

Towards a theorization of communal war subgenre of action film in selected Nollywood films

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ABSTRACT: The action film is one film genre that has attracted serious attention in scholarship. The hero in this genre is presented in a plethora of challenging situations that primarily revolve around violence, close fights, desperate chases, explosions and other life-threatening physical conditions. The action film in Nollywood currently focuses only on an infinitesimal aspect of Nigerian life basically revolving around armed bandits, drug organizations and human trafficking amongst others. Given that Nigeria is a country that is replete with a vast history of heroic activities, this study attempts to expand the horizon to the study of the action film genre in Nollywood by investigating its conventional codes from other aspects of Nigerian life, particularly from the communal war experience. The study is guided by the theory of genre as a framework to analyze two purposively sampled films namely: *Invasion 1897*, and *Battle of Musanga*. This research adopts the qualitative methodology of textual interpretation of the selected films to arrive at its results. Among its findings is the fact that apart from the mainstream action film genre in Nollywood, observable features of the genre are copiously found in communal war backgrounds of traditional Nigerian society. This study contributes to knowledge by delineating the codes and conventions that could aid critical discourses on the Communal War sub-generic classification of the action film in Nollywood. It is, therefore part of the recommendations of this study that more attention is paid to the development of indigenous canons to aid intellectual discourses on the African film.

Keywords: Action film, *Battle of Musanga*, communal war, *Invasion 1897*, Nigeria, Nollywood.

INTRODUCTION

The action film genre is basically a category of a film which explores an ethical interplay between good and bad characters (Iloma and Shaka, 2018). In this film category, the protagonist fights against inconceivable odds and as a result, finds himself entangled in a series of life threatening conditions that typically revolve around violence, physical exploits, chase, pursuit, narrow escapes and explosions amongst others. Yvonne as cited in Iloma and Shaka (2018) posits that the action film genre is the foremost genre in contemporary Hollywood cinema, generating extensive critical debates in the process. Evidently, the success of this film genre in Hollywood has established a cadre of reputable actors which includes: Sylvester Stallion, Arnold Schwarzenegger, James Bond, Chuck Norris, and Steven Spielberg amongst others.

Given the extraordinary popularity of this film genre in

Hollywood, many film scholars in Nigeria tend to analyze the action film genre in Nollywood from the point of view of the American background. As an extremely advanced society, America is primarily driven by science and technology which is manifest in virtually every aspect of its existence, be it health sector, banking, manufacturing, transportation, military, commerce, education, entertainment and others. It is this preponderance of science and technology in American social existence that has greatly impacted the action film genre in Hollywood. Film and indeed, literature being mirrors and reflectors of society take responsibility for reproducing social realities around it. Hence, the action film genre in America is predominantly propelled by the highly advanced scientific and technological life in the country. The exuberant use of stunts, magnificent visual illusions of even unbelievable life

situations and the likes are depictions of the outstanding powers of technology which sustains the genre.

While some of these hi-tech scientific features of Hollywood can be scarcely found in developing Nigerian society, limited available literature on the action film genre in Nollywood tends to be faithfully reliant on the Hollywood paradigms in the evaluation of the genre.

Whereas results of such studies may be plausible in few situations, limiting the Nollywood action film genre to a very infinitesimal aspect of the Nigerian socio-cultural life constitutes a serious problem. Even more problematic is the fact that this limited aspect of the Nigerian life which dominates critical discourses in the study of the action film genre in Nollywood is purely elitist. Accessibility to the limited available aircrafts, state of the arts medical technologies, cruisy cars, fantasy buildings, exotic military hard-wares and the likes which play dominantly in Hollywood action films is exclusively a bourgeoisie affair in Nigeria. Only a few classes of people have access to these.

Moreover, the obvious differences in cultural backgrounds between America and Nigeria viz-a- viz Hollywood and Nollywood pose a serious problem of incompatibility between the two film cultures: There is, therefore a predisposition to yielding faulty results as a consequence of applying the same instruments to different variables. It is perhaps, the dilemma arising from his unsuccessful attempt to contextualize the paradigms of the action film genre of Hollywood in Nigeria that prompts Ayakoroma (2014) to arrive at a result that declares the action film genre in Nollywood as untimely.

In a research titled: Trends in Nollywood, Ayakoroma (2014), while attempting to contextualize the action film genre in Nollywood brings the following films to critical evaluation: Teco Benson's *Executive Crime* (2000), *State of Emergency* (2000), Chiko Ejiro's *Escape from Congo* (2000), Zeb Ejiro's *The President Must Not Die* (2004), Ogoro's *Across The Niger* (2004) and Tarila Thompson's *State of Emergency 2* (2005), His discovery of lack of technical depth and expertise in gun battles, military warfare and arms and ammunitions handling is indicative that the researcher might be searching for the technical qualities which propel the genre in Hollywood rather than Nollywood. His conclusion that the genre is premature in Nollywood further highlights his inability to comfortably locate these paradigms in the selected Nollywood films.

The issue being foregrounded here is the lack of suitable indigenous theoretical canons to situate the action film genre in Nollywood. The need to search for what works for the genre in the Nigerian context is, therefore indispensable. Consequent to this background, this study attempts to expand the horizon of global discourses on the subject of the action film genre by investigating communal wars in Nigeria. Successful exploration of this discourse shall prospectively lead to the discovery of a robust action film culture in Nollywood through the communal war sub-genre.

Towards a theorization of communal war subgenre of action film in Nollywood

The Communal War Subgenre of an action film as envisioned in this paper is conceptualized against the background of providing appropriate theoretical postulates to the practices of wars in traditional Africa in contextual evaluation with the action film genre. As a people distinct in history, culture and religion, communal rivalries constitute a fundamental part of the African life. These rivalries which may be communal or tribal arise as violent means of venting anger over conflicting issues. Some of such which stem from conflicting situations arising from a quest for territorial expansion and annexation, farmer-herder crises, land disputes, power tussles, chieftaincy problems and the likes result in serious conflicts.

Ola Rotimi's play text titled: *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1978) tells the story of an attack and complete devastation of the land of Kutuje by the people of Ikolu. Speaking through the Narrator, Rotimi reveals that at the demise of King Adetusa, the king of Kutuje, the Ikolu people took advantage of the absence of the king to attack Kutuje, "they killed hundreds, they seized hundreds, they enslaved hundreds more and left behind in the land of Kutuje, hunger, thirst and fear" (Ola, 1978) he says. In a swift response, however, Odewale, a man who had been wandering from land to land in a futile search for peace arrives Kutuje, gathers the degraded people, leads a reprisal attack on Ikolu, conquered Ikolu, freed their (Kutuje's) enslaved captives, annexed their (Ikolu's) land and took over their resources. It is consequent upon these heroic exploits that the people of Kutuje in appreciation defiled their age long tradition and crowned him, a supposed stranger, their king.

Similarly, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1992) spotlights Ola Rotimi's literary interpretation of a historical account of the conquest of the Benin Empire by the British colonizers. The play tells how the Benin people, suspicious of the white man's motive for entering the Benin Empire during a sacred festive period resist his entrance. Trouble ensues as the white man insists on entering the land despite being warned that no visitor is allowed during the *Ague* festival. Even more disturbing is the fact that the white man comes with a team of armed black soldiers. The murder and subsequent beheading of the white men alongside his soldiers by the War Lords and Warriors of Benin triggers British reprisal. Even though the Benin Empire suffered great devastation at the hands of British authority, Rotimi's play highlights the virile practice of communal wars in traditional African societies (Ola, 1992).

Although, this class of literature has been widely categorized as an epic genre due to their historical inclination and the dominant traditional settings they portray, this study observes that the epic genre in literary studies in Africa has been lopsided with unclearly broad subjects. Whereas some are focused on rituals others are based on adventure, wars and the like. What appears to

be sought out as a canon here is a storyline that spans through a historical space in a traditional milieu. Such dramatic elements as language, costume, props and setting amongst others have also played key roles in the interpretation of the epic film genre. The need to further deconstruct the epic genre along the line of obvious distinctive features has therefore become imperative.

The Communal War Subgenre of an action film as envisioned in this study is therefore drawn from the epic background in order to pay specific attention to issues of war in traditional Africa. It is anticipated that the action film genre can emerge from the sociological context of communal wars in Africa. In doing this, this study critically evaluates two Nollywood films titled: *Invasion 1897* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2012), and *Battle of Musanga* (Bolaji Dawudu, 1996), to arrive at its finding.

Interrogating the theory of genre

Genre is a theory on categorization. It is concerned with the need to aid groupings and classifications of artistic works by their identifiable, distinctive and comparative features. It is principally concerned with the study of how literary works are classified according to their comparative types. Watson (2007), and Daniel as cited in Nwafor and Edum (2013) trace its etymology to France where it is imported to film theory from literary studies to connote "class," "specie" "kind" or "type". Uwah, (2016) further notes that it was used in literature to differentiate between various kinds of literature such as prose, drama and poetry, stressing that these categories also have subdivisions like tragedy, comedy, dirge, lullaby, and ode amongst others. In an attempt at providing a theoretical definition for the evaluation of the subject matter, Uwah (2016) further notes that "genre is a concept for grouping things together" stressing that it is "a key definer of features in subjects". This idea is further strengthened when he cited Stephen Neale as defining the concept as "a multi-dimensional phenomenon (and) its dimensions centrally include systems of expectation, categories, labels and names, discourses, texts and corpuses of texts and the conventions that govern them". In this study, therefore, a category of the Nigerian epic films shall be investigated with the view of scrutinizing features which make them distinct from other epic films in Nollywood.

METHODOLOGY

Research design deals with the researcher's need to identify the appropriate research methods suitable to the problem which the work sets to investigate. Kierlinger as cited in Ofo (1999) posits, "Research design is the plan structure and strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to the research questions and to control variance". In the light of the foregoing, this study shall

adopt a qualitative research method to arrive at its results. Fawole and others (as cited in Okwuowulu, 2016, p.117) posit that the qualitative research:

Studies many variables over an extensive period of time in order to find out the way things are, how and why they came to be that way, and what it all means. Qualitative researchers do not want to intervene or control anything. The most common methods of data collection are observations, interviews and focus group discussions, in order to guide and support the construction of hypotheses. The results of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive.

Against this background, this study adopts a qualitative methodology which "studies many variables over an extensive period of time in order to find out the way things are, how and why they came to be that way, and what it all means (Fawole et al., 2006). Consequently, two Nollywood films which cover two different decades of Nollywood's history would be critically evaluated. The decades represented in the films which incidentally cover the Old and New Nollywood films are in the periods between 1992 -1999 and 2010 to 2019. The films *Battle of Musanga* (Bolaji Dawudu, 1996) and *Invasion 1897* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2012) aptly represent the periods established.

DISCUSSION

A critical analysis of *Invasion 1897*

Invasion 1897 tells the story of the conquest of the ancient Benin Empire in 1897 by the British colonial authority. Okwuowulu and Iloma (2018) explain that the film opens in a London classroom where a serious lecture on African Arts History is going on. The lecturer narrates how the rich sculptural and other valuable artefacts of the great Benin Kingdom were carted away and used to furnish great museums in Britain where they are jealously guarded. Motivated by the need to recover the stolen artefacts from the British museums, Igie Ehanire (Charles Venn), one of the students who coincidentally happens to be a descendant of the great Benin kingdom stealthily takes away some sculptures from one of such museums with the motif of recovering what he believes was ill-gotten from his fore-fathers. He is, however, swiftly apprehended by the security operatives and subsequently charged to court for attempted robbery. Igie Ehanire who pleads not guilty maintains that he only tried to return a lost property of his people that was stolen by the British colonialists about three hundred years ago. He accuses the British Empire of being the real thieves whom he maintains, "unjustly invaded my people in the year 1897". In a narrative flashback, the film reminiscences the British invasion and

subsequent conquest of the Benin Empire and the attendant deposition of Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi (Mike Onoregbe). This incident however occasions the carting away of the lost artefacts. The notion of “action” in the film can be investigated from the clash which ensues from the activities of the invasion of Benin by the British colonizers and the accompanying resistance on the side of the Benin people.

Looking at the film from the thematic point of view, it could be said that the central focus of the narrative is an invasion. As suggested by the title, *Invasion* denotes forceful and hostile entrance into another territory with the view of conquering it. To expedite the goal of conquest, therefore war remains inescapable. It is this drive to conquer that enabled the British authority to wage a bloody war against the Benin Empire. The war in the film follows a stern resistance on the part of the Benin warlords against the forceful entrance of the British into the Benin land. The British imperialists had ignored warnings of the sacredness of the *Igue* festival which forbade strangers from entering the land. They had also rebuffed the hospitable offer of the Oba to be accommodated somewhere comfortable while awaiting the conclusive ending of the festival, from when they can be admitted. The British people, led by Consul Philip (Philip Wetherall) are undaunted in their resolve to see the Oba in Benin despite the efforts of the Benin chiefs to make them see reasons why they should not. Incensed by this flagrant desperation and suspicion about the unpalatable outcome of their visit to the Benin people, the Benin Chiefs resort to the violent killing of seven white men together with their African team. This incident gives the British the excuse for launching the offensive reprisal attack that eventually sees to the devastation of Benin, robbing her of her robust agrarian and artistic resources and finally deposing their revered king, Oba Ovonramwen.

The horrendous clash between the British soldiers and the Benin warriors in which “violence,” “physical actions,” “chases,” “exchange of firearms” and “heavy explosions” are exuberantly displayed brings the concept of action to the local context. In the scene where Benin Warriors are advancing to war against the white men alongside their soldiers, they use homegrown weapons of spear and shield as they move through the bush paths to get their goals accomplished. Actions are lavishly depicted through the series of the chase, narrow escapes, and life-threatening situations which were exhibited through the horrific looking combatant warriors of the Benin kingdom against the British soldiers. In fact, the intensification of action as seriously established in this scene is greatly facilitated by the hostilities in the facial appearances of these warriors, their props which consist mainly of traditional weaponry, the agility in their movements and the disjointed onomatopoeic sound effects do not only trigger the expectation of war but instil the mood of bloody combat on the mindset of viewers. In this scene, there are conscious expositions of different shots of action which



Plate 1. A Benin War Lord striking with the bow and arrow.



Plate 2. A shot revealing how the arrow from the bow of a Benin warrior hits his targeted British soldier.

attempt to X-ray the modus operandi of war in traditional Benin society. Plate 1 reveals a British soldier being struck with the arrow from the bow of the Benin warrior who shoots from his hideout behind a tree as seen in plate 2. The arrow pierces through the esophagus of the British soldier causing his immediate death. Similar actions are replicated in plates 3 and 4 where a Benin warlord horrifically dismembers the head of a high ranking British military personnel with his sharp machete after capturing him alive from the battlefield. This is another scene that underscores gallantry on the side of the Benin people and extensively reveals his enviable pride in the strength of the African warrior. It is worthy of note that the active life in the Benin history is part of what earns the African warrior the admiration for his strength. This notion accounts for the valorization of the African warrior by the Senegalese poet, David Diop (1927) in his poem titled: *Africa*.

Looking at the film from the perspective of character analysis, the fundamental elements of action film that can sustain critical contextual discourses about the genre can be conspicuously located. Given that action film, focuses on “a moral interplay between the good and bad



Plate 3. A war scene showing a Benin War-lord striking his machete to behead his British enemy.



Plate 4. A war scene showing the brutal beheading of a British soldier by a Benin war-lord.

character,” discovering the good character, as opposed to the bad character in this study can be actualized through a critical inspection of the character’s motivations. Hence, one must be guided by the question of identifying what character motivations impel the actions of the film.

Following this line of thought, the film portrays a clash of interest between the British emissaries and the Benin people. It reveals the British emissaries as impelled by the inordinate goal of exploiting the rich resources of Benin which they go about with utmost impunity. In a dialogue between Consul Galway (Keith Davidson) and Mr Houton (Tom Needman), this exploitative motif is revealed.

Consul Galway: We have a mission

Mr. Houton: A mission? That’s interesting.

Consul Galway: Since Dunlop JB patented his rubber tyre, the demand for a tyre in Europe has expanded dramatically and here, God has deposited the greatest number of rubber trees just waiting for us.

“The greatest number of rubber trees just waiting for us,” as declared above by Consul Galway and its attendant huge economic implication to the British government constitute the remote motivation for the British invasion of

Benin. Consequently, an obnoxious treaty that seeks British protection of the Benin kingdom is presented to the Oba. Given that this was a period of indirect rule in West Africa, signing the treaty implies surrendering the political, economic, religious, and cultural lives of the Benin people to the British authority. The Oba, enraged by the spurious content of the document, declines from signing. Upon persuasion however, he details Obaseki (Favian Okohe), one of his trusted chiefs to sign as he appoints him liaison officer between the British and Benin. It should be noted that whether the Oba signs the treaty or not was not to change the British determination to control Benin as the idea of giving him (Oba) the “Jaja treatment” by having him deported had already been conceptualized. Hamilton (Frank Rogers), a British character submits: “I suggest we apply the same strategy as we did against King Jaja, we take him out and annex the city.” The deposition of Oba Ovonranwem Nogbaisi as king of Benin and his final exile to Calabar brings to fruition, the Jaja’s treatment as suggested above by Mr. Hamilton. Although the carting away and the drive for recovering the Benin sculptural works constitutes a central focus of the film, a critical study of the film however shows that the Benin artwork was not *ab initio* in the picture of the British drive. Given that no mention of artwork was made throughout the narrative flashback of the film until the final conquest of Benin when the British team that invaded the Oba’s palace are shown carting away some of these artworks. The artworks, like the rubber plantations, however, constitute one of the major attractions found in the ancient Benin empire.

To the Benin people, the need to defend their kingdom against the invading external authorities constitutes the main thrust of their drive. Benin runs an organized monarchical government controlled by the Oba of Benin and assisted by his council of chiefs. Following the various premonitions of impending doom against the land of Benin and examining the suspicious attitude of the British emissaries to Benin land, Oba Ovonranwem becomes apprehensive of the white man’s motif. He asks Eyebokhian (Opute Joel), the conveyer of the white man’s message what his proposed visit portends to the people of Benin.

The Oba’s suspicion gets higher when a treaty seeking the control of Benin is presented to him by the white man. Again, looking at the white man’s persistent drive to enter Benin despite being warned of the sacredness of the *ague* festival, the Oba becomes more troubled as he details his chiefs to ensure the safety of the white men while also directing some other chiefs to ensure the protection of the Benin territory against external aggressors. To the Oba, the need to defend Benin from external aggression and invasion is sacrosanct while to the British emissaries, the need for economic and political annexation was the cardinal drive. In all of these, actions of different kinds were displayed in the film.

Another important highlight of action in the film is expressed through an avalanche of film techniques

utilized. As can be inferred from the film, the captivating camera movements and angles together with the compelling editing techniques which facilitated the accelerated pace, breath-taking stunts, heavy explosions, lucid sound and visual effects of the film amongst others, contribute immensely to consolidating the actions of the film.

In compliance with the assertion of Bean (2004) which places “dynamic tempo” and “rapid editing” as the most notable characteristics of the action cinema, it is inarguable to state that the actions of this film are also technically sustained by dynamic tempo and rapid editing. The metric montage used at the opening of the film to narrate the story of how two Benin prisoners are tried and subsequently executed aptly exemplifies the notion of dynamic tempo and rapid editing in the film. The scene reveals how a full trial and execution sessions of the supposedly defaulting Benin citizens are realized in less than twenty seconds. The editing of the scenes follows the weaving together of a series of brief shots in an accelerated order. This technique is replicated throughout the main flow of the film’s narrative. The lecture scene at the London University, the whole of the alleged theft sequence where the artefacts are to be recovered, the trial session of Igje Ehanire at London court and the war between the British soldiers and Benin warriors amongst others all follow a similar trend of dynamic tempo and tip-tap editing techniques. This technique becomes significant because it allows the audience to move gradually into the emotional heartbeat of the scene thereby increasing the dramatic tempo and consequent appeal.

A critical analysis of *The Battle of Musanga*

The Battle of Musanga is a movie that x-rays the historical account of the entry of the first white missionary priest to Arochukwu. His arrival however coincides with the preparations for the coronation of King Mugdaba Konolinga (Obi Madubogwu), the King of Musanga. Following the tradition of using human heads for coronations in Musanga and consequent upon the need to coronate Mugdaba Konolinga, as the new king of Musanga, a white missionary priest (Hubert Swenson) operating within the community of Arochukwu is kidnapped by some Musanga warriors to facilitate the coronation process. To avert the looming British reprisal, the rescue of the British captive becomes sacrosanct to the people of Arochukwu. Looking at their low military strength, Arochukwu sends a delegation to seek the support and alliance of the people of Ohafia to ensure the rescue of the captive and also to wage war against the primitive people of Musanga for the atrocity committed. Amidst jubilant celebrations marking the coronation of king Mugdaba Konolinga, the British missionary is horrifically beheaded and his head used as the king’s footstool. The military force of Ohafia community invades Musanga, causing

great massacres and horrific beheadings. King Mugdaba Konolinga is captured and beheaded by Kamalu Udonsi, the military commander and warlord of *Ohafia* community.

The *Battle of Musanga* rests within the thematic purview of communal war. The tripartite war between the people of Arochukwu in alliance with the people of Ohafia against the people of Musanga is orchestrated by the kidnap of the Arochukwu based British missionary by the people of Musanga as highlighted above. The film explores the preponderance of war and the *modus operandi* of warfare in traditional African society as opposed to western modern warfare. At the exposition of the film, a delegation from Arochukwu led by Mazi Izuogu (Alex Usifo) presents a pod of kola-nut and a bottle of locally made dry gin as a mark of solidarity to the Ohafia people in seeking their support for the war. This request is granted. The battle reveals the robust military strategies of warfare employed in traditional Igbo society. Firstly, the film reveals the practice of inter-communal coalition during wars as highlighted above. The people of Arochukwu, taking to cognizance, their limitations in military might, seek reinforcement through a coalition with the Ohafia people, a people with a proven reputation for fighting wars who had for ages, sustained a cordial relationship with them. Hence, the conquest of Musanga is facilitated by the advantage of this coalition.

The film further presents a series of intense and horrific battles characterized by escapes, chase, physical feats, violence, exchange of firearms and explosions among others. In the scene where the combined forces of Arochukwu and Ohafia warriors led by Kamalu Udonsi are advancing to war and the two fierce-looking and heavily armed Musanga warriors are sighted in the forest near the waterside, the battle that ensues between the duo calls for serious attention. In this battle, Kamalu Udonsi (Chika Anyanwu), upon sighting his enemies signals his men to take cover and they obey by exhibiting their gallantry in different ways. Kamalu Udonsi advance towards his enemies by tiptoeing while his men watch from their hideout for possible reinforcement where necessary. As he gets closer, he jumps to pounce on one of them amid a loud exclamatory shout while the other comes for rescue and possible attack (Plates 5 and 6). In a fiercely fought battle, Kamalu stabs one of them to death while he forces the other to reveal the Musanga’s war secret to him. Life is eventually snuffed out of him after he has told Kamalu Udonsi that the power of Musanga is in the Chief Priest and that unless the chief priest is killed, Musanga cannot be defeated in battles.

The war that follows the coronation of Mugdaba Konolinga of Musanga provides another critical and robust potential for the action film genre. After trekking along an obstacle filled distance to get to Musanga, the Kamalu Udonsi led force arrives at their destination and meets the people in a vainglorious celebration in which the British missionary’s head has been brutally dismembered and used as Konolinga’s footstool. The people of Musanga are



Plate 5. A low angle shot of Kamalu Udonsi as he pounces on two Musanga warrior.



Plate 6. Physical fight in which Kamalu Udonsi overcomes two Musanga Warriors at the bank of the river.

attacked with sporadic shots from Dane guns and bows and arrows. In this war, the god of Musanga (Emma Chinwuba), after being invoked by the chief priest (Wilcox Mbamara) appears live and engages his enemies head on by spitting fire on them. Kamalu Udonsi suddenly remembers what his earlier slain victim had told him about the Chief Priest. As he advances to kill him, he disappears only to metamorphose into a red necked lizard. As Mazi Udensi strikes his machete on the lizard, it metamorphoses again to his human form but this time, dead. The death of the Chief Priest eventually changes the fortune of the battle in favour of Kamalu Udonsi and his men who physically massacre their enemies, cut off their heads and take the few survivors as captives of war.

Another intriguing point of note in this scene is the point where King Mugdabe Konolinga, attempts to escape from the raging massacre by running into a nearby bush. Unfortunately for him, he is sighted by Kamalu Udonsi who engages him in a serious chase. While he had hidden near a three pathway, he suddenly launches a reprisal attack

on Kamalu Udonsi who at this point is trying to locate him from his hideout. A tensely fought battle ensues. As Mugdabe Konolinga attempts a deadly strike on Kamalu Udonsi, Kamalu suddenly braves him out and overpowers him. Kamalu single-handedly arrests Konolinga, a heroic act that subsequently leads him to commit suicide and then, a brutal beheading by Kamalu Udonsi.

The mood of war in the film is further intensified through the use of war songs. With special consideration to rhythmic flow, lyrical concerns and semantic value, the songs in the film are well sung in such a way that the audience's emotional sensations are fully charged to reflect war. Even more captivating are the boisterous ways in which the songs are synchronized with combatant activities. In the scene where the Ohafia and Arochukwu soldiers present themselves to the Chief Priest (Emeka Ani) for fortification, the *Ebelebe Jim jim* war song scored at this point is synchronized against well-choreographed confrontational movements by the warriors as they enthusiastically advance to war. This kind of synchronization is sustained in the scene where the Ohafia and Arochukwu warriors sight two Musanga warriors at the lake in the forest. In a fiercely fought battle between the Ohafia war commander Kamalu Udonsi and the Musanga warriors, a melodious war song is aptly heard in synchronization with the onscreen actions. The resultant effect of this is the culmination of high motivations that propel the spirit of war to both the fighters and the viewing audience.

Another veritable source for delineating the codes and conventions of the action film in the *Battle of Musanga* can be found in the film's character analysis. A copious study of the film reveals how it is again sustained by a moral interaction between the good characters and the bad ones. The abduction of the British Missionary from Arochukwu by the people of Musanga and the consequent drive to rescue him by the people of Arochukwu in order to avert British reprisal reveal the character motivations of the film.

The setting of the film in the triumvirate communities of Arochukwu, Ohafia and Musanga provides an exposition of the physical appearance of a typical Igbo society in the ancient period. The habitations of the communities consist of mud houses and thatch roofs with houses connected with overgrown bushes. The forests, trees and rivers which surround these communities provide for the military advancements and display of gallantry for the warriors. The felling of trees and using them as monkey bridges to cross the lake obstacle in the scene where the Ohafia and Arochukwu warriors are making advancement to Musanga, the climbing of trees by the Ohafia warrior to spy on the ritual activities of Musanga people in the land of Musanga amongst others go a long way in revealing the nature of the traditional setting of the Igbo society and how they can be interacted with by the Igbo warrior in times of war.

Again, it is important to note that the setting of the film: *Battle of Musanga*, contributes enormously to locating the

developmental period wherein the actions of the film take place. An ample evaluation of the setting situates the film in the early period of colonialism in Igboland wherein the white man's presence had not yet translated to full blown colonialism. This setting which is virginally indigenous to the Igbo society without any element of modernization highlights the robust beauty of the African landscape within the period in retrospect. Rich vegetation, flowing rivers, traditional buildings and scenery, and the likes, are part of what constitutes the setting of the film. From this setting, communities invested with war-like characteristics in the mood of actions and communicative exchanges are revealed.

Editorially, the film: *The Battle of Musanga* thrives on such techniques as fast cuts, continuity editing and powerful synchronization of sound and visuals. A critical study of the film reveals that the shots are relatively paced as opposed to many Nigerian films of the same period. All through the visit of Mazi Izuogu, down to when the warriors are advancing to Musanga and the war scene at Musanga itself in which Musanga is devastated, the pace of the sequences can be visibly acknowledged.

Delineating the theoretical features of the communal war subgenre of action film in the selected films

A critical evaluation of the films studied in this work reveals a preponderance of certain features found to be distinct from other classes of epic films in Nollywood. In delineating the conventional codes for the theorization of the Communal War Sub-genre of the Action Film in Nollywood therefore, these commonly shared features are considered very important. What follows below is therefore an attempt to delineate the theoretical tenets of the Communal War Sub-Genre of Action Film.

The communal war subgenre of action film presents its major conflict as manifesting through serious combats between two or more communities that engage in wars of moral interplay between good and bad motifs. Actions are depicted through brutal violence, physical feats, frantic chase, narrow escapes and crossfire of arms amongst others. The major weaponry and methodology of warfare are traditional with a punctuated synchronization of war sounds scored against major conflicts to heighten tension.

Also in this sub-genre, serious traditional African religious activities which aim at securing the divine help of the supernatural beings in ensuring victory are reverently observed. Like other action films, the hero of this subgenre usually finds himself entangled in series of life threatening challenges while fighting to protect communal interest and may either end victoriously or tragically in the final analysis as seen in the cases of Kamalu Udensi and Ovoranwe Nogbaisi in *The Battle of Musanga* and *Invasion 1897* respectively.

Furthermore, this category of films are usually facilitated with powerful camera and editing techniques paced up with swift camera movements and engrossing editing techniques.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the action film genre in Nigeria, with a view to properly classifying it and examining its narrative structures. The theoretical framework that guided this study was genre theory. This study further undertook a copious review of the action film genre in Nigeria and discovered that major studies on this subject matter describe the action film genre as "amateurish" and cheap imitations of Hollywood. It was also discovered at this point that such studies focused only on an infinitesimal aspect of Nigerian life which deals with gangs of armed bandits, squad of human traffickers and drug organizations among others. The study, therefore, argued that much has not been done in scholarship to develop suitable canons for the evaluation of the action film genre in Nigeria. Given that Africa is a society replete with history of heroic activities and consequent upon the fact that the filmmaker's primary responsibility is to mirror the immediate realities in his social environment, the need to expand the horizon of the action film genre to capture the peculiar experiences within the African environment became expedient. To this extent, the Communal War experience in Africa was explored with the view of discovering the action film genre in it. The following films were therefore tested through a contextual critical analysis with the theory of genre: *Invasion 1897* (Lancelot Oduwa Imasuen, 2012), *Battle of Musanga* (Bolaji Dawudu, 1996). At the end of the study, this research discovered a unique and robust action film genre in Communal War experience in Africa. A discovery which significantly contributes to the study of the action film genre in global discourses. This study, therefore, concludes that there is a distinct class of action film found in most Communal War Films in Africa. This study recommends amongst other things that more attention should be paid to the development of indigenous canons to aid intellectual discourses on the African film.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author declares that they have no conflict of interests.

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