

## **NOLLYWOOD FILMS AND SECURITY CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA: ANALYSIS OF WAR FRONT AND RED MAFIAS**

**Chibuike M. Abunike**

*Department Of Theatre And Film Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Anambra State.  
abunikechibuike@gmail.com, cm.abunike@unizik.edu.ng  
08036617447, 08083182776*

### **Abstract**

In a society like Nigeria where lots of societal problems such as armed robbery, poverty, advanced fee fraud, juvenile delinquency, murder, kidnapping, child and human trafficking and high level of illiteracy among others, are highly prevalent, there is an urgent need to seek solutions to these problems. Film as an indispensable work of art has remained a tool to mirror the ills in the society and present it before the audience for critical evaluation. The questions raised and answered in this work are, ‘Do the films produced by Nollywood proffer solutions to these problems or are the problems just projected? Do Nollywood film producers really justify the essence of violence in their films? How does violence in films affect the viewers?’ This research work evaluates the impact of Nollywood films on the Nigerian society vis-a-vis the current security challenges facing the country. It contends that its establishment has helped greatly in developing talents, and serves as a medium of entertainment and communication. It also highlights various critics that praised the ability of Nollywood industry in the past and expresses concern on the reverse focus on the negative themes and its negative impact on youths’ behaviour and the image of Nigeria society. The qualitative method of research formed the basis of this work. As a qualitative method, inferences were drawn from relevant books, academic journals, magazines to further validate the data analyzed. The research therefore critically examine the Nollywood films and security challenges in Nigeria using *War Front 1&2* (2004) and *Red Mafias 1&2* (2014) as paradigms.

### **Introduction**

Nollywood has also come under harsh criticism. These criticisms, which are centered on violence and modes of production are indicative of the importance placed on the industry. The

video film has a great influence and impact on the viewers and their general attitude. Stella Okunna states that:

The film as a mass medium can create new opinions and cause a shift in attitudes and values that have not been strongly entrenched. However, their greatest strength lies in reinforcing existing attitudes. (23)

There is need therefore, for the movie makers to properly scrutinize the quality of their productions, especially in terms of their social, moral values and violence inherent in them. The early Nigerian films actually emphasized on culture and history and to some extent morality. Perhaps, the success of Nollywood today could be attributed to the ability of present day movie makers to emphasize contemporary realities which many Nigerians and Africans can relate to, such as: Divorce, Love, Violence, Political instability and unemployment, but today the reverse is the case because the main focus is on the negative side that is capable of tainting the image of the Nigerian society.

In contemporary home video, the movie practitioners seem to be interested in their net profit rather than considering the social and moral consequences of their production. John Bittner opines that:

The message of the movies, like a bullet would be received by the individual directly, and it would have immediate effect on him, persuading him to do exactly the way the movie message advocates... (41-42)

As we all know, films are highly influential. Thompson Andy attests to this when he said that, 'Films are the country's most influential media.' (3) In view of this, some scholars are of the opinion that films influence the people in a society negatively rather than positively. Violence is found in all societies. It is not just an episodic problem affecting two or more individuals but a

structural and strategic problem rooted in wider, social, economic, organizational and cultural factors. It is a social phenomenon, which bears social costs.

The Nollywood video films dates back to the 90s. The movies produced initially were in Yoruba language but by the early 90s, Igbo producers and marketers arrived on the scene. They began to dominate the movie industry and have continued even till date. These home videos treat 3 so many topical issues. Such issues include: money making rituals, class distinctions, love, HIV/AIDS, widowhood, inheritance, witchcraft, poverty, armed robbery, kidnapping, prostitution and so on. In most of these issues, violence and security challenges can be seen as a recurring theme.

However, the industry has been accused of over-emphasizing negative themes by critics, and the industry's over-emphasis on negative themes is becoming a national concern. The National Film and Video Censors Board, the industry's regulatory body in its guidelines for motion picture producers, as a result, called for productions to be above board in portrayal of violence, crimes, sex, and pornography, vulgarity, obscenity, religion and other sensitive subjects(NFVCB 2000: 107-111).

As a result, The National Film and Video Censor Board imposed a ban on many films such as; 'I hate my village 1' for promoting cannibalism and failing to uphold Nigeria's cultural values. The board also placed bans on seven films: 'Shattered Home', 'Outcast 1&2', 'Night Out' (Girls for Sale)', 'Omo Empire', 'Isakaba 4', 'Terrorist Attack', and 'Unseen Forces' due to lawlessness and upholding of immorality and cannibalism by the producers.

An analysis of these selected movies reveal that issues highlighted in them include: violent robbery, ritual performances, rivalry, conflicts, sexual violence, organized crime, prostitution,

murder, greed, avarice, impatience, jealousy, envy, pride, arrogance, infidelity, treachery, occultism and so on.

Gerbner cited that the media violence has negative effects on the youths. He calls it “The main world syndrome”. According to him, people exposed to so much violence have a perception that the world is a far more dangerous place than it really is.

This research work examined Nollywood films and the security challenges in Nigeria. This was done with a view to accessing the level of inimical influences that the two films under study have on the Nigerian society. In the final analysis, one would be able to decide whether any of these video films will have either a negative or a positive impact on the society. In more precise terms, analysis of these Nollywood video films led this study into deciding the level of violence and security challenges posed by Nigerian video films.

### **Security Challenges in Nollywood Films**

The Nigeria society has come under inevitable influences of the home video movie like every other society in the world. A look at the content of the bulk of contemporary Nigeria movies reveals that though its materials are drawn from aspects of life and existence, the treatment and resulting message is usually ridiculous, negative and damaging. Thus Ademola says and advises:

Considering the incontrovertible fact that most movie stories draw their contents from ‘slices of life’ obtainable from their immediate environment... The movie story must be fashioned substantially from materials familiar to or acknowledged as universally human by both the viewer and the writer/film maker. (1)

This is because the impact of movie on the people is a reflection and representation of the image of the society they come from. Although, movies have the dual role of reflecting and influencing

the dominant culture of a given society, it should reinforce existing values, traditions and customs of the people. Yet, this does not mean they should not query some despicable and 18 unacceptable political, economic, cultural and traditional practices that endanger the social equilibrium of the society.

Nollywood films in its massive production have come to serve as a landmark in Nigeria. The home movies, after watching them thoroughly are often found to be interesting and have lessons to convey to the audience. But in most cases, actions like shooting, killing, fighting, sex scandal, arson, stealing, armed robbery, rape and murder are commonly seen in these films and they tend to make these acts easy for the Nigeria children/youth in real life. Such films like *Blood Sister*, *Across the Border* are implicated. Home videos before they go into the market are supposed to be scrutinized by the Censors Board. The National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) was set up under decree No.85 of 1993, but never began operation until December 1994 when the film industry witnessed phenomenal growth and sanitization. As specified under that decree, the function of NFVCB include censorship and classification of films and issuing of license to a person or persons to exhibit films, regulating and prescribing safety precautions to be observed in licensed premises, registration of films, exhibition premises, video production studios, video clubs, professional exhibitions, distributors and marketers license, keeping records of video producers in the country.

In classifying films and video movies they issue certificate of censorship on all films examined, analyzed and classified by its committee. Though the technical aspects of presentations do not fall within the portfolio of the Censors Board, they, nevertheless help producers to build up the technical quality and professional finishing of products placed before it by asking them to effect necessary corrections of technical lapses or mistakes before releasing it to the public.

Udeh Roseline, the former Director-General National Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) speaks on the Nigeria film industry, movie productions and the activities of her Board in, “Nigeria is not a country of ritualists and criminals.” According to her;

Everybody is tired of a situation whereby some filmmakers have stock to the outside world. They project Nigerians as cruel and vulgar people full of rituals and violence. (1)

Home videos lack the proper way of sending their messages across, especially to the Nigerian youths as they all simply watch the movies and actions displayed in the films and tend to practice such. Furthermore, Roseline reacted to the people’s belief that films and movies produced in Nigeria are woven around mundane issues, violence and witchcraft. In her opinion;

The board has had cause to issue warnings in the past to film producers to desist from producing movies that revolve around violence, witchcraft, cultism, devilish acts, spiritualism, etc. (2)

She warned that such films will no longer receive the approval of the Board for public release and the Nigeria film producers should stop portraying Nigerians in bad light. Reacting to Nigerians display of violence, she observed that if a film classified as violent gets into the home, it is the responsibility of parents to ensure that these movies are not watched/viewed by their children.

Ademola James commenting on the influence of movies asked, ‘Can any movie with its combined power of sound and vision become so impactful as to challenge any society more and wrestle them to the ground?’ (20)

The Nigerian home movies are gradually causing the extinction of Nigerian culture, tradition and social norms. Africans before the colonial encounter were known for their cultural 20 heritage,

sense of decency, self-respect, respect for others and elders. Unfortunately, everything has changed in the contemporary society and things seem to be in disarray. The Nigerian youths have become so crazy about western life that they have gone extra mile in imbibing western culture without caring about the implications.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Some theorist believe that the media has an all powerful persuasive influence in shaping and manipulating people's attitudes, their likes and dislikes, regarding their social, political and economic matters. According to Okere:

Bullet theory is likened to a bullet released at a member of the audience. Like a bullet, the message will be received by the individual directly and it would have an immediate and powerful effect on her, persuading her to behave exactly the way the message advocated. (13).

Here, the audience is seen as being weak, passive and unsuspected atomized pigeon totally at the mercy of the media, devoid of social interaction and relationship. This theory is also called the Hypodermic Syringe theory. It is believed that the media message acts like the contents of a hypodermic syringe, which when emptied into an audience member will have an instant effect like the drug from the syringe. The view of the Bullet Theory is very similar to what the social control theory thinks of the effects of the mass media which film is one of them. This theory states that receivers of mass communication message are passive and the mass media can therefore control and influence members of the audience. This means that the social control theory of communication sees the mass media as powerful and persuasive. Members of mass communication audience are seen as weak and in danger of having their values and behaviours changed by the mass media messages.

These theories (Bullet and Social Control) are based on the Source-Message-Receive-Effect (SMRE) model of mass media communication effects. The basic assumption of the model is that people receive information directly from the mass media and react individually to such information.

Cultivation Theory is one of the most interesting social theories to have explored the impact of media on society. Attributed to George Gerbner and Larry Gross, the cultivation theory historically examines the role of television in the society. It is perhaps most appropriate that the theory take roots in the 1960s and 70s when the rock music and hippie culture was the order of the day. It was the time when TV programming featuring violence, witnessed raging popularity, especially amongst the young and impressionable. With the decline of hypodermic needle theories a new perspective began to emerge: the stalagmite theories. Theorists used the metaphor of stalagmite theories to suggest that media effects occur analogously to the slow build-up of formations on cave floors, which take their interesting forms after eons of the steady dripping of limewater from the cave ceilings above. One of the most popular theories that fit this perspective is cultivation theory. Cultivation theory (sometimes referred to as the cultivation hypothesis or cultivation analysis) Cultivation theorists argue that television has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. Core Assumptions and Statements Cultivation theory in its most basic form, suggests that television is responsible for shaping, or ‘cultivating’ viewers’ conceptions of social reality. The combined effect of massive television exposure by viewers over time subtly shapes the perception of social reality for individuals and, ultimately, for our culture as a whole. Gerbner argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together. He has argued that television tends to



cultivate middle-of-the-road political perspectives. Gerbner called this effect ‘mainstreaming’. Cultivation theorists distinguish between ‘first order’ effects (general beliefs about the everyday world, such as about the prevalence of violence) and ‘second order’ effects (specific attitudes, such as to law and order or to personal safety). There is also a distinction between two groups of television viewers: the heavy viewers and the light viewers. The focus is on ‘heavy viewers’. People who watch a lot of television are likely to be more influenced by the ways in which the world is framed by television programmes than the individuals who watch less, especially regarding topics of which the viewer has little first-hand experience. Light viewers may have more sources of information than heavy viewers. ‘Resonance’ describes the intensified effect on the audience when what people see on television is what they have experienced in life. This double dose of the televised message tends to amplify the cultivation effect.

### **Violence in the Society as Reflected in Teco Benson’s War Front and Vincent Anointed’s Red Mafias**

The benefits of home movies notwithstanding have been criticized for some of its adverse effects on the youths such as portrayal of crime, shooting, prostitution, armed robbery, arsons, rape, murder, stealing and killing. According to Madden, “violence has been and still is fertile ground responsible for the growth of film right from its inception.”(6). The Nollywood has come a long way because of the high rate of demand of violent movies, which obviously fetch more money. Owing to a lot of criticism, a onetime film director once asked why do films choose to include so much violence? The man answered that the viewers enjoy watching violence films. But as regards to this, violent films do influence to a substantial extent the personality of the youths in Nigeria. This is because some youths are believed to be gullible in terms of copying everything in the society. Therefore, it is discovered that such films cause some youths to act

violently and then contributing to the exposure of the impressionable Nigeria youths to violent films and turning the nation to a violent nation. Parents should protect youths from crime and violent movies as we protect them from physical dangers. The influx of certain films which feature supernatural characters, sex and violence have been known to cause instability in view's mind. Every violent act a youth witnessed on film is like a small weight placed on the balanced and no psychologist guarantees that the balance would not trip thereby triggering violent acts by people or youths who had appeared normal.

The home movies which mankind invented are now destroying mankind. All the criminal codes and immoral behaviour youths exhibit today, are a response to what they picked up from the films they spend hours watching everyday. It is unfortunate that we will labour ourselves so much to acquire video sets to keep our growing youths busy at home, it never occurred to us that the type of film they are exposed to still have a direct effect in the moulding of characters.

According to NFVCB, most of the locally produced video films brought before it for registration, evaluation and classification revolved around uncontrolled tendency for sexual display, bloodiness, incest, violence, poisoning, occultism, cultism, fetishism, witchcrafts, voodooism, devilish spiritualism and so on. This is to ensure that most films exploit on these topics or themes (listed above) of negative cultural tendencies in our present and past sociocultural milieus.

The evolution of home video film in Nigeria is part of information dissemination channel; others include newspaper, magazines, television and computers. The trend of video in Nigeria and the world in general has moved from positive to negative impact on the general society. This has resulted to public outcry against the obscene content of video. During the early stages of film production in Nigeria, films such as *Living in Bondage*, *Igodo*, *Ijele* and so on were used to teach

morals as well as promote culture. Later on, the film producers owing to their insatiable quest for profit started deviating from producing good and moral films. They delved into producing films that are on western cultures. These films incorporate actions of corrupt practices which are now influencing the Nigeria youths as well as causing insecurity. These corrupt and violent practices are well reflected in *War Front* and *Red Mafias*. The use of axe, daggers, and guns carelessly in the two films shows that the directors of the two films under study do not have any regard on the negative consequences these acts will endanger in our society with regards to our present insecurity challenges in the country.

Odukomaye Segun affirms that the youthful age is the period of life between childhood and maturity, it is a transition period for the individual, it is a very dedicate stage when one forms opinion about life. There has been a lot of controversy over the age range of youths, as a result, it differs from one society to another.

The Common Wealth Youth Programme ranges youth from fifteen years to twenty-nine years (15-29), while the Nigerian Constitution ranges youth from eighteen-thirty-five years (18- 35). This is to say that the youths constitute a large number in the total population of Nigeria. The youths are of great importance to Nigeria society because they are the labour force. Due to their level of vulnerability, they can easily be influenced by film and the media. Orji Iyke posits that:

The youths all over the world are highly valued and cherished, they have been variously described as, the trustees of the nation, the hope of future, the origin of the society and the leaders of tomorrow. (47).

The youth has to be catered for, protected and disciplined in order to maintain a peaceful society, unfortunately, film producers no longer encourage our youths to watch good, educative, or

Christian films or movies from which they can learn good morals rather only those that corrupt and even destroy them. Aghamelu Fidelis affirms that:

Corruption enthrones sorts of moral negatives such that the entire youthful energy are directed against life and when this persists, it develops a routine negative frame of mind the highest point of moral disperspective. (37).

No wonder the Holy Bible stressed in the book of Proverb, “Train up a child in the way he should go and when he grows up he will never depart from it.” Nollywood films lay more emphasis on evil practices such as violence, lesbianism, prostitution, robbery, forgery and indecent dressing, which emanated as a result of imitation of western cultures. These practices have influenced to a greater extent the lives of our youth. As a result of this, corruption becomes highly obtainable in our present Nigeria society. According to Orji:

The youth should strive to bring back the lost glories of our cultural heritage through their mode of dressing, interactions and socialization and stop being unfortunate imitators of various decadent and unholy foreign cultural values. (47).

The restoration of our cultural heritage is more dependent on film producers than the youths because researchers have been able to come to a clear conclusion that projection of corrupt practices encourage corruption and this is as a result of the influential power of film. Thus, Barns, Roberta states:

We learn by observing and imitating behaviour. Role models act as stimuli to produce similar behaviour in the observers of the role model, behaviour is learnt by being imitated, rewarded or reinforced in variety of ways. (389).

The youths are therefore modeling violence because there are no good legacies to be modeled. As these violent practices persist, there emerges societal unrest which eventually leads to be

political instability, economic backwardness and cultural extinction. Ukachukwu Okorie affirms that, “The youth who are victims of societal influence are also victims of societal injustice.” (36).

## **Conclusion**

Some Nigerian Home Movie producers have failed to make any strong comment against social ills in our society; instead use them in their messages without realizing that arts can be viewed as having therapeutic effect that can both mirror and heal the society of its perceived ills.

From this research work, it is obvious that most movies produced by the Nigerian movie industry have negative impact on the Nigeria society. The latest trend in fashion presently was introduced by Home Video actresses and also corrupt practices such as violence, sex, crime etc 58 are attributed to the influence of home videos. Hence this study is able to establish that home video films in Nigeria affect the youths negatively.

One question that critics have failed to answer is that, whose job is it when youths watch movies and often times get influenced by what they have seen?, is it the parents!, the regulators!, or the youths themselves?

Though the intention of these producers are usually to impact positively on the society through mirroring deviant behaviours, but the execution is where they are usually faulted instead of giving a suitable punishment to a deviant characters, they end up glamorizing the character, hence, making our youths get the wrong message.

Considering the negative consequences Nollywood film has on Nigerian especially the teeming youths such as loss of moral values, it becomes important that all suggested intervention strategies already discussed be put into practice. The research has also exposed the need for

Nollywood film makers to not only be interested in producing several movies but producing film with that won't hurt the sensibility of Nigerians. The research has drawn attention to this neglected aspect of film making in Nigeria

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