

Article

Reimagining Storytelling: Nollywood's Digital Revolution against Hollywood Structures

Charles Okwuowulu

Department of Theatre Arts, Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Nigeria
dr.charles.okwuowulu@gmail.com, ORCID- <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2853-4480>

Abstract

*During Nollywood's formative years, the Nigerian film industry faced significant challenges in formalization. Scholars often classified it as an informal industry due to the short production-to-distribution cycle, insufficient funding, poor record-keeping and accountability, limited archival systems, and the absence of an effective distribution structure. This study critically examines Nollywood's digital transformation and formalization processes, focusing on the impact of platformization on narrative trends. Using critical reviews of scholarly works, participant observation as a filmmaker-researcher, and interviews with key Nollywood filmmakers, the research explores these developments in detail. Additionally, a comparative analysis is conducted between selected Nollywood films from the video's formative years in the 1990s – such as *Living in Bondage 1* (1993), *Living in Bondage 2* (1994), *Rattle Snake* (1994), *Glamour Girls* (1994) and its sequel, *Italian Connection* (1994), *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1994) and *The Return of Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (2001) – and their recent digital-era remakes: *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019), *Rattle Snake: The Ahanna Story* (2020), *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (2020), and *Glamour Girls* (2022). This analysis highlights how the remakes adopt classic Hollywood narrative techniques to appeal to a global audience. The study concludes that while the narrative quality of the remakes shows significant improvement, the themes of both the original and remake films often remain consistent, focusing on topics such as the quest for rapid wealth, crime, and greed.*

Keywords: Digitization, formalization, narratives, Nollywood and Hollywood

Introduction

Film medium has continually reinvented itself by constantly developing digitization techniques. The Nigerian film industry is equally undergoing a major transition following the global trend of streaming video content on digital platforms that offer subscription services, wherein viewers' viewing hours are being tracked on a numerical basis. The digital platformization has influenced Nollywood filmmaking and narrative trends to the extent that are synonymous with the universal visual culture and styles often seen in such global platforms as Netflix, Showmax, YouTube, Facebook, and Google. Foregrounding Bill Gates' statement in 1996 that "content is king", filmmakers in Nollywood have embraced the use of digital cameras and global platformization to globalise their local stories. Major components of the conventional Hollywood narrative techniques that these platforms regularly reinforce are, therefore, being replicated. As much as this is forging Nollywood production ethos and formalization process in the manner of the Hollywood specifications, it has continuously occasioned shifting trends in Nollywood Narratives.

Nollywood and the Notion of (In)Formality

The perception of Nollywood as an informal film business has varied over time (see Haynes and Okome, 1997; Okome, 2007; Haynes, 2014; Shaka, 2011; Labato, 2012; McCall, 2012; Ayakoroma, 2014; Tsika, 2019 and Haynes, 2019). The tortious



attempts at formalizing the processes of film financing and distribution in Nollywood through cable TV, multiplex, and digitization are highlighted by this study. McCall had characterized Nollywood as an industry with horizontal operational procedures distinct from the Hollywood studio system, developed according to the structural logic of a decentralized network of indigenous production and trading systems, in contrast to most established film cultures (2012, 12).

Nollywood is often referred to by scholars such as Haynes and Okome, (1997); Shaka, (2011); Ayakoroma, (2014); Shaka, Uwah, and Uchendu, (2014); and Haynes, (2016), to consist of video and digital films originating from Nigeria. However, scholars like Abdalla Adamu Uba (2007) have consistently seen films originating from the northern part of Nigeria as Kannywood. There seems to be a halt in the scholarly debate trailing the origin of Nollywood as a brand name. It was initially thought that Matt Steinglass coined the term in his 2002 *New York Times* article. However, Scholars like Shaka affirm that Norimitsu Onishi, a Japanese-American, is believed to be the originator of the term in his 2002 *New York Times* piece titled "Step aside, Los Angeles, Bombay for Nollywood," published in *The Guardian* (Nigeria) on Thursday, October 3, 2002 (2011, 234). Matt Steinglass's apparent denial of being the term's originator lends support to the scholarly assertion that Norimitsu Onishi was indeed the originator of the brand name, Nollywood.

Whenever issues surrounding the concept of formalization in the film industry are being discussed, Hollywood often serves as the primary example, with its centralized location in Los Angeles and production primarily by major studios with structured multiplexes for standardized exhibition and distribution. This form of production setting affords a sense of return on investment to investors. On the other hand, the Nollywood production setup is a decentralized business model, wherein film production and distribution do not dwell on a particular city/Location, but rather happen simultaneously in various towns and cities in Nigeria and are controlled by businessmen and entrepreneurs. As there is no Specific Geographical location or venue designed as Nollywood, the concept of Nollywood is ideological, operating on the structural logic of guide systems, production cartels, and much recent distribution framework, an offshoot of digitization.

Before the advent of multiple distribution channels such as cable TV, multiplexes (cinema houses), and online platforms, Nollywood films were primarily marketed directly to African audiences, both in Nigeria and the diaspora, through formats like VHS, VCD, and DVD for home viewing. Referred to as the "straight to DVD Market" by Haynes (2016), this distribution channel instilled significant control of the production framework to the executive producers (mostly referred to as marketers) who most often double as the producers. These sets of entrepreneurs oversee the near informal engagement of significant cast and crew members for film projects. Most times, these engagements are by mere phone calls, and the contract is activated once payments are made to the account of the engaged cast and crew. There are often no contract forms signed stipulating issues like royalty, and other terms and conditions. Nevertheless, the marketers often shy away from declaring the number of films sold and more often than not, the production houses of these marketers are shops in the electronic markets in Alaba, Onitsha, and Aba.

Comparing this production set-up (which has heavily been regulated by different filmmakers' guilds and associations) to the Western production set-up (where Hollywood belongs), this process may seem informal, even though it significantly contributed to the global visibility of the Nigerian film industry. This seeming informal production structure has made scholars like Labato (2012) infer Nollywood is an unstructured industry due to its unregulated and untaxed transactions. Noah Tsika (2019) attributes Nollywood's informality to its inefficient archival system for the produced and distributed films. Furthermore, McCall (2012) refers to Nollywood as a product of Labour and exchange, a system that negates the existence of global formal economies, arguing that Nollywood operates within the informal economy, with no formal records despite its significant success in impacting diverse audiences in Africa.

These views of Nollywood's informality mirror the perception of ancient African societies, which were often deemed to be devoid of formal structures, but invariably exhibited strong organizational systems in various aspects of life, as evidenced by studies on governance, healthcare, and education. While the cited scholarly reviews attempt to justify Nollywood's informality, the argument put forward in this paper is that Nollywood's formality lies not in the logic of destination/location, in the Hollywood sense, but in the guild/association systems which have enabled seamless film production across Nigeria. The emerging distribution platforms have again taken care of the issues of records and taxation as advanced by some scholars earlier cited.

Perhaps Ezinne Igwe's (2017) article, *Structure and Power Struggle in Contemporary Nollywood: An Ethnographic Evaluation* which underscores the presence of both visible and invisible formal structures within the Nollywood industry buttresses the argument of this study further. Igwe suggests that despite conscious efforts towards formalization, Nollywood appears informal when compared to Western film culture. Aligning with Igwe's scholarly position on the issue of (in)formal structures as seen in production and distribution, supported by the guild system, the researcher's argument will be further buttressed by the discourse on how digital streaming platforms are contributing to the formalization of Nollywood.

An Overview of the Digital Interface in Nollywood

By the year 2001, with the arrival of Econet (now Airtel), a Zimbabwean telecommunications company, and subsequently MTN, a South African telecommunications company, the mobile regime commenced in Nigeria. The arrival of the GSM network changed various aspects of the film business. Before then, Nollywood had already been (arguably) established as the number one video film industry in Africa, but with ease of communication through the GSM network, various deals for transnational films such as *Amazing Grace* (Jeta Amata, 2006) were easily brokered. These transnational films meant cross-fertilization of production ideas and filming equipment. Recall that before the introduction of the GSM network in Nigeria, the internet and computer systems were introduced globally, with digital data storage as the driving force.

Gradually, there was innovation through more digital cameras and accessories as well as computers with higher capacities (RAM, ROM, processor speed, and graphic cards) for film editing. These innovations made the filming business easier and a lot of people went into film production. As these trends developed and expanded the film business in Nigeria positively, it dismantled some limitations which were unconsciously imposed by the analogue distribution system. Film distribution at that period relied heavily on VCD and DVD sales which were heavily controlled by executive producers (in Pound Road-Aba, Upper Iweka-Onitsha, and Alaba-Lagos). With the arrival of DSTV in 2003 and ROK TV in 2013 as well as so many cable television stations, for business in Nigeria, there was improved technological development as these TV stations (serving as distribution platforms) continually stipulate technical requirements for film acquisition.

The strict technical requirements often insisted on by the Cable Television Stations before the acquisition of content have had a significant impact on Nollywood narrative techniques. Beyond the fact that these Cable TV stations provide different contract documents before the acquisition of content which has deepened the formalization process of Nollywood, the technical requirement often serves as a compelling yardstick for the adoption of “Universal” narrative styles in Nollywood production, a technique which (re)shapes the evolving narrative trends in Nollywood which are titling towards Hollywood classical narrative techniques. A content manager at Mnet television network, who has requested anonymity, elaborates on Mnet's prerequisites for film acquisition. According to him, before the acquisition, films undergo assessment based on technical aspects (such as technical quality in video and audio qualities) as well as adherence to regulatory standards (like the NBC/NFVCB stipulations). Thus, following the current technological advancements, acquiring full HD content, exported in formats like MOV, MXF, or H264 with an aspect ratio of 1920 X 1080p is emphasized. Again, there is an emphasis on visual clarity, (avoiding shaky and poorly lit scenes) and good audio quality (devoid of wind, pops, and unnecessary ambient noise) before acquisition. For the narrative components, priority is accorded to the compelling story with well-structured plots, produced with good actors and with reasonable fan base. The evaluation of the narrative quality is often done on a scale of 10, with films scoring below 5 seen as non-transmittable. In addition, Adherence to the NBC (Nigerian Broadcasting Commission) code and NFVCB Nigerian Film and Video Censors Board regulations are emphasized. NBC and NFVCB are part of the regulatory bodies for motion pictures in Nigeria. (Personal Communication, April, 24th 2024).

Nollywood Western Formalization Processes and the Role of Online Distribution Channels

Following the upsurge of cable television Networks, notably Mnet on the DSTV as a window for film distribution, there was a significant decline in the DVD market by 2004. After Mnets’ engagement into the Nigerian film scene in 2003, against the marketer’s intention of airing already released films on DVD, Mnet began showcasing premium content before their release to DVD markets. A situation that almost extinguished the DVD market, as marketers and other independent producers started shooting for Mnet Cable TV network. By 2009 and beyond, innovations in telecom technology made it possible for viewers to watch films on

their Android Phones, a situation that again made some film marketers who were struggling to keep abreast with the technical requirements for producing for Mnet to readapt to the internet platforms for film distribution. With this shift, made possible by the digitization of information networks, available films on the internet could readily be accessible to viewers through the Global System for Mobile (GSM) communication network, which enabled the usage of data towards accessing online content (Okwuowulu, 2018; 42). The dynamics of Video on Demand (VOD) have been adequately discussed by scholars such as Wheeler Dixon (2013), Chuck Tryon (2013), and Moradewun Adejumbi (2019) among others. Tracing the history of VOD in Nigeria, Haynes (2019) observed that IROKO partners, a company owned by Jason Njoku, commenced operations in Nigeria, in 2011, acquiring a catalogue of 5,000 films which endeared large viewership across 178 countries. This viewership increased to a billion views on YouTube by 2015 (277).

Iroko TV's entrance in Nigeria signified the adoption of internet technology in Nollywood film distribution. With their activities, Iroko TV became the first YouTube-hosted channel, dedicated to the acquisition and distribution of compelling Nollywood films to online viewers on a subscription basis. Seeing the success of the internet-based platform, some DVD marketers designed and launched similar channels. RealNolly YouTube Platform owned by ten prominent DVD marketers was one such platform. George Edmond, the Managing Director of RealNolly in an interview with the researcher noted that the consortium was founded in 2012 by a group of ten marketers, who collectively uploaded a variety of films. While citing Iroko TV as the pioneer in the industry, Edmond observed that adapting to the digital technological trend is the major driving force behind the company, an attribute that determines the survival of film in Nigeria as well as reaching out to the diasporic teeming fans of Nollywood (George Edmond, personal communication, April 34, 2017). Presently global streaming platforms such as Netflix have pitched their tents in the Nigerian film industry for business. Netflix's penetration in the Nigerian film ecosystem has been examined and adjudged favourably by scholars such as Alessandro (2022) and Omoera with Ojieson (2022). With a volume of 238 million paying subscribers across 190 countries, Netflix occupies the position of the premier entertainment provider in the world, providing an avalanche of TV shows, films, and games in various genres and languages.

Nevertheless, Nigeria boasts only about 169,600 Netflix subscribers. Netflix, the streaming giant, made its foray into Nigeria in 2016, captivating the nation's audience despite rivalry from South African-owned Showmax and other platforms. The release of Genevieve Nnaji's film, *Lionheart* (2020), marked Nollywood's maiden venture as a Netflix Original. The remarkable success of the film paved the way for Netflix's significant involvement in the Nigerian film industry, attracting both local and international audiences to the streaming services. Before this breakthrough, Nollywood had been adjudged as the world's second-largest film industry, with an estimated 580 million contribution to Nigeria's GDP in 2016. However, over the past seven years, Netflix claims to have injected over \$23 million into the Nigerian film sector, resulting in approximately 250 locally licensed films, along with co-produced and commissioned content that garners widespread global viewership (Alessandro 2022; Omoera and Ojieson 2022; Oyelakin 2022; Eleanya 2023; Akintaro

2024). As noted by Mathiew Ajjalys, Netflix has multiple acquisition methods, such as Netflix Original, and Netflix royalty, with different acquisition rates. He observed that at the inception of Netflix in Nigeria, the acquisition fee for Royalty (popularly known as Netflix Naija) was between 100,000 to 200,000 dollars, whereas the original was recording above 500,000 dollars. However, with the usual influx of content by Nigerian filmmakers, as they did when Mnet entered Nigeria in 2003, acquisition prices have dropped drastically (Personal communication, May 2, 20204).

With the arrival of the Netflix streaming platform and its technical stipulation and requirement for content acquisition, formalization in Nollywood film production has gone a step further, tilting towards the Hollywood classical narrative visual style. Izu Ojukwu and Mathew Ajjalys, renowned filmmakers in Nollywood affirm that because the Chief Executive Officers of Netflix, Ted Sarandos and Greg Peters are Americans, they unconsciously impose classical Nollywood narrative style as a yardstick for content acquisition. However, Netflix's inroad in Nigerian cinema has encouraged the (re)production of original African Stories as seen in many remake films (personal commination, March 24, 2024). To review the classical narrative structure, significant attention is drawn to D.W. Griffith's intention in initiating shot variations, which stemmed from a pursuit of effective narrative in visual storytelling. This disruption from the customary long takes marked a significant shift in the early cinema. The designated "Master Scene Technique" is a separation of shots that are broken into long, medium, and close-up sequences. This can be likened to the process of the pyramidal structure often seen in the classical theatre. Griffith's adoption of this narrative technique, having employed shot sequences that proceeded from long shot through medium to close-up shots has become a cliché in universal film narrative. However, subsequent directors began to deviate from this conventional shot structure, reversing the classical pyramidal narrative and experimenting with different styles. Shots could now initiate with close-ups and conclude with medium or long shots. At an artistic level, narratives could commence with climactic scenes and then weave back through episodic methods to reveal preceding events, akin to the employment of flashback and flash-forward techniques in filmmaking. Examining the evolution of narration styles, this paper foregrounds the fundamental roles of technology in influencing the narrative trend. For instance, the advancement in cameras during the late 1950s spurred the director's interest in experimentation, leading to the eminence of visual techniques like close-up shots, and shot-reverse-shots sequences.

Bordwell and Thompson affirm that the term "Classical Hollywood Narrative," developed from scholarly inquiry regarding the reoccurring narrative trends in Hollywood films. Observable indexes highlight that these narratives are often woven around protagonists whose desires are often inhibited by natural or societal constraints, being embodied by antagonistic forces. Again, Hollywood narratives often adhere to certain structural conventions, including the division into three acts, each punctuated by pivotal plot points, wherein film traditionally commences with a "grabber" to captivate the viewer's attention. In addition, the concept of mise-en-scene techniques is employed by directors to enhance narrativity, with an emphasis on creating adequate suspense and other visual elements aimed at sustaining the

viewer's engagement. As the narrative progressed, particularly between the 1980s-2000s, the trend towards faster cutting in the film became prominent, reflecting a shift in visual style to keep the viewers visually stimulated (Kolker, 2008, 103; Bordwell and Thompson, 2010, 404-673).

Shifting Trends in Nollywood Narratives: Analyses of Selected Iconic Nollywood Films and their Remakes

Nollywood narratively has been attributed to portray "image commodities" which include lavish automobiles, elaborate wardrobes, and massive houses as inferred by scholars such as Shaka (2002), Larkin (2008), Diawara (2010), and Villiers (2019). These narratives according to these scholars often exhibit plots that revolve around urban, middle-class settings. While Mbembe (2008) ascribes Nollywood's story as consisting of "aesthetics of superfluity," which reinforces the postcolonial poverty of the Nigerian people. The phrase "aesthetics of outrage," coined by Brian Larkin (2008), describes how stories are constructed around repeated shocks that violate social and religious conventions in an effort to provoke the viewer. According to Haynes (2016), Nollywood stories are "money-driven," meaning that protagonists frequently need a certain amount of money to save a life or advance to a position that is out of their reach. On the contrary, according to Villiers (2019), Nollywood's story pattern involves a "money-time" where the presence or absence of money presents itself as a virtual time representation which often impedes the filmmaker's intentions to on-screen activation. Villiers' investigation of Nollywood production economies, avers that the "uncinematic" narrative style in Nollywood is a product of deficiency in finance and production expertise/management (53-58).

Haynes (2016, 2019) attributes themes of "money ritual" and "get-rich-quick" syndrome which featured predominantly in the early Nollywood films, as the influences of popular culture shaped by class dynamics. Despite the predominant focus on wealth acquisition, some narratives also address social issues such as gender inequality, ethnic conflicts, and religious intolerance. Nollywood narratives draw heavily from the collective (un)consciousness of Nigerian society, reflecting current social experiences and aspirations to emotionally engage audiences through the portrayal of societal challenges, including poverty, corruption, and tribalism, to underscore the lack of patriotism and the prevalence of vices such as prostitution, fraud, and ritual killings in Nigerian society (Shaka, 2011).

The evolution of several narratives in Nollywood has given rise to district themes such as Rags-to-Richs and retributive justice, both, a product of popular culture, exhibiting the aspirations of Nigerian masses. These narratives, exhibit various methods of upward mobility, most time through fast means like fraud, magic, and rituals often ending with significant punishment for the wrongdoers. These narrative trends are a construct of societal aspirations as well as the preferences of film financiers and distributors. In the earlier years of Nollywood, film marketers and producers exhibited overwhelming influence on most of these narrative drifts, which often cater to specific audience demographics. With the multiplicity of distribution platforms, independent producers through experimentation and artistic expression developed more impressionable styles and genres. This was catalyzed

by technological advancements which gave way to higher and more innovative production standards.

One of the staff at Netflix who prefers anonymity in an interview highlighted that technical standards introduced by Netflix aim to ensure that the local video contents have a universal appeal. He believes that the shifting trends in narratives are not technical but on genres of the original language content being demanded by Netflix. According to him, Netflix's requirements before film acquisition focus on original stories shot on high definition systems, full HD, exported on MOV, MXF, or H264 with an aspect ratio of 1920x1080p. This technical quality emphasizes clarity of picture and purity of sound (personal communication, May 1, 2024). Beyond the strict technical compliance that often makes these films have the universal visual appeal, Netflix's quest for original content has endeared Nigerian filmmakers towards re-examining post-colonial anxieties in Nigeria, resulting in the development of various sub-genres that reinforce the concept of aspiratable narratives. These include genres such as epic/historical films, crime/vigilante/gangster films, ritual/occultic films, action films, prostitution/ghetto life, royalty/traditional films, religious/Christian films, love/romance films, and military/oil politics films. These films portray traditional societies, insecurity situations, rituals, occultism, and the effects of the get-rich-quick syndrome.

The fulcrum of most of these narratives is hinged on the projection of aspired and relatable lifestyles in Nigerian society, which constantly underpin the concept of aspirational (aspiration and relatable) narratives. These genres are supported by most online platforms through dedicated genre demarcations. These genres are mutational due to the function of social indexes and the imposition of different film financiers and distributors.

These scholarly positions can best be understood through the discourse of the development of the Nollywood narrative trend, through the analyses of the remake of iconic Nollywood productions such as *Living in Bondage* 1 (1993), *Living in Bondage* 2 (1994), *Rattle Snake* (1994), *Glamour Girls* (1994) and its sequel *Italian Connection* (1994), *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1994), and its sequel *The Return of Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (2001). Netflix's exhibition of these remake films presents a substantial opportunity for significant visibility of Nollywood content to the global community. In *Living in Bondage* 1 (1993) and its sequel (1994), Andy Okeke (Kenneth Okonkwo) inexorably pursues wealth, and resorts to using his dedicated wife, Merit (Nnenna Nwabueze), for ritualistic wealth. The spirit of Merit, once Andy's source of sustenance as his wife, begins to haunt him after her death, resulting in Andy's degrading into madness in a bid to secure a profitable contract. On the contrary, the 2019 remake complexly interlinks the original plotlines, highlighting Nnamdi Okeke (Jide Kene Achufusi), allegedly Andy's son, traversing similar struggles for riches. Having been introduced to the cultic world of riches by Chief Omeego (Kanayo O. Kanayo), a former companion of Andy, Nnamdi's expedition emulates Andy's, culminating in a struggle with the choice of sacrificing a loved one for wealth.

The two films highlight the theme of cultic money, but while Andy caved into the pressure of sacrificing Merit his wife, Nnamdi resisted sacrificing loved ones, despite the glamour of wealth. The consequences of their choices haunt them inversely: while Andy is tortured by Merit's spirit, Nnamdi faces a near-death circumstance. Arguably, the commercial success of *Living in Bondage* (1992) laid the foundation for contemporary Nollywood. Thus notwithstanding technological limitations within that era, *Living in Bondage* achieved realism through convincing *mise-en-scene* techniques, emphasized by Andy's ritual-birth with real ram blood and vibrant cultural ceremonies. The achievement of the remake film is drawn from the emotive depth of the original and complimented with superior cinematography and production values. The remake paid thorough attention to details, contrasting the grittiness of slum life with the affluence of modernity, with the aid of visual and auditory components to induce desired emotions.

The narrative *Rattle Snake* (1994), centres on Ahanna Okolo, who, following his father's untimely death, engages in crime. Odinaka, his uncle, maltreats Ahanna and his siblings and later impregnates his mother. He amasses Ahanna's father's property in Lagos into his own. Ahanna, oblivious to his uncle's endeavors, unintentionally becomes entangled in criminal activities to support his family. His mother and uncle are mistakenly murdered during the robbery. The success of many robbery attacks led to the formation of the notorious gang ARMADAS which operated till the law caught up on them. In the 2020 remake, *Rattle Snake: The Ahanna Story*, Ahanna is portrayed as an unemployed graduate, who having found his family ensnared by his uncle's schemes after returning to Lagos is deeply shocked and runs to his friend, who is faced with mounting debts to a drug lord. Ahanna proposes robbing his uncle to avert the impending disaster. Revelations emerge during the robbery, prompting Ahanna's killing of his uncle and mother and subsequently the formation of the ARMADAS gang. While *Living in Bondage* (Original and its remake) have linear plot continuity, the two versions of *Rattle Snake* (Original and remake) exhibit parallel narratives, portraying contemporary Nigerian societal challenges. Conversely, both films portray societal issues like embezzlement, drug trafficking, and unemployment, however, the sharp contrast between the original and remake is emphasized by technological motifs which are very evident through deep-focus cinematography and sophisticated production techniques that enhance narrative coherence, capturing with intricate details, the essence of modern Nigeria.

Three storylines showcasing the luxurious lifestyle of Nigerian women who engage in sexual activities with men to make money are featured in *Glamour Girls* (1994) and its sequel, *Italian Connection* (1994). In the first storyline, Fred (Zack Orji) takes his wife Jessica (Tina Amuziam) abroad to sleep with dogs for money and later jilts her for her friend Anita (Eucharika Anunobi). The second storyline portrays Jane (Liz Benson) in an attempt to dump her husband Desmond (Sola Fosudo) for Alex (Raymond Johnson), a supposed presidential candidate who turns out to be a swindler and later defrauds her. The third story foregrounds three ladies who engage in sexual escapades with men for money. In *Glamour Girls* (2022), two storylines are presented: Emma (Sharon Ooja), endears herself to Donna (Nse Ikpe-Etim) who runs a prostitution organization and she is later linked to Segun (Femi

Branch), a well-off man who realizes that she was a stripper and wants her strip for him before his guard Zeribe. In the second storyline, Jemma husband is seen to be on life-support and she tries to borrow money or sell their land to save him. After several unsuccessful attempts at getting the required funds, Jemma returns to the high-profile prostitution business with Donna Agency. Her return is heralded by a sizzling romance with Alexander (Lymxxx), the accountant of multi-billionaire Chief Nze (Ejike Asiegbu). Jemma's husband finally dies, and she realizes that her son is being sexually molested by Alexander and kills him. This heightens the conflict in the film. The remake of *Glamour Girls* (2022) has the same title and theme as the original but diverges in plot, story, treatment, and narrative techniques. As much as both films portray Nigerian society as inhabited by disadvantaged people lacking social security and therefore willing to engage in profane activities to make money, the remake film shows remarkable upscaling in production quality, as evidenced by deep-focus cinematography and production value.

The film, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (1994), tells the story of a barren woman who pleads with the river goddess for a child, and in return, promises that the child will serve the goddess. Nneka, being an offspring of the river goddess, grows up with a presumed spirit husband and thus inflicts pain and destruction on any man she encounters. Her primary target, Tony, a promising young man with an enviable career is led astray from his promising career to a life of ruin and destruction. However, through divine intervention, Tony is redeemed. In the sequel, *The Return of Nneka the Pretty Serpent* (2001), Ifeoma and Tony flee to Port Harcourt and start a family, but struggle ensues when Tony loses his job. Tony experiences a spiritual reformation and faces life with newfound uprightness. The predominant themes of infertility, spiritual possession, and the consequences of promiscuity are significant to both films. They caution against reckless behavior and explore the dangers of yielding to temptation. In the 2022 remake of *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* a young woman realizing the enormity of her supernatural heritage and the required implications is foregrounded. Nneka confronts various challenges and adversaries, particularly those who seek to exploit her abilities for their gain. As the film progressed, she struggled through power, love, and sacrifice to redefine her identity.

The mystical element of Nneka's ancestry seems to be the connection between the original and remake films; a connection not well pronounced in the remake. Again both films depict Nigerian society as a country where citizens' quest for wealth is inordinate, often resorting to unethical means. This motif is iterated through the reflection of societal values and challenges, as seen in the high crime rate, induced by poverty, as highlighted through incidents like the theft of thirty thousand dollars from a forgotten bag. There was evidence of less convincing visual effects and staged compositions on the 1994 and 2001 versions of *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* which relied on developing digital technology. However, while the 2022 remake highlights the recurring themes propelled by social anxiety, the application of stunning visual effects offers a fresh perspective on the tale of the water spirit. With this exhibition of striking special effects and cinematography, viewers are immersed in Nneka's mystical world through cutting-edge filming techniques.

Both the original *Living in Bondage* and its remake, strive for continuity in the story of Andy Okeke, now through his son, Nnamdi Okeke, creating a clever connection. Andy, who descends into madness in *Living in Bondage 2*, transforms into a 'born-again' Christian and a pastor in the remake. An attempt is made to suggest that Andy's wife, Ego, who fled in *Living in Bondage 2*, was pregnant with his child before her departure, implying that she gave birth to the boy, now grown and known as Nnamdi Okeke in the 2020 remake. With reference to the Otokoto riot of 1996 in Owerri, Imo State, where citizens protested against ritual killings, significant believability and credence were added to the story.

In *Rattle Snake* (1995) and its 2020 remake, the director revisited the same plot structure and narrative which revolves around the issue of social insecurity and poverty in Nigeria, drawing attention to the prevalent get-rich-quick syndrome. While the remakes of *Living in Bondage*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, and *Glamour Girls*, attempted to either continue or discontinue the original story using (dis)similar plot structure, the 2020 remake of *Rattle Snake* faithfully follows the original narrative, albeit with minor deviations and notable differences in narrative techniques which could be likened to the pervasive digital advancement. The issue of technological evolution in Nollywood is well espoused in analysing both films, as they deal with the same story and plot, albeit shot over a protracted period. While both films portray Nigerian society as inhabited by citizens who are impoverished and lacking in social security, leading them to engage in various societal ills such as armed robbery, giving way to advanced fraud, and drug trafficking, to survive, there is a sharp contrast in the technical value of the remake, from the original, giving room for efficient narrative.

There is a weak establishment of character continuity between the 2020 remake of *Glamour Girls* (1994) and its retitled sequel, *Italian Connection* (1994), with an insignificant connection wherein Donna is meant to journey to Beirut to seek assistance from Doris and Thelma, her purported mentors from the original film, to have them wield their power to whittle Nkem's harassment of her colleagues. Similarly, beyond the mystical and ancestral elements associated with Nneka in *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, there is no significant affinity, between the original and the remake.

The *mise-en-scène* treatment adopted by films under review showcases the depth of work done by the filmmakers as well as draws attention to narrative styles prevalent within the production period. The introduction of believable narrativity, utilizing realistic elements like Andy's ritual bath and eating from a dustbin, alongside traditional ceremonies in *Living in Bondage* (1992/1993) justifies its audience appeal, occasioning its commercial success. Similarly, *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019) captures the emotional depth of the original through the plot structure, characterization, *mise-en-scene* of intermingling urban-slum life with state-of-the-art production design and cinematography. The issue of digital intrusion is also well explored in the remake of *Rattle Snake* (2020) which employs a first-person voice-over narrative to compress actions and externalize character thoughts and motives. Again, digital advancement enabled a vivid portrayal of scenes involving

glamour, drug dealings, and criminality through suitable lighting, costumes, settings, and camera angles.

While the original *Nneka the Pretty Serpent* film is flawed because of less convincing visual elements due to technological limitations, the 2022 remake has enhanced production quality and narrative clarity. Summarily, these films under review adopt adequate poetic justice to draw significant attention to the consequences of wrongdoing, with characters facing retribution for their actions, whether through madness, self-sacrifice, imprisonment, or even death, reflecting moral themes prevalent in Nigerian cinema.

Conclusion

Nollywood's evolution from a decentralized and informal business model to a more structured industry has significantly impacted its production and distribution mechanisms, positioning the industry for global appeal. The emergence of visual narrative techniques that align with international standards has enabled Nollywood to globalize uniquely Nigerian stories while reflecting the socio-political environment and collective anxieties of the local context. The remake films serve as a testament to this transformation, effectively blending local storytelling with modern technological advancements and internationally recognized narrative patterns.

Despite its gradual adoption of global standards—such as deep-focus cinematography, fast-paced editing, kinetic and aerial shots, as well as other hallmarks of Hollywood's classical narrative—the industry has retained its informal production context, which some scholars continue to consider a defining feature of Nollywood. This balance between adopting modern production techniques and preserving local storytelling approaches ensures that Nollywood's narratives remain distinct, even as the industry seeks to engage global audiences.

The remakes analyzed in this study—*Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*, *Rattle Snake: The Ahanna Story*, *Nneka the Pretty Serpent*, and *Glamour Girls*—demonstrate a marked improvement in narrative quality and technical sophistication. These advancements reflect Nollywood's embrace of international filmmaking practices, as shown in its use of shot variations, expressive lighting, and enhanced production value. However, despite these improvements, the remakes reassert themes such as the pursuit of rapid wealth, crime, and greed—an indication of the industry's commitment to local storylines that resonate with Nigerian audiences.

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