


Pornography or Cinematic Verisimilitude? A Critical Examination of the Explicit Sexual Depictions in Neo-Nollywood Films

Ilori Sanjo Isaac 

Department of Theatre Arts,
Osun State University, Osogbo, Osun State.
sanjoisaacilori@gmail.com

Patrick Charles Alex 

Department of English and Literary Studies, Osun State University,
Osogbo, Osun State, Nigeria.
charlespatrick282@gmail.com

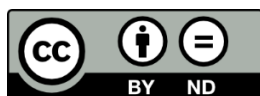
Abstract

This article critically examines the explicit sex scenes in neo-Nollywood films in light of the tension between cinematic realism and pornography boundaries. It probes whether such scenes serve an authentic narrative purpose, enhancing the realism and character depth of such a story, or run the risk of being gratuitous, sensational displays devoid of substance. The study adopted a qualitative research design with the descriptive method since the data involved are visual. Our arguments are framed by cognitive and Psychoanalytical film theories. Three purposely selected films were artistically, culturally, and ethically analysed, focusing on the implications that the sensual portrayals have on audience perception, filmmaker intent, and cultural impact. It places the emerging aesthetic of Neo-Nollywood within the larger discourse of realism, cultural sensitivity, and audience expectation, all while problematising this demarcation point between art and obscenity within African cinema. Evidence shows that, with the recent shift in Nigerian cinema toward more courageous storylines and relaxed censorship, filmmakers have increasingly employed explicit content to depict intimacy and complex relationships. The study concluded that the Neo-Nollywood quest for global relevance must not be allowed to desecrate its moral obligation. Nigerian filmmakers have to chart a path that will marry verisimilitude with moderation, nurturing storylines that appeal both ethically and aesthetically.

Keywords:

Pornography, cinematic verisimilitude, sexual depictions, Neo-Nollywood, cultural sensitivity

<https://dx.doi.org/10.56279/ummaj.v11i2.8>



Introduction

With the impulse to celebrate and project Nigerian films' feat in world standard cinematic practice comes the necessity of weighing some intricate scenes in the films' narratives against the backdrop of what is widely accepted as modest/cultural sensibilities of audiences and the public in Nigeria. This argument is premised on the theoretical assumptions of subjectivism in ethical and aesthetic evaluations of Nigerian films. In the context of this paper, Nigerian films are described as film texts that represent the national ideologies and cultural attributes of Nigeria and Nigerians, irrespective of ethnic and religious affiliations. Similarly, this classification covers the productive periods of old Nollywood and neo-Nollywood films. This is because the difference in the productive periods is only found in the advancement in cinematic technologies and techniques without much difference in the cultural ideologies and sociology of the film texts. This argument resonates with that of Deleuze (2000), who notes:

(It's not a question of recounting a story in a well-determined space and time; rather, it is the rhythms, the lighting, and the space-times themselves that must become the true characters). A work should bring forth the problems and questions that concern us rather than provide answers. (p.370)

Considering the artistic difference between the old Nollywood and the neo-Nollywood films, we will argue that while Nigerian filmmakers in neo-Nollywood continue to navigate more deeply in what is regarded as a universal way of storytelling and character creation, picturing some sensitive details, particularly in horrific scenes where sex and sexual acts are involved as found in Chichi Nworah's *Shanty Town* 2023, Mo Abudu's *Blood Sisters* 2022, and Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo* 2022, are unnecessary. This practice tends to impact the psycho-cognitive stimuli of segments of the audience. With the ideals of subjectivism, the present study adopts psychoanalytical and cognitive film theories in the ethical and aesthetic evaluations of a few of [neo-] Nollywood films.

One of the basic issues in the psychodynamics of production and consumption of [neo-] Nollywood films is the emergence of streaming platforms. Consequently, several Nigerian filmmakers have distinguished themselves in pushing barriers in film production by conforming to the standard requirements of streaming platforms such as Netflix and Showmax. In the process, these filmmakers have demonstrated a departure

from the stereotypes of old Nollywood. Films in this category are but not limited to Chichi Nworah's *Shanty Town*, Mo Abudu's *Blood Sisters*, and Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo*. Dimensions in these film productions share similarities with Tunde Kelani's oeuvre. *Shanty Town*, *Blood Sisters*, and *Anikulapo* are films that, while incorporating some of the traditional narrative and cultural elements of older Nollywood, also embrace new standards established by international streaming services. These modern standards include higher production values, broader international appeal, and the integration of various genres. This evolution distinguishes them from the low-budget, melodramatic style commonly associated with older Nollywood films. Nonetheless, these newer productions maintain a stylistic connection with the works of established filmmakers like Tunde Kelani, Chico Ejiro, Zeb Ejiro, and Tecu Benson, who have significantly contributed to the quality and authenticity of Nigerian cinema. Contemporary filmmakers continue to draw from the aesthetics of these pioneers, often exploring themes of folklore, cultural narratives, and real-world socio-political issues. While the current generation of filmmakers may push beyond the boundaries of what older Nollywood accomplished, they are still inspired by the rich tradition of cultural storytelling exemplified by Kelani and his peers.

What is more, the films have gone a bit higher in their narrative techniques and intrigues - bringing this class of Nigerian films closer to thrilling Hollywood movies. The mise-en-scene of this genre of Nigerian films is their trademark. Arguably, the works are generally appealing to young minds. The works, in addition, have, in a way, reflected the age brackets of their makers and artistic directors, who are still in their prime compared with the likes of Tunde Kelani of the older generation. Invariably, while older Nigerian film directors seem to factor into their creativity considerations like 'decency' and 'modesty' within the context of African cultural values, it appears the younger ones are given to character creation and a universal way of storytelling, with little or no consideration for moral sentiments. Films in the category of young directors push more barriers, thereby calling for a need to re-examine the paradigm in directing in neo-Nollywood films.

Literature Review

A good number of scholars have invested substantial intellectual energy in researching sexualised images represented in Nollywood films. Much of what has been produced therein focuses on the nuanced, gendered ways in

which female characters are represented and how such representations mirror, foster, and reinforce societal attitudes regarding femininity, sexuality, and gender power relations. Many scholars (Ugondo & Adikpo 2016; Olayiwola 2022; Oladoja & Tomere, 2022; Agwu, Nwokecha, Abba-Father, & Fab-Ukozor 2022; Arinze-Umobi & Chiweta-Oduah, 2023; etc.) tend to examine how female figures are positioned within Nollywood's narrative structures – what objectification, what empowerment, and what very complicated notions of sexual agency operate in those cinematic representations. Olayiwola (2022) for instance, evaluates Nollywood movies through a gendered perspective, arguing that “It is worrisome that despite the position women occupy in Nigerian history, culture and tradition, Nollywood video films are still dominated by a stereotyped portrayal of gender relations and negative portrayal of women” (p.123). Similarly, Osakpolor (2021) argues that “the portrayal of women has never gone beyond the traditional line which strongly accentuates male chauvinism and patriarchy” (p.122). Osakpolor, Jimi, Salau, & Folarin (2022) aver that Nollywood has produced numerous films depicting female sexuality, yet most of these portrayals rely on stereotypical and often contentious representations. Nollywood's depictions of women remain largely rooted in traditional societal expectations of women's roles despite two decades of progress. Doghudje (2020) investigates how both genders are stereotyped in Nollywood movies using Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* as a case study. The scholar reveals that the stereotypical depiction of both genders in Nollywood has not evolved much. Although the lead actress's role and character are an exception, the way other women were portrayed in the movie adheres to the conventional storyline (p.94). Ugondo and Adikpo (2016) probe the gender and power imbalance in Nollywood films, revealing that Nigerian films are filled with portrayals of power imbalances in gender relations, where men hold advantages across social, economic, and cultural dimensions. All these scholars hold the view that Nigerian films, rather than challenging gender stereotypes, reinforce outdated stereotypes of women in Nigeria.

A few scholars investigated audience perspectives on the sexual images of women in Nollywood films. Uwom, Chioma, & Sodeinde (2013), for instance, examine audience perception of the objectification of women in Nigerian films. The scholars reveal that “sexual contents in Nigerian movies are not appreciated and that there is a need for adolescents to be protected from getting exposed to these contents” (p.23). Like Uwom and co., Adesina (2010) investigates audience perception of sexualised images of women,

arguing that the audience regards most of the gratuitous pictures of women in Nollywood movies as inappropriate and offensive.

Among the few scholars who investigated the objectification of women in Nollywood films are Endon and Emike (2023). The scholars probe Nollywood films and Nigerian musical videos as a cesspool fostering the sexualisation of women, arguing that the images depicting nude or scantily clad women are often seen as obscene, vulgar, and offensive, undermining the dignity and humanity of women (p.159). This study comes close to the focus of their work; however, this study differs given that the images have gone beyond mere objectification, as argued by these scholars. Neo-Nollywood films – which are the films done in contemporary times – churned out furiously these days have been pornified. The objective of this paper is to probe the borderline between verisimilitude, which many of the producers of these films claim to want to achieve, and the pornification resulting from such efforts.

Methodology

This study utilises a qualitative research design with the descriptive method in critically analysing explicit sexual depictions in Neo-Nollywood films. In this study, purposive sampling shall be used for film selection. Three films [Shanty Town (2023), Blood Sisters (2022), and Anikulapo (2022)] were selected based on these criteria: films produced between 2020 and the present, reflecting the “Neo-Nollywood” era, Inclusion of explicit sexual depictions, and films across diverse genres for comparative perspectives. Close viewing will be done on selected films in search of explicit sexual representation. The analysis is based on the visual, audio, and textual elements. A prominent filmmaker was interviewed using a semi-structured interview to gain an understanding of the necessity, intent, and reception behind these representations.

The study is approached from perspectives of Psychoanalytic film theory and Cognitive film theory. First, psychoanalytic film theory, which represents the academic school of thought regarding psychoanalysis (developed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan) and its applicability to films, provides the basis for analysing Chichi Nworah’s *Shanty Town* (2023), Mo Abudu’s *Blood Sisters* (2022), and Kunle Afolayan’s *Anikulapo* (2022) intricate scenes to bring a spotlight on unconscious activities projected in the scenes. Psychoanalytic film theory examines how film triggers irrational/unconscious activities in viewers’ minds. It equally examines the

unconsciousness of the film's directors and cast. In their views, Annette Kuhn and Guy Westwell opine that a method of investigating the unconscious activities of the human mind, established in the late 19th century by Sigmund Freud and now practiced worldwide by followers adopting a range of approaches is what has surfaced as psychoanalytic film theory; going further, the two scholars add that, the major issue here boils on 'interpreting the talk, dreams, and bodily symptoms of analytic patients' (Kuhn & Westwell 2012).

In a more careful study of what psychoanalytic film theory entails, Allen (1999) considers how the theory can 'provide an impetus for reflection and reconsideration' and not just bring up repeatedly 'a seemingly obscure and arguably moribund set of doctrines' (p.123). Allen further argues that a film theorist who is informed by "ethics would examine what a film depicts rather than imposing the stance of psychoanalysis theory on film" (p.142). Allen draws attention to the limitations of psychoanalytic informed theories on film. However, Allen fails to expatiate on what he terms ethics. Also, in contrast to his argument, theorists do not necessarily have to impose the position of psychoanalysis on films but may find applicable, and as suitable, the parameters of the theory to a given film since it is allowed that films are approached from various perspectives. And in this case, psychoanalytic theory works as a 'child of circumstance' in the study and not an imposition.

Second, what the present writers classified as intricate scenes in the selected films is examined from cognitive film theory developed by Jean Piaget. Cognitive film theory posits that the comprehension of movies is a function of inference, making the viewers the determining factors as to what meaning a film generates. The theory emphasises the ability of a viewer to recognise or comprehend what it is that a scenario is all about in a movie. Pervez (2015) argues that "cognitive film theory approaches the understanding of film from a receptor-centered perspective," adding that "film is a medium for audio-visual form that becomes meaningful only when receptors assign value to it" (p. 289). This corroborates the stance that film viewers have abilities to intuitively grasp the imitation of human nature/activities comprehensively in motion pictures without bothering the part of the film director by revealing some sensitive details. It is in this vein that Allen (2002), positing that films engage viewers' minds, argues that "films are not like mental processes, they engage mental processes" (p. 20).

Eroticisation of Neo-Nollywood Films

Chichi Nworah's *Shanty Town* (2023), Mo Abudu's *Blood Sisters* (2022), and Kunle Afolayan's *Anikulapo* (2022) are films with captivating thematic preoccupations. The directors of these films, in their commitments to depicting details and making the scenarios as real as possible, have, in some cases, broken some edges within the context of usual/popular practice (though not stereotypes) in the art of filmmaking in Nigeria. Some intricate scenes in the films have to do with sexual escapades, violent acts – fights, such as bloodletting clashes, or struggles among characters. In a clear departure from earlier directorial approaches and depiction of human struggles/violence in Nigerian films, in the films under study, the characters engage in martial arts and elaborate gun duels. The study, however, emphasises a recent approach to the depiction of human intimacies, particularly those that revolve around sex.

Shanty Town

Shanty Town opens in a chaotic scene where gunmen raid the Shangisha community. A young man defends a woman, and her twins by inflicting a deadly blow on the attacker, and in a reprisal attack, the young man who has almost escaped with the mother of the twins and the twins is lethally shot by the assailant with the bullet also penetrating, one of the twins. The blows, shootings, and spilling of blood in the scene appear almost real. Zanga (hood) opens in a busy room where topless women and men in their pants are working on drugs. In the same room, Scar engages Ashanti in oral sex. In the oral sex scene, although the camera does not reveal explicit details of the oral sex, it focuses on many topless women and men. Later, after arriving in Zanga, Inem finds herself fighting one of Scar's aides. Fernandez's aide follows suit, engaging Scar in several skirmishes. Every fighting sequence, such as Fernandez hitting Inem, Inem overpowering Enewan, and the release of Chief by security forces, is detailed and engaging. In the horror scenes where Jagun is shot, Scar and his men have an auto crash, Fernandez cuts off Scar's fingers, and Jackie is butchered, which are replicas of Hollywood in style. Also, taking after the depiction of details as seen in some foreign films, Fernandez fondles the breasts of Shalewa while his aid satisfies himself by hitting Shalewa's buttocks under the guise of searching, as blocked by the director.



Fig. 1- The scene in which Fernandez searches Shalewa's body: **Source (Movie):** *Shanty Town*, 2023 – 13:13, 43:34

Even though the artistic director has the right to his creativity and craft, certain details in the film are on the extreme. But for the choice of the directorial approach of the director, Shalewa could still have been searched and technically manoeuvred, revealing an unclad human body. It is evident that what would ordinarily be a routine search to ensure Shalewa is not absconding with stolen property instead becomes an opportunity for Fernandez to sample what his son has been secretly enjoying – a notion the director conveys as vividly as possible. Nonetheless, when the camera picks Shalewa from her shoulder up to her head, a close-up shot sufficiently brings her countenance to the viewers. It gives the impression of how disturbed, embarrassed, and uncomfortable she is, with the idea of pulling down her clothes in a bid to search her. Already, the camera has established how Fernandez reaches out his hands toward Shalewa's chest. Then, it is apparent he is fondling Shalewa's breasts, as revealed by his countenance. Therefore, the close-up shot of the breast is not necessary as there is no motivation for the explicit portrayal of what has already been established effectively.



Fig. 2: Fernandez touches Shalewa's sensitive parts after striping her.
Source (Movie): *Shanty Town*, 2023 – 13:06, 43:34

An extreme close-up of Shalewa's facial expression could further emphasise her discomfort, much like the close-up used in the film. However, these shots are accompanied by a mid-shot that exposes Shalewa's bare body from the waist up to her neck. The focus here is less on whether this is Shalewa's actual body or a body double and more on the display of nudity itself, which has sparked considerable debate and counter-reactions on social media. Efosa Taiwo in *Vanguard* (January 2023, 21) presents some of these reactions thus:

"@AjibolaAyonite2: Nancy Isime, that's your real boobs we all watch in *Shanty Town*, you can't fool us we're familiar with your game."

"@Nysclegitplus: My point is that this is a normal thing in American movies, so why are you guys seeing it as a big deal just because Nancy Isime is the one on the scene Nigerians, eeh."

“@joe_octave: Whether na Nancy Isime real body or not, or na Body Double. Na the Oyibo standard wey Nollywood wan the give una now. Nudity special. She Ini Edo don act something like this too? Why the rukusef? Nice film.”

“@Nii Miiiiiiii: Y’all shouting ‘Nancy breast and yansh’ yet you want Nollywood to be like Hollywood. If you can’t comprehend, just watch the movie and enjoy. But Gad, Nancy Isime get yanshooo.”

The reactions indicate a drift to newer attitudes taken or held towards nude scenes in Nigerian films. All the reactions impinge on what spectators do with these real bodies and sexuality in view. It has been a case of negotiation between an expectation of realness that has come with Nigerian cinema and the sanitised, even cosmeticised bodies portrayed, for instance, by Hollywood. The question of authenticity, seen from the perspective of the body of Nancy Isime—real or double—opens up important questions regarding the role of verisimilitude in Neo-Nollywood film productions within international streaming standards.

Without the mid-shot, viewers would still have grasped the intended message through inference based on the earlier shots and their own interpretive experiences—particularly within the framework provided by cognitive film theory. Notably, Shalewa’s breasts are only exposed to viewers with the introduction of this mid-shot. It is not assumed that viewers are watching as voyeurs but rather that they engage analytically with the narrative. Taiwo quotes Nancy Isime (Shalewa) saying, “Simmer down horny boys and girls, I know those gorgeous body parts excite you, but they sadly belong to my beautiful body double. Mine aren’t that succulent” in her attempt to douse the tension raised on her alleged nudity by viewers (Taiwo, 2023). The inclusion of nudity in the scene, intended to enhance the realism of the performance, also provides secondary gratifications. This “pleasurable moment,” functioning in part as an aesthetic choice, inadvertently risks pulling the film into the murky waters of pornography.

Blood Sisters

In *Blood Sisters*, the first violent scene opens when Kola brutally confronts the man hired by his brother – Femi, to kill him. The scene mirrors the style

of American crime and detective action movies. The fight in the film is not a usual choreographed, unconvincing assault scene identifiable in many Nigerian films. This has offered more. It is a foretaste of horror and incredible scenarios that would later unfold in the film, such as the brutal murder, beheading, and secret burial of Kola by Sarah Duru, assisted by Kemi Sanya. The story heats up with scenes of Sarah deliberately running over Winston Akindele, a photographer; a woman showing her breasts in Ibrahim's bar; a very violent fight between Uncle B, Sarah, and Kemi; and a doctor making a deep cut in Kemi's thigh and slitting Kenny's throat, among other complex and suspenseful scenes that make the film darker. In all of these scenes, the directors have given all the time to detailed imagery, leaving the viewers to no guesses. The climax of it is the bathroom scene where Timeyin fights one other female patient, both, and all other patients, are stark naked.

Genoveva Umeh (Timeyin), who is excited to work on a Netflix deal with Ebony Life Studios, sees herself taking a hard role in the bathroom scene (Adebayo 2022). In an interview, Umeh granted Inem Udodiong, and she recounted that it took four hours to shoot that scene (Udodiong, 2023). A strong determination to capture the details in the scene can only be the explanation for this. The bathroom scene appears exploitative, and it is unnecessary. No cogent extra issue is raised here in the character creation of Timeyin other than what has earlier been established and what would later be revealed. Perhaps the directors (Kenneth Gyang and Biyi Bamdele) included this scene to place the film squarely within a globally recognisable genre of storytelling, one that places it within a broader audience appeal and increases its visibility. But at what cost, one might ask? By settling on such a scene, the filmmakers risked selling out to the degradation of the narrative through the exploitation of that moment for shock value rather than artistic or thematic merit. While this may be a very marketable film, it made the characters implausible and lessened the substance of the work to sacrifice telling for appeal.



Fig. 3: Timehin in the bathroom scene. **Source (Movie):** *Blood Sisters*, 2022 – 06:14, 52: 44

Oni (2022) notes that “creating compelling imagery seems to be the ultimate aspiration of the so-called ‘New Nollywood’ (p.6). The scholar further asserts that if we think of film as ‘visual storytelling, *Blood Sisters* certainly gives us the ‘visual’ even if it sometimes leaves us wondering about the ‘storytelling’ (p.7). One examines the spectacle created around human nakedness, which she refers to as the ‘exhibition of the naked human form’ in exploring the politics filmmakers create ‘around gender and social class.’ We, like many scholars, question not whether it is right or wrong to exhibit nudity in film – as the naked human body serves artistic value, but on the one-sidedness with which nudity is constantly made exclusive of female actors. What is more, Oni (2022) brilliantly raises red flags on the overt engagement of extras in the exploration of nudity in the film, explaining that while the camera pans (briefly) on key and notable female actors in naked scenes, extras whose status disadvantaged them being unknown faces in the Nigerian movie industry, adversely enjoy the attention of camera on their frontal nudity.

Our concern is different from Oni's. The point that we are advancing here is that film directors (especially in Nigeria) do not have to bear all, whether in the case of men or women, for the sake of achieving detailed visual content in films. There is a thin line between verisimilitude and moderation, which, in some instances, is ignored by filmmakers/artistic directors. It is not in all cases that total picturisation is achievable, even when there is a deliberateness in having it. The determination to achieve verisimilitude ought to go along with a considerable level of moderation – this much will form the concluding part of this study. The four hours used in shooting the bathroom scene make the extras and Timehin vulnerable, reducing them to objects and spectacles to profane eyes of not only the viewers but also the crew who took several shots of the scene and subsequently determined what shot to retain in editing after 'close' viewing. Possibly, the directors are unconscious of the psychological effects of the process of their craft taking on the well-being of the cast.

On why many directors have their casts appear nude before the camera on the excuse of the demands of the script, Lachit Roy - an experienced film analyst - reveals that Kate Winslet, who acted as Rose in Leonardo DiCaprio's *Titanic* (1997), regrets revealing her nudity many years later. Roy (2023) says further that fans still hand the nude picture of Winslet to her, requesting an autograph, a request Winslet considers more humiliating. Poppy Bilderbeck quotes Winslet in the interview she had with *The Sun*, "I wish I hadn't shown so much flesh..." In another interview Winslet had with *Yahoo* in 2014, Bilderbeck adds that Winslet laments that her nude role continues to haunt her. In film creativity, directors need to chart a course that allows the active engagement of viewers' minds in fleshing out stories imaginatively and reaching logical conclusions on scenarios by themselves without the camera revealing too many details.

Anikulapo

Anikulapo presents a story of man's greed and self-centeredness. Of particular note is the scene where Arolake (Bimbo Ademoye) rapes Saro (Kunle Remi) on Saro's return to his base after a business visit to the palace. The scene of the rape is captured first in a wide shot where Arolake throws herself on Saro. Thereafter, she removes the wrapper covering her body from armpit to waist, making the side view of her breast possible. While the body movement of Arolake is on, in simulating sexual intercourse, the camera angle is on a long shot, allowing viewers to see the characters from

a distance. Immediately, a wide shot takes viewers back and closer to Arolake and Saro, revealing Arolake's breast again. But for the choice of the director, the long shot of Arolake and Saro sufficiently explains what transpires in the scene, even without the details captured in wide shots.



Fig. 4: Arolake in a room with Saro. **Source (Movie):** *Anikulapo*, 2022 – 56:43, 2:22:44

In another scene, Arolake is seen sitting on the bed topless in the company of Saro. Subsequently, Saro makes love to her. By the time the scenario is over, it is not only Arolake, whose nudity is seen, but Saro, too; Saro's full (unclad) back is exposed to viewers. The scene, due to its outrageous gratuitousness, drew contentious pandemonium among Nigerian viewers who expressed their disapproval online. However, Hakeem Effects – the make-up artist of the movie – explained that what Arolake has on in the scene is prosthetics breasts (Okezie 2022). What remains to be said is that the explanation covers only Arolake, not Saro. While Hakeem's ingenuity is commendable, the viewers would still have decoded what transpires in the scene intuitively should the director keep the details from the camera as it is, in the scene where Saro rapes Omowon.

Troubling Dialectics between Verisimilitude and Moderation

The contention amongst most Nigerian viewers, as it were, has been on how many sensitive human body parts should a film director reveal or expose

before the camera in lascivious scenes. Aside from this, usually, few (negative) concerns are raised by the audience on directors' depiction of realities on other matters in mise-en-scene. This presents a challenge given the popular belief that art is an aesthetic expression in which its essence is not attained unless creativity is allowed to take its full course unrestrained. To what extent can a film director go in achieving his cravings for verisimilitude while remaining within the confines of normative ethical standards? We are aware that decency in the context of creative art – in this case, film – appears esoteric. Can it be argued that what is considered by a section of people, culturally or sentimentally, as the 'norm' constitutes the accepted ethical standards? In principle, many viewers might find it easy to recognise what they would consider "decent," but in practice, the line which is supposed to divide what is acceptable from what is not usually proved to be nonexistent. Ironically, much of what is described as obscenity in a movie turns out to be attractive even to many of those who, through rhetoric, condemn it. However, this is not to suggest that decency in the craft of filmmaking is meaningless. The controversy entails what should or should not be included in depicting realities in films while striving to achieve verisimilitude, particularly in amative scenes where sexual intimacies are involved.

We might be persuaded to agree that it is in search of truthfulness that film directors meticulously craft all details in the pictures they create so that viewers find them engaging and believable. Doki and Odeh (2015) aver that verisimilitude "involves persuading the viewers into willingly suspending their disbelief, into accepting what they watch to be real within the framework and context of the film" (p. 30). Davies (2023) observes that "verisimilitude concerns what is true and false and belongs to the area of reason" (p.3). Davies tends to argue that there is a dichotomy between relative truth and objective truth. He posits that while relative truth is the product of mental statements, objective truth comes from facts. Thus, to achieve verisimilitude, there has to be a rich interplay between the worlds of mental statements/ideas and facts. The two have to come together to project the truth that is valid for everyone (Davis 2023, p.4). In this wise, directors need to ask themselves: 'What truth is acceptable to all?' For instance, in *Anikulapo*, not many details are exposed to the viewers regarding the intimate affairs between Awarun and Saro, yet, it is believed that the two have had sexual intercourse – this is a departure from the sex scene involving Femi and Yinka in *Blood Sisters*. Once it is established seeing

Awarun and Saro in bed coupled with the dialogue, the affairs between the two become a fact. It is assumed that the two characters have had sexual intimacy, but how they perform the act is left to the individual viewer's interpretation. Even so, it is often easy to believe that whatever happens, the act happens exactly that way.

Veteran filmmakers like Tunde Kelani, Chico Ejiro, Zeb Ejiro, and Tecu Benson hold the view that sexual intimacy can be subtly implied to the audience, rather than explicitly showcasing details typically regarded as 'private affairs.' Kelani shared these insights during an interview with these researchers (C. A. Patrick & S. I. Ilori, personal communication, March 13, 2024), emphasising a preference for suggestive gestures instead of gratuitous exposure of bodies in film directing. Kelani's notion of 'private affairs' in films is informed by the influences from his Yoruba culture. A conscientious film director only needs to deploy a scenic aura that will make a sexual intimate scene believable. This, in essence, is creativity. In the case of Yinka and Femi in *Blood Sisters*, the two lead characters get to have sex at any given chance; though not fully naked, an effort towards creating verisimilitude shows Yinka removing his underwear in one of the scenes. What some of these new-generation directors are oblivious to is the over-bloated portrayal of reality in some of the neo-Nollywood films. This illustrates the ambiguity in verisimilitude. Some phrases such as 'oh, fuck' that sporadically crop up in characters' dialogue, for instance, in *Blood Sisters*, are not Nigerian.

In reality, most Nigerians rarely use those sorts of phrases in their daily conversations. Similarly, in the scene where Chief Fernandez attempts to set his son free and a fight breaks out, the average Nigerian could hardly relate to the martial arts in that scene. At one point in that fight, it got to a level where two characters had to drop their guns and engage each other with their fists. The security operatives on arriving at the scene, deployed skills similar to a commando style to subdue the fight, an approach that is larger-than-life in a Nigerian context. All of these require an ingenious and resourceful director to create compelling and believable pictures tempered with ethical consideration and cultural authenticity. Bruveris (2017) explains how Pakalnina creatively "blends documentary (of real events) and imaginative events in a film" (p88). The challenge here, however, according to Bruveris is "the poetic framing of reality...renders problematic the idea of verisimilitude, associated with documentary film" (2017, p.86). To an extent, the treatment of realities coats the real message in a film,

presenting sublime scenery by collapsing “the appearance of truth into truth itself” (Jorgensen 2017, p.135).

In the case of neo-Nollywood, a niche must be created, and Nigerian film directors have to be courageous and deliberate about this. In achieving a Nigerian type of verisimilitude in ‘modern’ film directing, moderation has a role to play, bearing in mind the peculiarities of Nigerian culture where it is normal for people to cast aspersions on alien behavioural patterns that they deem indecent. It is evident that, when determining whose behaviour is deemed improper in society, scrutiny tends to fall more heavily on women than on men. Ogunleye (1999, p.8) succinctly observes, “Many studies have shown that images of women in films are negative, disparaging and stereotypical.” In ‘obscene’ content in movies, female characters get more castigation from the public than their male counterparts. This much has been observed by Azeez and Shittu (2015, p.16):

Pornographic films put the female folk at the receiving end of moral upbraid in our society as ladies who partake in it are quickly stigmatized as whores, harlots, and social renegades while society keeps mum about men. So, Nollywood which should project our values need not be the vanguard for deepening the castigation of women.

Azeez and Shittu (2015) further stress that, though society frowns at men and women who are involved in “open sexual escapes as denigrates” nonetheless, the “stigma is less pronounced” on men (p.17). This suggests that film directors cannot perpetually ignore the disposition of the public or feign ignorance of the concerns of the viewers who are the consumers of the products the film industry turns out. Film directors are compelled to settle for an alternate way where moderation is the guiding principle in presenting/depicting verisimilitude in lascivious scenes in movies.

Conclusion

Neo-Nollywood and its practitioners have to be resourceful and innovative in their works; they need to retain the multidimensional and multinational appeals of their offerings. Nigeria’s stories are Nigerian movies and vice versa. Nigerian film directors must be mindful of viewers’ sensibilities, especially as regards projecting obscene events in the movies they produce,

bearing in mind the social-cultural composition of the people for whom primarily the film is produced. This penchant for mimicry of American-style filmmaking, as found in some of the neo-Nollywood films, tends to express itself in the representation of explicit scenes bordering soft-core pornographic expressions that detract from the cultural credibility of Nigerian cinema. The benchmark from which quality and standards in Nigerian films are judged must be intrinsically homegrown. Criteria born out of a valid understanding of life in Nigeria, while the country and people are growing, would be that which speaks and will speak particularly to Nigeria's identity and cultural orientation. The observation of Macaulay and Akande (2021) that "creative emphasis is usually placed on the originality of the filmmaker's vision, which means that he is still within the genre; the world he creates on screen across several films reveals consistent preoccupations and visual styles" (p.7) is valid here. Nigerian film directors' perspectives, if put into practice consistently over time, become a rating. This (i.e. the stand of Macaulay and Akande above) is the approach older film directors like Kelani, Tecu Benson, Zeb Ejiro, etc. adopted in their creative works. Yet Kelani's works are within the range of neo-Nollywood. This is the cardinal position that the Nigerian film industry should imbibe as it navigates the threshold of transformation and strives to carve out a unique and enviable space on the global stage of film production. By imbibing this approach, the industry can ensure its evolution is not only innovative but also rooted in the values that define its rich cultural heritage, ultimately securing its place on the global cinematic stage.

References

- Adebayo, T. 2022, May 26, *Netflix Blood sisters: My hardest day was between 'the club scene' and 'the bathroom scene Meet Timeyin, played by Genoveva Umeh*, Kemi Kelani News. <https://www.kemifilani.ng/> Accessed: October 2, 2024.
- Adedina, F. 2022, Challenge and Prospects of Propagating Literature and Culture through Creative Writing, *Akete Journal of Performing Arts and Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, pp. 106 -122
- Adesina, L. A. 2010, Audience perception of portrayals of women in Nigerian home video films, *Journal of Communication and Media Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp.35 - 48.

- Agwu, A. E., Nwokeocha, I., Abba-Father, J. O., and Ibekwe, Chinedu. 2022, Sex Objects and Conquered People? Representations of Women in Nigerian Films in the 21st Century, *QISTINA: Journal Multidiscipline Indonesia*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 48-63.
- Allen, R. W. 2002, *Theory and the Arts*, Routledge, New York.
- Allen, R. 1999, *Psychoanalytic Film Theory*, in *A Companion to Film Theory*, Blackwell Publishing Ltd, New Jersey.
- Arinze-Umobi, S. O. and Chiweta-Oduah, O. 2023, Negative depictions of women in contemporary Nollywood Films: A critical analysis of shanty town film, *Global Journal of Arts Humanity and Social Sciences*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 113-118.
- Azeez, S. A. & Shittu, T. 2015, Nollywood and cultural re-orientation: Prospects and problems, *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, vol.15, pp. 5-27.
- Bilderbeck, P. 2023, November 20, Kate Winslet revealed why she regrets iconic scenes from one of her biggest movies. www.unilad.com> film-and-tv > news. Accessed: October 13, 2024.
- Bruveris, K. 2017, The creative treatment of actuality: Poetics and verisimilitude in Laila Pakalnina's films, *Culture Crossroads*, vol. 10, pp. 85-90. DOI:<https://doi.org/10.55877/cc.vol10.144>.
- Davies, P. 2023, *Values, Virtues and Verisimilitude*, Bournemouth University.
- Deleuze, G. 2000, The brain is the screen: An interview with Gilles Deleuze, in Gregory Flaxman (Ed.), *The Brain is the Screen: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Cinema*, pp. 365-375, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Doghudje, R. V. 2020, Balancing gender stereotypes in Nollywood: A consideration of Genevieve Nnaji's Lionheart, *Ejotmas: Ekpoma Journal of Theatre and Media Arts*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 83-97. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ejotmas.v7i1-2.6>.
- Doki, A. G. & Jerry, I. O. 2015, Verisimilitude and aesthetics in selected Nigerian home videos, *Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists*, vol. 15, pp. 28-43.
- Endong, F. P. & Eumole P. E. 2023, The sexual objectification of women in the Nigerian entertainment industry, *SIASAT Journal of Social, Cultural*

and Political Studies, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 154-165.
<https://doi.org/10.33258/siasat.v8i3.158>

Jeyifo, B. 1981, Literary drama and the search for a popular theatre in Nigeria, in ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi, *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*, pp.411-419. Nigeria: Nigeria is Amazing.

Jimi, K., Jumoke S. and Florence F. 2022, An appraisal of the dominant depiction of women in Nigeria Nollywood Movies, *Covenant Journal of Business & Social Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 90-111.

Jorgensen, D. 2010, The Numerical Verisimilitude of Science Fiction and EVE, *Extrapolation*, vol. 51, no. 1, pp. 121-134.
<https://doi.org/10.3828/extr.2010.51.1.9>.

Kuhn, A. and Guy W. 2012, *A Dictionary of Film Studies*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Macaulay, A. and Olumuyiwa A. A. 2021, Talents and creativity as artistic impetus in films: An interrogation of Abiodun Olayiwola's *Ojiji Iwa* and *Ikekun*, *Awiyé Journal of Language, Literature and Communication Studies*, vol.1.

Ogunleye, F. M. 1999, Towards the dissolution of the female stereotype in and through the Nigerian Video Film: A challenge for the new millennium. *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 8-15.

Okezie, W. 2022, Anikulapo: Bimbo Ademoye's breast is not real - Crew Member reveals. *Alimosho Today.com* www.alimoshotoday.com. Accessed: October 5, 2024.

Oladoja, F. & Tomere, D. 2022, Gendered Voices and Ideological Communications: A Case from the Film Industry, *Journal of Business, Communication & Technology*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 67-81.

Olayiwola, A. 2022, Gendered Nollywood: Interrogating femininity in contemporary Nigerian films, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 12, no. 5, pp. 123-129.

Oni, O. 2022, The spectacle and politics of nudity in *Blood Sisters*". *Olongo Africa*, May 18.2022, olongoafrica.com.

Onyenankeya, K. U., Onyenankeya, O. M., & Osunkunle, O. 2019, Sexism and gender profiling: Two decades of stereotypical portrayal of women in

Nollywood Films, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 72-90 <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss2/6>

Osakpolor, E. 2021, Portrayal of women in contemporary Nollywood Films: Isoken and King of Boys in Focus, *Cinej Cinema Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 117-145.

Azeez, S. A. and Shittu T. A. 2015, Nollywood and cultural re-orientation: Prospects and problems, *Journal of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists*, vol.15, pp. 5-27.

Pervez, A. 2015, Cognitive film theory: An overview, *Bangladesh Film and Television Institute Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 57-68.

Roy, L. 2023, November 25. I was young... had things to prove: Kate Winslet Regrets Showing So Much Flesh in the Steamiest Scene of Hollywood. *Fandomwire* <https://fandomwire.com/> Accessed: October 10, 2024.

Taiwo, E. 2023, January 21. Nancy Isime's unclad scene in 'Shanty Town' sets social media abuzz. *Vanguard*. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/> Accessed: October 14, 2024.

Udodiong, I. 2022, December 26, Far from home: Genoveva Umeh, Tomi Ojo & Elma Mbadiwe on Netflix Original, *Pulse*. <https://www.pulse.ng/> Accessed: October 07, 2024.

Ugondo, P. L. & Adikpo, J. A. 2016. Critical Discourse on Gender and Power in Selected Nigerian Films. *Kwararafa Contemporary Journal of Research*, 2(1): 173-187.

Uwom O. O., Chioma P. E., & Sodeinde O. A. 2013, Audience perception of sexual contents in Nigerian movies, *New Media and Mass Communication*, vol. 19, pp. 16-24.

Videography

Shanty Town. 2023. Directed by Dimeji Ajibola, performances by Chidi Mokeme, Ini Edo, Richard Mofe-Damijo, and Giant Creative Media.

Aníkúlápó. 2022. Directed by Kunle Afolayan, performances by Kunle Remi, Bimbo Ademoye, and Sola Sobowale, KAP Motion Pictures.

Blood Sisters. 2022. Directed by Biyi Bandele and Kenneth Gyang, performances by Ini Dima-Okojie, Nancy Isime, and Ramsey Nouah, Netflix.