and discuss them afterwards, an experience which I already reported in the first chapter. For such people, the scenario was not entertaining; it was merely a constructed set up intended to assist a researcher gather data. Besides, there was also no guarantee that the responses of such people in 2012-2013, when the data was actively sought, would have been the same between 2001 and 2013 when the films were made (and if they had seen them then).

Because of the lapsed time between the initial release and the time of this study, it was not considered appropriate to adopt the ‘screen and discuss’ method used in

Innocent Uwah's (2013) study of Nollywood films and Igbo culture, in which he screened 10 minutes of each film and discussed it with research participants who were paid for their troubles. Further, Stacey's comments are illustrative of the methodological challenge of measuring reception in this context. She states that "studying cinema audiences from the past adds further problems to questions of 'access' and additionally complicates interpretive strategies because of the role of memory in structuring audiences' accounts of their viewing practices" (Stacey 1993: 263). An innovative strategy was therefore adopted to measure reception of the films being discussed long after their release. The exercise was intended to yield greater insights to methods of future reception studies of Nollywood and indeed African films.

In Africa, Nollywood films have undergone mixed reactions and reception from the viewing population. Edited volumes such as *Viewing African Cinema* and *Global Nollywood* have specifically addressed the questions of reception within the continent and elsewhere, among Africans, African diasporic, European and American audiences. Both texts provide useful information on the trans-nationality of Nollywood and its reception in diverse socio-cultural contexts. Some of the contributions in the texts address specific films employed by the authors to demonstrate the dynamics of Nollywood's contexts of migration. All of those contributions invariably adopt textual analyses and ethnographic approaches. Stacey (1993) observes that textual analysis has its own benefits and is indeed beneficial for understanding narrative styles, points of view, plot constructions, the 'what' and 'how' of narratives. But it does not completely answer questions about director/producer- motivations or cinema audiences without whom the social and political functions of the narratives do not have much force. Stacey notes that "audience studies continue to be a striking absence" (p. 262) in the broad spectrum of film studies. Much of what has been written in the past on Nigerian film studies have been on the texts themselves or on the institutions funding or regulating such productions. Relatively little, if at all, has been documented historically on film audiences and the dynamics of spectatorship. Stacey (1993) also rightly emphasizes the complexity of audience studies:

Finding the material in the first place is a problem, since availability is clearly difficult in the historical study of film reception. Whether written in the past, or collected retrospectively by researchers today, the material

will always be shaped by discursive factors and will produce a very particular set of selective knowledges (p. 265)

In spite of the paucity of reception studies conducted after or while viewing particular films such as Uwah's (2013), some authors have conducted ethnographic studies which included participant observation (Krings and Okome, 2013; Okome, 2007), and surveys (Esan, 2008; Ashakoro, 2010 and Agina, 2011). Similarly, Krings (2004) writing in another context also notes the interrogation of "filmmakers, actors and especially the audience is important to understanding the assumptions made by researchers based on film texts alone" (p. 168). Reception studies are rare, yet they are important indicators of the interaction between filmmakers and audiences, and it is for that reason that there is sufficient basis for this chapter of my thesis.

8.2 Journalists as Unique Audiences

In the preface to the Nigerian edition of *Nigerian Video Films* (2000), the first academic publication on the videos, Haynes wrote, "already two fairly substantial bodies of writing have grown up around the videos. One is the prolific newspaper reporting and reviewing, which provide an extensive and lively chronicle of the industry" (p. xvii). That statement answers a methodological question in this research, even if it raises other legitimate ones. Film journalists, arts and culture editors write and speak about the Nigerian film industry on a weekly basis, and are identified in this research as information rich sources (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 28) which can be derived through a snowball sampling technique. Writing about the events and sources of scholarship on Nollywood, Haynes again points out that:

In Lagos, journalists produce a wealth of material on Nollywood... Oji Onoko's useful book *Glimpses of our Stars* (1999) grew out of profiles he did for the *African Concord* magazine and *ThisDay*. Chidi Nebo, a columnist for *The Vanguard*, wrote a satirical book about Nollywood, *Reel Blunders* (2000). Shaibu Husseini has been doing a series of interviews with film people, publishing them weekly for more than five years in *The Guardian*; his editor, Jahman Anikulapo, is editing some of them into a book... Steve Ayorinde, formerly of *The Guardian*, whose reports on the Nigerian video industry as it began are essential reading... It would be productive if more journalists were coaxed into academic settings ... because they are a valuable resource for writing the history of the development of these film traditions ... (2010: 108-109).

Therefore, seventeen journalists who had reported Nollywood for a minimum of five years from 10 major newspapers (*The Guardian*, *This Day*, *Business Day*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *National Mirror*, *The Vanguard*, *Entertainment Express*, *Saturday Independent*, *The Sun*, *234Next*) and two freelancers were sought through the snowball sampling, and interrogated. A total of 13 interviews – 8 face-to-face, 4 emails and 1 telephone – were successfully conducted while four of them turned down interview requests for tight work schedules or official travel at the time. The journalists are first degree holders, mainly in Mass Communication. All reside in Lagos and like all journalists, claim to be poorly paid even though none of them divulged the actual sum. Other sources claimed a monthly salary estimate of ₦100,000 (£361). This has its own implications for reportage and information dissemination.

This mediated interview strategy, with its own drawbacks, proved to be not only a useful approach in understanding Nigerian video film audiences, but also, a rich source of information (snowballing) on the film industry itself. The study recognises the academic (and other) scepticism, which may result from the declining state of Nigerian journalism practice including the lack of requisite skill in writing about film and unethical compromises which journalists often have to make. For instance, Daniel Smith in his book, *A Culture of Corruption: Everyday Deception and Popular Discontent in Nigeria*, notes that the press itself has a credibility problem stemming from “the fluid lines between fact and fiction” (Smith 2007: 228).

However, these considerations do not discredit the fact that this group of people know a lot about the film industry. One of the interviewees revealed to me the technical constraints he had regarding producing film reviews, but also added that critical reviews were not appreciated by his audience and editors (B. Njoku, personal communication, May 18, 2013). This point was corroborated by Nse Okon-ekong who noted that if he wrote critical reviews, his editor would “ask me to go and start my own newspaper” (N. Okon-ekong, personal communication, May 17, 2013). So, factors such as credibility, media ownership and leadership as well as technical abilities impinged on the intervention of the journalists as audiences. However, they proved to be a mine of information regarding film production and consumption in Nigeria, apart from being a

pragmatic approach to interrogating audiences in the face of the challenges mentioned above.

In addition to these, the option of questioning journalists is legitimate because of the prominent roles they play. Film journalists maintain weekly and semi-weekly columns in Nigerian newspapers on the general state of the industry and of particular films and filmmakers. Most of them admitted to privileging actors' lifestyles over critical film reviews to satisfy the fans of the actors. Steve Ayorinde, Jahman Anikulapo and Shaibu Husseini sit on the jury of awards ceremonies like African Movie Academy Awards (AMAA). Most of the journalists attend film premieres at cinemas, and particularly private or press screenings so that they can gather news for their weekly columns. They attend film festivals all over Africa and elsewhere. Therefore, I consider their expert knowledge and closeness to the film industry sufficient basis for their contribution to my work.

The socio-cultural contexts of the journalists' interpretation are taken into cognizance as an intervening element in speaking about the films and the industry. Also relevant are their knowledge and relationship with the film producers and directors, including an awareness of the dynamics of the medium of creating meaning. Memory interferes with an adequate reflection on the films because of the passage of time mentioned above. Olumide Iyanda, Editor, *Saturday Independent*, stated that he had seen most of the films that mattered in Nollywood, and those studied in this work, but he was unable to provide a scene by scene recollection of them (personal communication, May 24, 2013). Journalists' dominant readings and perceptions of the industry are addressed by examining their understandings of the pasts the filmmakers portray, the motivation, the audiences, challenges of depicting the past and the future of the industry they are a part of.

8.3 What 'History'?

From the interviews which were all conducted in Lagos, it was observed that the journalists, preferred the term 'history' to the 'political past' as distinguished in chapter 2 above. Thus references were made to historical films even though in previous chapters, I have maintained the political and the past as two determining factors in the

choice of films for this study. Steve Ayorinde's (*National Mirror*) comment on the political being interwoven with history and vice versa sets out the tone that the interviews followed. Does Nollywood portray Nigeria's political past and what forms do those portrayals (if any) take? Clearly, Hall's (2001) assertion that decoding media texts do not necessarily and inevitably follow from the encoding process is borne out in the responses below. Variations of insufficient history, cultural epics as history or no history at all greeted the digital voice recorder on which the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. While the journalists confirmed mild representations of history, they also vehemently described what was believed to be an aversion or indifference to the topic of 'history'. Subsequently, their italicised responses below ranged from comparisons between the early filmmakers discussed in chapters two and three above to its paucity and their substitution of 'history' films with cultural epics as the Nollywood historical genre:

A.AJELUORU: *With Ugbomah, history was taken seriously; indeed, history was it. It was something that informed and prepared young minds for the future, so they didn't make mistakes of the past. So, for Ugbomah's celluloid, history was prominent. His films reflected the importance of history like Death of a Black President, Oil Doom, Dr. Oyenusi and so on... But today, no; not enough is being done now. Indeed, not much to that effect. Nigerians still look forward to such films (May 28, 2013).*

S. AYORINDE: *Nollywood has managed to respond to almost everything. A few will get a pass mark for historical representations (May 6, 2013).*

O. IYANDA: *There's very little history in Nollywood probably because the producers think that it wouldn't sell. There is a popular saying in Nollywood that says, "na wetin the people wan see" translated as it's what the people want to see (May 24, 2013).*

A. ABODURIN: *Some of these filmmakers call the fictional epics history films. It's funny but that is their understanding of times past (May 15, 2013).*

D. AJAO: *In the Nollywood context, no. Nollywood has not engaged with Nigerian historical events as much as it should. However, that might be asking too much of the industry. In my opinion, Nollywood did not start out to attend to the historical (June 3, 2013).*

J. ANIKULAPO: *I don't think we should generalise. Some have, but all cannot because they are purely meant for entertainment. Is it only when they talk about Politics that we will say they are socially conscious...You can't push popular art to tell your history (May 11, 2013).*

The narratives given by the filmmakers in chapter four are different from the above, with the position of each respondent reflected in the comments. While the filmmakers tend to be defensive and point to the cultural epics as their 'history' or begin a litany of reasons why history is or is not evident in their films, the journalists state explicitly that constructions of the past are marginal if at all. Fred Amata, who directed *Anini* referred to his production as an action film, and in another instance as a library film, is not understood in such terms as shown in the reports by this group of audiences. Such differences, while not necessarily negative, do establish that "the degrees of symmetry in the communication exchange depend on the degrees of symmetry established between the positions of the producer and the receiver" (Hall 2001:510). The "structural differences of relation and position" (ibid.) make the codes of a 'library' or 'action' film negotiable and effectively negotiated. However, the "insufficient history" reported above meshes in an analogous way to the features of library holdings.

On the specific films discussed in previous chapters most of which the interviewees had seen, but which they remembered vaguely, it was a mix of reactions:

S. AYORINDE.: *Across the Niger is a film that stands out in many regards. Overlook some technical drawbacks and you'll see it was a good film. It's a shame we haven't seen anything like it since then. Was it successful? Yes. It didn't do so well at [international] festivals though... As a work of art, it's an accomplished film, beautifully told...with aspects of our history. I commend that film...*

Anini did not do too badly in terms of reception. It earned a few appraisals... (May 6, 2013).

A.AJELUORU: *I've only seen Across the Niger ... and not the others. Kingsley Ogoro's Across the Niger, although based on the Nigerian Civil War, is more a romance story than actually threshing up the political issues that caused the war. But indeed, it served as an important reminder about that tragic episode of Nigeria's history; commendable effort (May 28, 2013).*

J. ANIKULAPO: *Across the Niger may have been a little soft in the way it portrayed the past. It's a story of love after all. The war was in the background. Oil Village is also a good film that is politically and historically conscious (May 11, 2013)*

O. IYANDA: *Stubborn Grasshopper is a bold attempt to step out of the usual boundaries. I will not say more than that for now (May 24, 2013).*

Once more, differentiated readings of the films are evident. The films are not read within the dominant codes of production. Kingsley Ogoro reported in chapter four above said: *I wanted people to come out of the theatre and think they had seen the war.* But the readings suggest that rather than war, romance was read. Hall's analytic "reference code" is relegated to the back in the audiences' reading of *Across the Niger* as romance in war or war in romance, or even romance and war. Up to a point, the readings even become prescriptive, if not oppositional, as the comments below reveal.

Regarding the question of constructing the past, the journalists were of the opinion that the industry has failed to demonstrate high aspirations by restricting its narrative options to the band-wagon paradigm. The band-wagon production model was confirmed by several filmmakers interviewed for this research. According to the most prominent ones among them, it was an anchor that held the prospect of success when the investment of a filmmaker's entire savings was at stake. Repeating successful story lines with minor alterations and casting popular actors were precautionary measures that guaranteed dividends. This situation effectively shut out un- or thinly-explored territories such as the construction of the past:

S. AYORINDE.: *Nollywood has imposed a limitation on itself from the beginning reducing its import to popular culture. If Hollywood is popular culture, and has produced a lot of history. Then why does*

Nollywood limit itself so? The problems listed by Nollywood are not peculiar to it. Magazines, newspapers... struggle with funding, electricity supply and the like

Not to make a foray into such narratives will be inadequate for an industry that is producing so much. It can't all be rituals and romance... There must be some other engagement with aspects of history even if we have to express displeasure or engage directors in terms of conclusions and narrative styles (May 6, 2013).

S. HUSSEINI: *I think they have not fully exploited that genre yet... I mean '20 years' after what is believed to be the birth of commercial movie making in Nigeria, there have been no significant movie shot on Nigeria as a country, its amalgamation, independence or even major landmark events (May 26, 2013).*

O. IYANDA: *How come nobody has done a film about Nnamdi Azikiwe, Awolowo, Tafawa Balewa. We've seen Lincoln, The King's Speech. When you look at the scale of Nollywood's production and the number of films that touch on history, you find out that the latter is quite low (May 24, 2013).*

D. AJAO: *I would say the only record of Nigerian film of history crossing generations would be in the industry's 'dynasties' for want of a better word. The likes of the Amatas, the Ejiros and now Kunle Afolayan and his actor-brothers... (June 3, 2013).*

As discussed in the fourth chapter, Nollywood's alternative to the past is the cultural epic that flooded the markets and graced the screens in the 1990s. Popularised by Andy Amenechi's *Igodo* (1999) which had a male protagonist, the epics appeared in the form of remakes of *Igodo* and a host of similar narratives set in pre-colonial rural communities and parading actors dressed in leaves and raffia. Such representations were generally received with a combination of positive and negative reactions as Novia (2012) observed, but the comments below are indicative of oppositional and negotiated readings:

A. ABODURIN: *The Igbos make some funny epic films. I don't know where they get their own accounts of history from. They just look for one muscular guy who will play the hero...then the Yorubas do virtually everything. Then don't forget that there is also the element of spirituality in all the epics. Some of them have good conflict but it is how to resolve the conflict rationally that is the problem...so they just go spiritual (May 15, 2013).*

N. OKON-EKONG: *The producers of such epic films are trying to fit into Western modes of African understanding. There was NEVER a time we wore raffia or jute bag as an item of clothing (May 17, 2013).*

These comments and those reported in the fourth chapter reveal that accuracy was not a feature to be pursued in the narrative of the past especially for the producers of the cultural epics. As was earlier pointed out, the sources of the stories included folk tales which no one bothered to verify for their levels of truth because they were constructed as moral lessons, didactic tools of the oral tradition. What seemed important then, was that the stories be decoded as messages from the past to aid the moral dispositions of the present times, rather than as veracious purveyors of historical facts.

In her essay on audiences in Africa, Barber (1997b) justified the position that audiences are primarily constituted by the performance. It is the enthusiastic greetings with which performances are greeted that cause the producers of popular arts to mushroom. The popularity enjoyed by the producers of the cultural epics was therefore the element that stoked the fires of production. Were the audiences not as keen on viewing the 'epics', they would have died out naturally. This keenness ought not to be interpreted narrowly or necessarily as approval because as one of the filmmakers revealed, *people watched the films so that they can criticise us* (C. Ejoro, personal communication, November 2010)

Closely linked to the challenges of constructing the past as reported by the journalists is the issue of funding, which is required to conduct adequate research before filming. As shown in the fourth chapter, the filmmakers are of the opinion that funding makes all the difference in a period piece. While that may be a plausible argument in their favour, there are reasons to doubt that adequate funding will not be trumped by

other interests: audience appeal, director's motivation and perspective on a particular story. Although HOAYS challenges the assumption that funding will solve all the problems expected to arise when depicting the past, there is sufficient evidence from the filmmakers that budgetary constraints impinge on history in the video films. The journalists' responses support the notion that research is ill-served:

D. AJAO: *I have seen a couple claiming to re-enact some civil war or the other, obviously not Biafra! Part of the problem with Nollywood is poor research and in effect misrepresentation of historical fact... (June 3, 2013).*

A.AJELUORU: *But Nollywood treats history in a cavalier manner; it isn't given its proper perspective. It's all romance, voodoo and what-not (May 28, 2013).*

O. IYANDA: *One of the challenges of making history is that you must do your research very well. If you have to go back in time to capture the essence of that time, a lot of things have to go into the production. It's not the same as making a comedy or romantic story where you can call your friends and they appear and act as dressed. The props are important. You have to think of the cars of the time if that appears in your story. But today, you can grab a friend that has a Range-rover and you are good to go... Yes, it's expensive but even if you want to do a historical movie in Nigeria, you don't need half the budget of Titanic (May 24, 2013).*

Beyond the issues addressed above, filmmakers claim an interaction with their audiences that ensure their productions meet the latter's demands. Their assumptions, often based on sales figures, are contested by the journalist-audience. This immediately suggests the complexities associated with assessing audience preferences for they are neither homogenous as an entity nor constant in the film choices they make.

8.4 “Na wetin people wan see”

In 2011, Chico Ejiro, popularly known as Mr. Prolific, gave two reasons why he was unlikely to re-enact Nigeria’s political past. The first is that he thought such a task belonged to the government. Ejiro added that he was not being supported by the government as a filmmaker and that such propagandist filmmaking belonged to the government of the day. He questioned the rationale behind making a film about the government if that was not guaranteed to yield any benefit to him. The second was that the audience, his audience was not interested in watching those films. Asked how he knew that with certainty, his replied revealed the industry’s informal and undocumented ways of assessing the reception of their films. For them, the success of a film was determined by the amount of money the producer’s account increased by. Ejiro’s comments were echoed and modified at different moments of my research by filmmakers and journalists.

Even though Ejiro’s comments were similar to ‘*na wetin people wan see*’, it was Olumide Iyanda who used the Pidgin expression to refer to the well-known saying in Nollywood. I enquired amongst other journalists what they thought about Ejiro’s assertions regarding the audience:

S. AYORINDE: *What is driving the consumer pattern in Nollywood is not necessarily the theme but availability. Audience preferences dictate choice of subject e.g. romance over history but it’s a convenient and commercial way to look at art. No one has done any research to determine accurately what the audience prefers. It’s based on what they think and what sells at a particular moment. Nollywood’s audiences are housewives, retirees and students. The subject of history in film is for a more discerning audience (May 6, 2013)*

O. IYANDA: *I would argue that it’s not particularly true that the Nigerian film audience is not interested in history. It depends on what you are packaging and how you are giving it to them. I give people the example of Fela on Broadway. Until it came to Nigeria, I’m sure very few people thought of doing anything on Fela. By the time it came, everybody was waowed about it. Everybody was going ooh and ah. So, if*

you put that kind of commitment too into Nigerian films, yes, it would work. People may think that enough research has not gone into it.

*At the end of the day, I put the lack of history in our films down to the fear of producers. You see, it's easier to make films on romance, comedy than the history ones. If you are making a film on 1914, everything in the film must be 1914. There mustn't be any pure water sachet on the floor, no okada sounds...Films like that are subject to more critical reviews than your regular films. There was a time a film was done on Oduduwa, and people questioned the use of Igbo characters for key roles, people who couldn't speak Yoruba very well. As a typical example, in *Oleku* by Tunde Kelani, you see a poster of Brandy. Of course, a lot of people didn't notice that, but Brandy is a 1990 phenomenon, and *Oleku* was set in the 60s. So even those you think are masters get it wrong once in a while.*

The people who will appreciate historical films are those who are cerebral and they will be critical of what they see. If the film becomes popular because people are talking about it, then more people will see it (May 24, 2013).

Y. OGUNDARE: *It's not true that the audience will not patronise movies that deal with the past. People will buy quality productions, good directing and dialogue...People bought and watched Jeta Amata's *Amazing Grace* (May 7, 2013).*

A. ABODURIN: *Nigerians are intelligent. You don't just force a slapdash production on them. Yes, there are some who'll take anything but there are also some that are enlightened, who'll see your trash for what it is and won't waste their time on it (May 15, 2013).*

N. OKON-EKONG: *Nigerian audience and history? They are hungry for it. Did you go to see *Kakadu*, the historical play? The hall was packed full! The filmmakers will have to bring their creativity to bear because its success will largely depend on how the story is told. The younger generation will benefit a lot from it. People want to see films*

with strengths and frailties of significant Nigerians not just all the good. There are many stories to tell. The scriptwriter has a lot of responsibility. He/she can do so much especially if the story is woven in a careful and creative way (May 17, 2013)

The apparent contestations in the comments above reveal one of the strongest claims of this research, which is the importance of the film-filmmaker-audience research paradigm. By interrogating a sole component of this paradigm, one loses the rich insights of the other two. Of course the questions asked of films, filmmakers or audiences will depend on the objectives of such an endeavour, but this approach shows up the deficiencies or blind spots of a single element. Furthermore, self-reporting is often embellished to enhance the speaker's image, therefore alternative voices broaden the results of the research. Filmmakers are not solely motivated or demotivated by audience preferences as the above shows, but by other observable factors highlighted by journalists.

The fourth chapter dealt at length on the motivation of producing the past as well as on producing films generally. Much of the information contained in the chapter drew on interviews with filmmakers and the researcher's observation of industry trends. The same question of filmmaking motivation was addressed to the journalists and while the responses largely corroborated the initial findings, there were some interesting dimensions from industry reporters:

Y. OGUNDARE: *Some of the women want glamour so that they can meet rich men and obtain benefits. Some of the filmmakers are motivated the way pastors are, meaning they have an urge to spread a message of whatever nature. Most of them are there for material reasons, some for fame. Some are just passionate about the industry and love what is going on there. There are also some that are like ambassadors, making a change in their little corners without much concern for the money. Because their parents were there, they fell in love with it as children. Femi Adebayo is a lawyer and probably does not need the money...Sola Kosoko is also there and that is not because he doesn't have the certificate to do something else (May 7, 2013).*

A. ABODURIN: *They are motivated by profit. Don't forget that that's how parts of Upper Iweka in Onitsha and Idumota in Lagos came into existence – to sell films. I'm not saying they should not go after profit. But they should seek to entertain, educate and break even at the same time...that's how the Charles Novias of the industry operate (May 15, 2013).*

O. IYANDA: *I think that some of the filmmakers are motivated by passion, but there is also the band-wagon thing. I mean, why would someone who has acted in only two films want to be a producer or a director? But because everyone is doing it, they think they can do it too (May 24, 2013).*

A.AMATUS: *Poverty contributed a lot. I think poverty is a motivating factor for these filmmakers. A lot of people graduated from school...no jobs. I think poverty fuels creativity because let's face it there is money in filmmaking. The early filmmakers like OJ, Andy Best, JBM made a lot of money when they put their money in film. Then there is the urge to be a success story in your family, your community, your country. People do not want to be failures so they strive to make something out of the films (May 28, 2013).*

8.5 The Future of Nollywood

On the future of Nollywood and past political representations, this audience contended that the industry is still largely fragmented and that is certain to yield adverse effects especially the ability to access funding which from the foregoing is a critical element in portraying the past. The future of Nollywood is dependent on how the present challenges confronting the industry are managed. Funding, distribution outlets, education and professionalism, environmental factors such as censorship and poverty-based bickering are the most crucial problems underscored by the journalists as the film industry's Waterloo.

The problem of poor distribution competes with that of inadequate funding to thwart the burgeoning return to the cinemas. Nigeria has less than 20 cinemas across the country accessible to middle class families. The majority of Nigerians, who are poor, has no access to film screenings in multiplexes. Some governments such as Lagos State have pledged to erect community cinemas to cater to the vast majority of Nigerians living in urban slums. But that is a long term goal; and as Olumide Iyanda rightly pointed out, if the incumbent governor of Lagos State leaves his political office, the community exhibition centres are likely to go with him as history has repeatedly shown. Iyanda added: *Cinema should not be made elitist...take it to Agege, Yaba...because that is where you have the crowds*. In support of this, but from a different angle, Azuh Amatus noted that “*it is sickening that in a country of 150 million people, a filmmaker is unable to sell 1 million copies of his films, no thanks to poor distribution outlets and piracy*” (May 28, 2013).

O. IYANDA: *I have noticed something. More Nigerians watch Nollywood films today than they did 3 or 4 years before. Nollywood is doing something but don't forget that you can also be a victim of your own success...therefore; they need to maintain the tempo of telling good stories* (May 24, 2013).

Y. OGUNDARE: *...funding, professionalism, good education and encouragement from the government, and environment. Everything that affects Nigeria affects the industry* (May 7, 2013).

The problems continue unabated. Film funding, the journalists affirmed, should emerge from the private sector while the government addresses issues of policy: economic and infrastructural. It has already been established by the filmmakers themselves, by scholars and by the journalists interviewed here that the filmmakers need to continually educate themselves in all aspects of filmmaking if they seek to be globally competitive. I will therefore focus on environmental factors that influence depicting a political past on film. As was pointed out in chapter four, HOAYS is a recent example of how censorship and socio-cultural factors affect the release of a film.

The journalists drew my attention to the protracted tussle between the producers of HOAYS and the Censors Board which was followed with additional interviews and

visits to the Lagos office of the Board. The film, HOAYS, did not fare any better at the Censors Board than the *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*. In fact, it was worse because censorship as pointed out in chapter five is a deterrent in historicising an explosive society like Nigeria. The film was presented for classification on 10th April, 2014. The State Security Service (SSS) was invited to view it in Abuja on the 1st of May. Within the period, a group of 276 school girls from Chibok, a rural community in North East Nigeria were abduction by terrorist group, Boko Haram (14th – 15th April). That affected classification of the film which was scheduled for its Nigerian premiere on 25th April because of its political slant. Between April and July when the film was finally classified, rumours of a ban, bribes, official and unofficial correspondences, loss of income and the redeployment of the Lagos Zonal Coordinator of the Board and other officials occurred. Even worse was the silence maintained by the Board following the rumours of a ban which was propagated by the media. Kene Mkparu, CEO of Film House Cinemas that bought distribution rights for the film wrote, “The continued unexplained delay in getting a formal response from the Board suggests that the Film has been banned even though there has been no formal communication to this effect.” Caesar Kagho, Acting Head, Corporate Affairs of the Board replied in a press statement “that the movie was not banned as speculated and that the board had dutifully exercised due diligence consonant with section 36 (1)(b) of NFVCB Enabling Law ACT 1993, CAP N40 LFN 2004, which stipulates that “a decision on a film shall ensure that such a film is not likely to undermine national security.”

Mkparu revealed to me that the film was being held mainly out of political and ethnic reasons. He alleged that Gowon, Head of the FMG during the civil war was from the same ethnic group as Patricia Bala, DG of the Board, and that he had pleaded/warned that the war be completely forgotten. It is difficult to tell if Mkparu was solely motivated by economic reasons since his company had incurred significant losses in promotional materials for the botched premiere of the film. However, when I confronted the Corporate Affairs manager at the Board with this information, he neither denied nor confirmed it. Rather, he was visibly agitated and said to me in Igbo, “*we have to be careful with what we say*” (personal communication, August, 2014).

Efforts to obtain an interview from Eddy Edion, who until July 7 was Zonal Coordinator of the Board failed. On August 31, 2014, he contacted me on Whatsapp:

“it’s my views on HOAYS that saw Ms. Bala posting me to Bauchi. My position was that as a theatrical/cinema presentation, it was ok for an 18 rating. But for home video, some edit cuts have to be effected. Bringing SSS and undue delay was wrong.” Interested in Edion’s response, I pressed further:

A. AGINA: *Were your views based on ethnic differences as portrayed in the film or on the explicit sexual scenes?*

No response!

E. EDION: *She (Bala) even brought in film producers like Mahmood Alli Balogun to review a film that the Board had not taken a decision on. I felt that was wrong and pointed this out to Bala. That was my offence. Trouble is when you put power in the wrong hands, disaster will follow.*

What the Board does effectively is to protect the government from public scrutiny and undue embarrassment while the filmmakers risk financial loss. The result is a creative aversion or total avoidance of certain politically-charged issues. This was the case with the ban of a documentary *Fuelling Poverty* (2012) which I have argued elsewhere was more of a political move and less of national security concerns. The repressive tendencies of the Board leave little room for filmmakers to explore historical and political subjects. They tacitly decide to play safe by focusing on romantic comedies and melodramas although in the past, filmmakers like Tunde Kelani, Zeb Ejiro and Charles Novia are known to have couched their political statements in ways “that the Board will not be able to pinpoint anything” (Novia, 2012).

Further, when films which smack of national politics are made, the producer now has the additional burden of timing its release or exhibition at an appropriate moment. Who would have known that the Boko Haram abduction will happen four days after submitting a film for classification? Another unidentified official met at the Board’s Lagos office said, “*the country is not stable, look at Chibok, and it is the same Hausas that fought the war so you can’t make films that will incite violence*” (personal communication, August 2014). Kene Mkpuru and the producers of HOAYS were not as fortunate as Kelani whose film about military dictatorship was released when the dictator Gen Abacha died even though shooting began while Abacha was alive” (Haynes, 2007).

Kanayo O. Kanayo, a famous actor and the protagonist of *Battle of Love* and *Across the Niger*, said, “*Bala does not know what she is doing. She is controlled. She applauded the film in Toronto and has now come to Nigeria to ban it. So what was she applauding?*” (personal communication, July 24, 2014). Interestingly too, Ugboma was not sparing in his criticisms regarding the portrayal of ethnic violence in the film.

An important point regarding the reception of HOAYS is that the disappointment felt and written about by western audiences on Bandele’s ‘dismissive history’ was not raised at all among some of the Nigerian audiences that saw the film. Three debatable reasons can be put forward: 1. Nigerian film audiences are less concerned about history than the foreigners; a conclusion that raises other questions on the historical consciousness of Nigeria’s movie going audience. 2. Familiarity with the novel could have filled in the missing links for Nigerian audiences to such an extent that what the film lacked, they made up for by recalling it in the novel. An important point is that the novel was on sale at Film House Cinemas, Lagos where the film premiered. 3. Borrowing from the idiom ‘in the land of the blind, a one-eyed man is king’, a third reason is that Nigerian audiences are not used to such (as HOAYS boasted) high quality production and acting in Nigerian films. HOAYS seemed to match a Hollywood production and at the same time provided familiar faces, contexts and stories that film lovers could relate to and had read. The foundation for this access and relevance had been laid by the novel.

The chapter examined broadly the reception of popular ‘historical’ films to produce robust discussions on the film-filmmaker-audience paradigm. Although reception studies constitute a major component of media and communication studies with its own theories and methods, I argue that the fruitfulness of tapping into the journalists’ knowledge has enriched the study and made the exercise not only original but also worth replicating in other contexts. This cushions the biases of filmmakers’ self-reporting as they “reproduce on the cultural level the fundamental conflicts within society...” (Kellner, n.d.). The journalists interviewed shed light on certain aspects of production and consumption of films in ways that no other audience can for reasons already stated above. This approach opens up the debate on measuring reception of films made long before a researcher becomes interested in examining them, and in the absence of requisite archival materials. The inclusion of this chapter was not to respond

to all the questions arising from examining reception, but to round out and make robust the discussions, arguments and contestations of constructing the past. In interrogating industry allies, the responses left out by the filmmakers came to the fore.

CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

9.1 Wrapping Up

This study identified the growing number of films that examine the political constructions of 1967-1998 by Nigerian filmmakers. In analysing English language films produced in South West Nigeria, the study focuses on popular video films that reveal the symbolic practices by which the social and political meanings of the past are constructed. As well as how those meanings reflect Nigerian contemporary political culture. As Hall (2013) rightly observes, “it is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture...and other representational systems to construct meaning” (p. 11). Apart from Nollywood, there are other indigenous film industries burgeoning in different regions of the country, notably the vibrant Kannywood. And it will be interesting to investigate how Kannywood constructs the political past. But for reasons mentioned above, the study deliberately excluded the Hausa film genres and similarly, left out indigenous language films to concentrate on the English language ones. This is not a shortcoming but a recognition of the need to adhere to a homogenous category that allows in-depth readings and interviews typical of qualitative research efforts such as this.

The study adopted a number of theoretical thoughts to address the multi-disciplinary nature of the study: African popular arts, post-structural cum contextual ideological critique and reception analysis in a post-colonial African state. Beginning with Barber’s theorisation of the popular productions, the study assessed how formerly-disdained cultural art forms, particularly video films, engage with a country’s political past. This reveals the modes by which Okome’s (2003) urban sub-altern speak to and of the political power of the day and to themselves as well. By so doing, it contributes to the body of literature devoted to the political consciousness of the films previously described by Nigerian intellectuals as apolitical and a cottage industry which is giving Nigeria a bad image (Onyekakeyah, 2009). Nollywood narratives are constructed in similar ways regardless of genre, with the exception of footage intended to historicise the events. The use of flashbacks and metaphors is predominant, allowing for multiple and extended readings of the film texts.

Dialogues hold a special position in the films. Due to budgetary constraints and educational backgrounds, pre-production efforts are slim. This deficiency is accommodated in dialogues, which are used to fill in the visual absences. The ideological critiques drew largely from the social and political order of the country to flag the consciousness of state affairs among filmmakers. As was demonstrated above, the films contained elements that promoted and subverted the ideological projects of the periods and people represented by making them appear natural and commonsensical. On occasions, the filmmakers' agenda were thwarted by the cinematic choices, which validate Barber's (1987) assertion on cultural producers' inadvertent loss of control over their art.

If as Atton (2002) argues, "alternative media possess the capacity to generate non-standard, often infractory, methods of creation, production and distribution" (p. 4), then it is safe to assume that the films discussed in this research might be seen in the broad context of communication studies as alternative media. Throughout the chapters, Barber's idea on the emergence of popular arts from people without access to official public communication channels was repeated. That idea shares a relationship with Atton's alternative media, which originates from the grassroots. But if by alternative media, the transformational and radical character of underground press is meant, then it might be presumptuous to label Nollywood as such. For indeed, the capacity of the films discussed in this research to provoke social change is yet to be fully developed (Abah, 2009). The extent to which these Nollywood films might be conceived as alternative media in Lacey's (2009) sense is also not fully admissible. Lacey suggests that "alternative media operate outside formal conventions...to disorientate the audience by suggesting the possibility of other ways of seeing" (p. 126).

The methods employed to arrive at the findings include informal observation, textual analysis and interviews with filmmakers and journalists. The inclusion of journalists as unique audiences was the result of a methodological problem which this study creatively solved and proposes as a useful means of not only feeling the pulse of the film industry, but also of looking at films made in the past, for which reasonable documentation is absent. This reinforces the film-filmmaker-audience paradigm of studying Nollywood which this study enthusiastically promotes.

9.2 Key Findings of the Research and Original Contribution to Knowledge

In African popular arts studies, and in particular Nollywood, research triangulation is important because filmmakers and individuals rarely say negative things about themselves, hence the need to interrogate their colleagues and collaborators. In other words, self-reporting masks a whole range of abilities, motivations, feelings and reactions positively and negatively. Positively for those who choose to be modest about their achievements and negatively for filmmakers who tend to overstate their capacities and competencies.

Readings of African popular arts reflected an understanding of cultural products as dominant sites of contestation, resistance and political power tussles (Stuart Hall, 1998; Karin Barber, 1987; Chris Waterman, 1990). It also reflected art as the domains of cultural identity and hierarchical structures which shape and are shaped by the people that produce and consume them. However, existing literature also showed that, because popular arts are powerful and often resonate with the masses, they are equally deployed for political endorsements and national/community education, Kinsey Katchka (2000).

Other findings include:

- Every history is past, but not every past is history. Until the past is mediated and accounted for, it is not history. This mediation, as expected, is invariably positional and subjective. Scholars have a great tendency to use both terms interchangeably.
- African film scholars note that post-colonial filmmaking in Africa was built on a decolonisation agenda (which means that the filmmakers looked backwards for stories and themes) whereas those of Nigerian film affirm that filmmaking is largely about contemporary issues and anxieties. This partly accounts for the insufficient academic attention given to films that depict the past, hence the uniqueness of this study. The political context of film production, distribution and consumption make the discourse of post-colonial theory a necessary tool for reading and interpreting the video films.
- Murphy (2000) makes a strong case for the usefulness of post-colonial theory in unpacking the commonalities existent in African arts and culture, noting the

tendency of some theorists to disregard the differences inherent in various African states and cultures. He further observes that “post-colonialism explores links between African cultures in the light of their shared history of colonial exploitation and their rebellion against this oppression in its various forms (without assuming that this shared experience is identical in every African state)” (p. 248). As already mentioned, Nigerian film-makers did not set out with a decolonization agenda as their counterparts in the Francophone countries. What they sought to resist through their films is their own government’s repression, corruption and lack of accountability. Therefore, Murphy’s position, while not adopted wholesale enabled an understanding of what filmmaking (cultural production) might look like in a post-colony.

- Nigerian cinema has its roots in the Yoruba travelling theatre. The former is therefore heavily influenced by stage and later by television (W. Fanu, personal communication, August 9, 2012). The third chapter traced the link between the travelling theatre and the modern video film practice.
- Directly relevant to my study are the articles of two film scholars – Chukwuma Okoye (2007a) and Françoise Ugochukwu (2014) because they make direct references to the notion of ‘history’ in the video films. The first examines the portrayal of the Nigerian Civil War in *Battle of Love* while the second interrogates the 1987 Kano riots in *Love in Vendetta*. Both reveal the points in which video filmmakers enter (and their degrees of engagement with) the historical discourses of ethnicity, nationhood, conflict and intercultural communication. Several other articles and book chapters describe the role of filmmakers as political commentators and keen observers of government agencies.
- With reference to methodological literature, it was observed that scholars approached Nigerian videos on the basis of two paradigms:
 - theory-film-researcher and
 - theory-film-researcher-filmmaker

The first depends on textual analysis and interpretation by the researcher while the second performs textual analysis and interviews with filmmakers. When Nollywood audiences are studied, they are done in isolation, neglecting the reception of specific films and their producers. Recognising the merits of previous studies as well as the gap created by the inability of linking production to consumption, this study proposes a different paradigm: theory-researcher-film-filmmaker-audience (or the last three components since the first two are usually taken for granted in academic contexts). This was realised through textual analyses of specific films, interviews with the producers/directors/affiliates of those films and with ‘disciplined audiences’ (film journalists). Undoubtedly, this yielded a richer understanding of video films in which significant past events are re-enacted and the overall ‘health’ of the film industry measured. The theoretical insights from Barber’s African popular arts and ideological projects, Hall’s representation, Kellner’s ideology critique enabled the realisation of this unique assessment of the modes and codes of constructing Nigeria’s political past through video films.

This study contributes to the discourse on historical and political representation in African video film. It perceptively recognises the possibilities, practicalities, boundaries and limitations of media representation and interpretation in post-colonial Africa. Through its findings, the study highlights the implications of constructing a political past for filmmakers, academics, policy makers and the general public. First, filmmakers ought to demonstrate a sensitive awareness of the socio-political subjectivities of their cultural milieu. By extension, historicising controversial political periods will necessarily continue metaphorically and marginally in such circumstances, if theirs and societal interests must be protected. Such representations ought to be creatively articulated to express alternative critical voices without drawing the ire of the Censors Board. Filmmakers must also hold consultations with historians and stakeholders in a bid to ameliorate potential unintended consequences of their films for better quality narratives.

Second, academic debates on Nollywood’s modes of representation and its local and global impact are on the increase. Africans on the continent and in the diaspora are avid consumers of Nollywood films as attested to by Krings and Okome (2013) in striking similarity to Bollywood’s rise and consumption in “the Indian subcontinent and

among the South Asian diaspora” (Thussu, 2006: 200). This study affords fresh, unique and inclusive perspectives on motivation, narration, ideology and reception of video films that envision Nigeria’s political history. It posits alternatives to dominant theoretical and methodological positions on the study of African popular arts, and contributes to Daya Thussu’s notion of ‘the rise of the rest’ in reference to local and global information flows of Bollywood and other media producers from the global South. It further imparts a critical Nigerian perspective to the de-Westernising agenda of film scholars who question the imposition of western film theories and thought on African realities, as succinctly argued by Sholat and Stam (1994) and Petty (2012).

Third, policy makers, with particular reference to the NFVCB, must adopt a responsible disposition to filmic narratives and their creators. The tendency towards dictating or legislating film content has repeatedly failed, and when scrutinised is often seen to promote official agenda. This has detrimental effects on artistic expression especially when such creative prowess is directed at re-enacting national ‘histories’ on screen. Policy makers and regulators have to collaborate with filmmakers in creating sustainable and enabling environments rather than ‘lording’ it over them. This has to be actualised in a democratic administration if we are to go beyond the rhetoric of freedom of expression, mindfully exercised.

Fourth, the general public stands to benefit from enhanced film histories if the preceding three sectors are taken into consideration. As observed by the journalists interviewed in this study, the Nigerian audience is waiting for historical films, which for reasons espoused in the thesis are few and far between. At a time when the subject of history is being expunged from school curricula, might the audio-visual version not hold any promise for the historical consciousness of film audiences?

As already stated in different sections of this work, no research effort is absolute; none can claim the monopoly of knowledge on any discipline. The recognition of this leads to other questions that the insights from this research might raise. If this work has provided answers to the questions of motivation, narrative techniques, ideology and reception of a small number of films produced in south west Nigeria, it will undoubtedly raise similar (or different) concerns about the filmmaking practices in other parts of the country, and indeed the continent. The objective of the research was not to generalise the findings to all Nigerian or African experiences, but to

contribute to the debate on the politics and implications of Nollywood's system of representation through negotiated images of the past.

9.3 Suggestions for Further Studies

Suggestions for further studies include examining indigenous language films in their representations of the past and perhaps a widening of the time frame. This study limited its time frame to 1967–1998, which incidentally was predominantly military-led. The period in question has repeatedly seized the optic of many a poet, dramatists and novelists because of the prominent position that the events of the period occupy in the political history of Nigeria. However, what constituted the optic of literary figures became the blind spot of video filmmakers for reasons espoused in chapter 5 above. Without attempting to draw clear-cut parallels between literature and film, it was necessary to focus on this approach because Nollywood has become the most powerful producer of culture in sub-saharan Africa (Haynes) and is difficult to ignore (Okome) its productions.

It would be interesting to adopt the theory-researcher-film-filmmaker-audience paradigm for other film genres particularly the cultural epics, the Christian/religious films, the Hausa films, the romantic comedies which are fast becoming the dominant genre in Nigerian films today and possibly the diasporic Nigerian film. Also useful would be an examination of Nollywood through untested theories such as alternative media.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

Films	Year	Director
<i>76</i>	????	Izu Ojukwu
<i>Across the Niger</i>	2004	Izu Ojukwu
<i>Afonja</i>	2002	Jare Adeniregun
<i>Alpha</i>	1972	Ola Balogun
<i>Amazing Grace</i>	2005	Jeta Amata
<i>Anini</i>	2005	Fred Amata
<i>Arugba</i>	2008	Tunde Kelani
<i>Battle of Love</i>	2001	Simisola Opeoluwa
<i>Battle of Musanga</i>	1995	Bolaji Dawodu
<i>Being Mrs Elliot</i>	2014	Omoni Oboli
<i>Black Goddess</i>	1975	Ola Balogun
<i>Blues for a Prodigal</i>	1984	Wole Soyinka
<i>Bound for Lagos</i>	1962	Edric O'Connor Jurgen Pohland/Francis Oladele
<i>Bullfrog in the Sun</i>	1971	
<i>Cindy's Notes</i>	2008	Izu Ojukwu
<i>Crude War</i>	2011	Ugezu J. Ugezu
<i>Cry Freedom</i>	1981	Ola Balogun
<i>Culture in Tradition</i>	1963	Esso World Theatre
<i>Daybreak in Udi</i>	1949	Terry Bishop
<i>Death of a Black President</i>	1983	Eddie Ugbomah
<i>Dinner with the Devil</i>	1975	Sanya Dosunmu
<i>Domitilla</i>	1996	Zeb Ejiro
<i>Dr. Bello</i>	2013	Tony Abulu
<i>Dr. Oyenusi</i>	1976/7	Eddie Ugbomah
<i>Egg of Life</i>	2003	Andy Amenechi
<i>Fight for Freedom</i>	1977	Ola Balogun
<i>Gone with the Wind</i>	1939	Victor Fleming et al.
<i>Half of a Yellow Sun</i>	2013	Biyi Bandele
<i>Heart of Stone</i>	1995	
<i>Hotel Rwanda</i>	2004	Terry George
<i>I will Die for You</i>	2004	Charles Novia
<i>Ichabod</i>	1993	Izu Ojukwu
<i>Igodo</i>	1999	Andy Amenechi
<i>I'll Take My Chances</i>	2011	Desmond Elliot
<i>Invasion 1897</i>	2014	Lancelot Imasuen
<i>Invictus</i>	2009	Clint Eastwood
<i>Jenifa</i>	2008	Muyideen Ayinde
<i>Jodhaa Akbar</i>	2008	Ashutosh Gowariker
<i>Kongi's Harvest</i>	1970	Ossie Davies

<i>Koseegbe</i>	1996	Tunde Kelani
<i>Lagaan</i>	2001	Ashutosh Gowariker
<i>Liquid Black Gold</i>	2008	Ossy Okeke Jnr.
<i>Maami</i>	2011	Tunde Kelani
<i>Militants</i>	2007	Moses Inwang
<i>Moral Disarmament</i>	1957	
<i>Mortal Inheritance</i>	1996	Bond Emeruwa
<i>Muzik Man</i>	1976	Ola Balogun
<i>October (One) 1</i>	2014	Kunle Afolayan
<i>Oil Doom</i>	1978	Eddie Ugbomah
<i>Oil Village</i>	2001	Kalu Anya
<i>One Nigeria</i>	1969	Ola Balogun
<i>Osuofia in London</i>	2003	Kingsley Ogoro
<i>Saworoide</i>	1999	Tunde Kelani
<i>Sitanda</i>	2007	Izu Ojukwu
<i>Stubborn Grasshopper 1 & 2</i>	2001	Simisola Opeoluwa
<i>Tears of the Sun</i>	2003	Antoine Fuqua
<i>The Child</i>	2009/10	Izu Ojukwu
<i>The Last Vote</i>	2001	Andy Amenechi
<i>The Patriot</i>	2000	Roland Emmerich
<i>The President Must Not Die</i>	1983	Zeb Ejiro
<i>Titanic</i>	1997	James Cameron
<i>Vendor</i>	1990	Ladi Ladebo
<i>White Waters</i>	2007	Izu Ojukwu

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Filmmakers' Interview Questions

Introduction

In the interviews conducted with filmmakers, general questions relevant to the research such as filmmaker's background, industry constitution, genres, filmmaking costs, thrills and challenges were asked. Specific questions regarding cast, themes, narratives and reception of individual films were also asked.

1. Can you give a bit of your biography?
2. When did you begin your filmmaking career?
3. Where did you train?
4. What is your major motivation for making films?
5. What role, if any, does your ethnic background play in the kinds of stories you choose to tell?

Genres

6. Do you have a preference for any particular genre of films? Which and why?
7. Generally, what informs your choice of stories or themes?
8. To what extent has the Nigerian film industry portrayed any aspect of Nigerian history (historic period, events or individuals)?
9. Why did you choose to tell the Ken-Saro Wiwa story in *Oil Village*?
10. What motivated the film *Stubborn Grasshopper* knowing that the protagonist is considered by Nigerians to be a villainous character?
11. There is an assumption by Nigerian audiences that the portrayal of history in Nigerian films (civil war, coups, Niger Delta & Isaac Adaka Boro/Ken Saro-

wiwa, Nigeria's successes at football e.g. 1994 African Cup of Nations, 1999 elections etc) is deliberately avoided. What would you say about that?

12. It is perceived that satire is used as an excuse by filmmakers to justify their lack of research or in-depth storytelling. Would you agree or disagree with this statement. Why?

13. Does Nollywood have the potential to retell any bit of Nigerian history?

a) Why do you think so?

14. "The Nigerian audience is not interested in history films" How would you react to this statement made by a Nigerian filmmaker?

Filmmaking Experience

15. What has been your most rewarding film financially?

a) And artistically?

b) How do you fund (have you funded) your films?

16. What has been your most discouraging experience?

17. What would be your dream story?

18. What challenges do you have as a filmmaker?

19. What has been your most inspirational experience as a producer and director?

20. Can you give an estimate of total production cost of Oil Village and Stubborn Grasshopper

21. What was the experience like on:

a. Oil Village;

b. Stubborn Grasshopper?

22. And how does that (revenue and experience) compare with other productions of yours?

23. What is the typical/average length of your productions from pre-production to premiere/CD/DVD release?

Reactions to Nollywood from the Intelligentsia. Please respond to each

24. Femi Osofisan “For we cannot but remark that, however popular the films may be, and however much in demand, the picture that the majority of them present of our world is one that we must not only interrogate, but indeed reject very strongly, if what we seek is the transformation of our society into a modern, progressive state.” How would you respond to this assertion?
25. Steve Ayorinde “Not to make a foray into historical narratives will be inadequate for an industry that is producing so much. It can’t all be rituals and romance etc. There must be some other engagement with aspects of history even if we have to express displeasure or engage directors in terms of conclusions and narrative styles.” What is your opinion on this?
26. Reuben Abati “There is a crying need for professionalism in Nollywood. The industry, despite its popularity and impact is gradually being overtaken by home-grown mediocrity. Every actor and actress is a potential producer, movie director and screenplay writer. This "jack-of-all-trades" mentality reduces the quality of the output.” Would you consider this a valid statement?
27. Filmmakers and critics have tied the problem of piracy to a lack of adequate distribution outlets. Would you lend your voice to that?
28. Funding is a big problem in the industry and it is also the source of many conflicts. What do you make of the recent government interventions aimed at solving the problem of funding?

APPENDIX B

Journalists' Interview Questions

Introduction

In the interviews conducted with journalists, general questions relevant to the research were asked, but I often began with ice-breakers. These were comments on the journalist's previous writing on Nollywood or a particular film, director, producer or actor. Naturally, such ice-breakers varied according to the interviewees. For instance, the statement below opened the interviewing process with Steve Ayorinde, which he wrote in 2012.

“...as one who reckons that appreciation of cinematic arts is in his DNA, I join the celebration of this growing industry, with the fervent hope that its next 20 years will produce more of quality than quantity...with a rich history that is not tainted.”

1. Can you speak about the idea of quality you mean: subjects, ideas, themes presented, collaborations or what?
2. How long have you reported Nollywood and the creative industries?
3. What do you think is the motivation of Nigerian filmmakers beyond the much-reported commercial incentive?
4. Do you think there is an appreciable number of films depicting our national and political history?
5. If you were to identify a filmmaker who has attempted retelling Nigeria's political past, who would that be?
6. Was he successful at it and why/why not?
7. How is history produced and transmitted in Nigerian films – celluloid or video, from Eddie Ugboma to present filmmakers
8. What is the prevailing ideology in Nollywood? Has that changed over the years – before and after 1992?

9. How is history consumed in the celluloid and video film culture? The Nigerian audience is not prepared for it. How valid is that statement?
10. Are you familiar with the cultural epic genre e.g. *Igodo*? To what degree do they depict any aspect of Nigerian history?
11. To what extent has Nollywood engaged with historical events, people, periods?
12. Do you think it has been successful at such attempts, why/why not?
13. Have you seen *Across the Niger*, *Oil Village*, *Anini*, *Stubborn Grasshopper*, *Amazing Grace*, *Love in Vendetta*?
14. Can you share your thoughts on each of them/the ones you saw and wrote about when they were released?
15. Nollywood ought to be appreciated more as a product of a renaissance than circumstance. What do you mean please?
16. Nollywood as art is often compared to popular music and literature in Nigeria. Some critics have argued that “Nollywood still lags behind its music and literature cousins in critical appraisal (of what and who?) and global laurels.” What are your comments on that?
17. Similarly, “Nollywood is yet to produce its own Fela, Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe as music and literature have done with resounding acclaim.” What are your thoughts on that statement particularly when those literary scholars were politically and historically conscious?
18. In what ways can the media aid production, circulation and consumption of Nigeria’s political history in Nollywood, bearing in mind that censorship might deter the portrayal of history with political undertones?
19. Do you think journalistic writing can compel the powers that be to create enabling environments for film practitioners? How so?
20. In your opinion, has the NFVCB aided the industry’s possibilities in narrating history or not?

21. Some filmmakers are of the opinion that historical films will not be appreciated by Nigeria's movie lovers, hence their avoidance of the genre. What do you think of that assertion?
22. What do you consider to be Nollywood's biggest challenge in general and particularly with respect to producing history?
23. Has the government's two-time financial intervention addressed the film industry's real problems as you understand them?

APPENDIX C

List of Interviewees

Filmmakers

Date of				
S/N	Interview	Interviewees	Designation	Duration
1	16-Feb-12	Fred Amata	Dir, <i>Anini</i>	87 minutes
2	20-Feb-12	Kalu Anya	Dir, <i>Oil Village</i>	69 minutes
3	24-Jul-12	Bayo Awala	Producer	53 minutes
			Film-maker and	
4	09-Aug-12	Wale Fanu	technician	67 minutes
5	12-Feb-13	Tunde Kelani	Dir, <i>Oleku</i>	70 minutes
6	13-Feb-13	Kemi Adesoye	Screenwriter	138 minutes
			Co-producer, Stubborn	
7	23-Mar-13	Neville Ossai	Grasshopper	18 minutes
8	29-Mar-13	Andy Amenechi	Director	131 minutes
9	04-Apr-13	Chikezie Donatus	Film-maker/marketer	32 minutes
10	06-Apr-13	Franklin Okoro	Producer	69 minutes
11	26-Apr-13	Amaka Igwe	Producer	20 minutes
12	25-Jul-13	Zeb Ejiro	Producer	77 minutes
13	21-Aug-13	Ishaya Bako	Director	22 minutes
		Alexis Onome-		
14	23-Aug-13	Egborge	Film editor	39 minutes
15	23-Aug-13	Bobhope Iregbu	Production Manager	40 minutes
16	29-Aug-13	Kingsley Ogoro	Producer, <i>Battle of Love</i>	43 minutes
17	13-Sep-13	Bond Emeruwa	Film director/CONGA	94 minutes
18	07-Jul-14	Simi Opeoluwa	Dir, <i>Battle of Love</i>	90 minutes
19	16-Oct-13	Sam Onwuka	Producer, <i>S. Grasshopper</i>	Telephone
20	30-May-14	Henry Legemah	Producer, <i>Anini</i>	Whatsapp
21	25-Feb-13	Emem Isong	Producer	E-mail
22	Turned down	Izu Ojukwu	Dir, <i>Across the Niger</i>	
23	Turned down	Tade Ogidan	Producer	

Journalists

24	11-Apr-13	Rukaino Umukoro	Tell Magazine	48 minutes
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25	06-May-13	Steve Ayorinde	National Mirror	64 minutes
26	07-May-13	Yejide Ogundare	Nigerian Tribune	47 minutes
27	11-May-13	Jahman Anikulapo	The Guardian	63 minutes
28	15-May-13	Akintayo Abodurin Nseobong Okon-	Nigerian Tribune	65 minutes
29	17-May-13	ekong	This Day	72 minutes
30	18-May-13	Ben Njoku	Vanguard	49 minutes
31	20-May-13	Funke Osae-Brown	Business Day	E-mail interview
32	24-May-13	Olumide Iyanda	Saturday Independent	43 minutes
33	26-May-13	Shaibu Husseini	Freelance/The Guardian	E-mail interview
34	28-May-13	Anote Ajeluoru	The Guardian	E-mail interview
35	28-May-13	Azuh Amatus	Entertainment Express	61 minutes
36	03-Jun-13	Derin Ajao	Freelance/234 Next	E-mail interview
37	Turned down	Victor Akande	The Nation	
38	Turned down	Sola Balogun	The Sun	
39	Turned down	Hakeem Lasisi	The Punch	
40	Turned down	Okey Uwaezuoke	This Day	