

IGBO CULTURE IN NOLLYWOOD FILMS AND THE PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUALIZATION OF IGBO IDENTITY IN DIASPORA COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

There exists today a thriving Nollywood entertainment enterprise whose patronage spans Nigerian geographical space. In most of the Nollywood films, one notices in-depth innovativeness in both thematic and artistic excellence and relevance, particularly issues that express the Nigerian/African culture and experience. Films embellished with the cultural practices of the locale in which they are set, as it is the case with Nollywood Igbo films could, apart from their entertainment value, also be veritable means of cultural transmission to the younger generation, particularly to those in diaspora communities. Nollywood films set in Igbo society are largely consumed outside Igbo homeland. The implication, therefore, is that when the diasporic Igbo youths/children who have had no contact with Igbo culture, or non-Igbo consumers, watch such films, they are likely to see whatever is portrayed as the culture of the people as true reflection of what obtains in the Igbo society. Such assumption may be misleading as a good deal of the traits some of the films ascribe to the Igbo tends towards misrepresentation of, or is inconsistent with, the Igbo culture and identity due to elements of conscious or unconscious culture corruption in the films. Existing critical studies on Nollywood films focus mainly on their sociological relevance or their function as cultural index, with none seemingly paying attention to the distortion and corruption of Igbo cultural practices in the films and the implications for the uninformed consumers. It is against this background that this paper interrogates the representation of the Igbo world in some Nollywood films. Through random sampling, the paper selects, for illustrative purposes, five works considered to be representative of such Nollywood Igbo films and explores their content to expose the actions, incidents or episodes that are not in tandem with Igbo culture and, therefore, present negative picture of the Igbo society. The study is largely expository and analytical with the five selected works providing the essential primary data. The findings of this study would place certain Igbo cultural issues in proper perspective and disabuse consumers of the misrepresentations and misconceptions occasioned by the production of such films.

Key Words: Igbo culture, Nollywood Igbo films, Igbo identity, diaspora communities, misrepresentation of culture

1.0 Introduction

The primary function of films or drama is entertainment. Since the advent of home video in Nigeria or what later came to be known as Nollywood films, perhaps, after

the model of the famous Hollywood in Los Angelis, California or the Chinese Bollywood, it has continued to perform this traditional function of entertainment. Today, Nollywood is a fast growing and flourishing entertainment industry, which has provided employment opportunity for many people in Nigeria. The emergence of Nollywood films, particularly those whose setting is Igbo society, has witnessed all shades of dramatization with varying thematic preoccupations: love affairs, marriage, family squabbles, sibling or co-wives rivalries, crimes, irresistible power of oracles/deities, supremacy of God's power over powers of darkness, get-rich-quick syndrome through initiation into secret cults where the prerequisite for wealth is to sacrifice a loved one as we see in *Living in Bondage*, the first Nollywood film in Igbo medium, and several other video dramatic works that emerged later, etc., giving the impression that the content of the films are the traits of Igbo society. A good number of such films are suffused with Igbo cultural elements, some of which are sometimes distorted or misrepresented. The paper selects, for illustrative purposes, five works, namely, *Silent War*, *Sword of Justice*, *Palace Niggars*, *Ezi Nwaanyị Dị Ụkọ* and *EgwuOnwa* considered to be representative of such Nollywood Igbo films, and explores their content to expose the actions or episodes that are inconsistent with Igbo cultural matrix.

2.0 Overview of the Key Issues in the Study

It is important at this point to briefly explain some of the keywords that are germane to our discussion. They include:

2.1 Igbo Culture

The Igbo word for culture is “*omenala*”, which Ilogu (1974, p. 124) sees as “a moral code” that defines “the various aspects of behaviour and social activities that are approved while at the same time indicating those aspects that are prohibited.” Both Ogbalu (1981) and Nwala (1985) explain “*omenala*” as literally meaning what happens in the land. In the words of Nwala, it is “that which obtains in the land or community... what accords to the custom and tradition of people” (p. 11). For Ogbalu, it is truly, what we do, how we live, our food, our dress and dress code, our distinct identity as a people or nation, our songs, our attitude and behavioural pattern. There is no community without culture; it is the people's culture that defines their identity. In his elaboration of the constituents of culture, Ogbalu indicates that it entails human development; everything that affects human life like education, belief system, laws and their character, and people's distinctive attributes. People's culture emanates from their milieus, the variety of things that make them what they are – their thought and physical and tangible environment.

Culture entails how people are brought up and how they behave to ensure harmonious coexistence. When a person is born into a community he/she learns how the people behave and follows suit accordingly. Children watch the community behaviour and imbibe it as they grow up (Ogbalu, 1981, p.11).

For Nwala (1985, p.26), culture includes “... the character of taboos, regulations, prescriptions, and prohibitions as to what is proper” in the “universe – rules of marriage, sexual intercourse, attitude to strangers - and forms of social relationship, as well as realm of simple decency and etiquette. Indeed, *omenala* is a body of law and

morals along with metaphysical foundations” (Nwala, 1985, as cited in Ikwubuzo, 2005, pp. 490-491).

“All the approved and accepted standards of behaviour constitute the cultural norms while the prohibitions are referred to as *nsọ ala* (the actions that are abominable to *Ala*, the land or Earth goddess)” (Ikwubuzo, 2005, p.491).

In discussing murder specifically, Ubesie (1978, pp.213-214) identifies four types of it: accidental murder, which can be occasioned by an accidental discharge of gun during funeral ceremony or hunting exercise (*nne ọchụ*), homicide (*oke ọchụ*), homicide that involves slaying of a person from another community (*ọchụ ezi*), kinsman and fratricide (*ọchụ ulọ*), and suicide by hanging, which is considered heinous. Uchendu (1965, pp.12-13) hints that the Igbo world “is a dynamic one – a world of moving equilibrium.

“The Igbo society, like other societies of the world, has established value systems embodied in their *omenala*. For life to go on as expected and for the society to be seen as a conducive place for human interaction, interrelation and coexistence, there are ethical traditions – norms of social behaviour that need to be upheld and adhered to. They are the approved and acceptable standard of behaviour in every Igbo community. The Igbo ... for instance, have had and practiced and still do], among several others (i) a culture of being their brother’s keeper; (ii) a culture of hospitality; (iii) a culture of providing collective security and safety in the community where they live; (iv) a culture of charity to all and malice to none; and (v) a culture of maintenance of peace, non-violence and respect for sanctity of life”(Ikwubuzo, 2005, pp. 491-492). Just as there are things that society proscribes and frowns at - those that do not promote good human relationship and harmonious living, there are also things it approves and cherishes.

Igbo culture is multi-faceted and cannot be exhaustively discussed in a short paper such as this. Extant studies like Victor Uchendu’s *The Igbo of the Southeast Nigeria* (1965), Tagboo Nzeako’s *Omenala Ndi Igbo* (1972), Tony Ubesie’s *Odinala Ndi Igbo* (1978), Bertram Osuagwu’s *Ndi Igbo Na Omenala Ha* (1979), Chidozie Ogbalu’s *Ndu Ndi Igbo* (1981), and similar works, discuss different aspects of Igbo socio-cultural lives of yesteryears. If we compare the Igbo life these works portray with the lifestyles of the Igbo today, one would notice some distortions, adulteration, or even a complete departure from what they used to be in the past. In the past, the Igbo were so rigid about their culture that if one failed to do anything in the way it was supposed to be done under the custom of the people, they would demand that it be done accordingly. One, for instance, would be expected to marry according to marriage regulations and customs of his people, bury the dead in line with the traditional requirements of his people, adjudicate in disputed issues to ensure justice and fairness, make proper investigations of allegations against somebody before judgment is passed so that the innocent is not punished unduly and so on.

2.1.1 The Ọkpara (First Son) in the eye of Igbo Culture

In a typical Igbo family, the father is the accepted head of the family (Ejiofor, 1981) but the first son also occupies an important place in position and role. As explained by Ogbalu (1981, p. 73), “when the father of a family is no more, *diọkpara* (first son)

becomes the hanger on which the bag is hung, the bastion of the house, the game forest at which hands point as the inhabitation of either an antelope or leopard. When a father passes on, it is the *diokpara* that inherits his wealth.... *Diokpara* can allocate the father's belongings (family property) as a father. If a father goes to the spirit world, *diokpara* can show his siblings where to build their houses or farm This bestows on the *diokpara* the right to occupy his father's *obiia* roofed dwarf-walled minor house in the front position of a man's compound where stays to perform his traditional rituals and receive his visitors] when the father dies" (translation to English from Ogbalu (1981)'s *Ndu Ndi Igbomine*). Ogbalu's explanation denotes that the first son on his father's demise steps into the father's shoes as a father-figure to the family.

2.1.2 The Igbo Leadership Tradition

"The political institutions in Igbo land differ in their structure. Some of these, like the kingship institutions of Onitsha, Nri and Aguleri, are intrusive traits. Although age-grade associations, title-making societies, Dibia fraternities (medicine men), secret societies, and oracles are among the traditional instruments of government, the role of each in the political processes of a given village-group differs markedly. Nevertheless, there emerges a general pattern of political process which is shared by all Igbo (Uchendu, 1965, p. 39).

According to Emenanjo (2009:2), in Igbo thought and perception, a "king" is anybody the community/society selects to be at the helm of affairs For this reason, it is the community that owns the king and vice versa. At any given Igbo assembly, it is to be noted that the community of people and the king are gathered. Every social stratum, every level of authority, every association has their king. The *NzenaOzo* (titled men), and even the kings themselves have their own king. Even armed robbers and kidnappers have their own king. As it is among humans, so it is in the animal world and vegetation. The lion or leopard is the king of animals just as the iroko tree is the king among trees. The ocean is the king of all large bodies of waters.

The king (*Eze*) is the representative of the people (*phanaeze*). Not the community alone. Not the king alone. There is a consensus in the choice of a king. It is through a democratic process. It is not a divine right. Nor the exclusive preserve of a particular family or lineage or kindred.

The inference to be drawn from Emenanjo's exposition is that in Igbo society, power belongs to the people; the king derives the power and authority he exercises from the community, the people who made him; he does not wield power which the community does not accept or impose a unilateral decision on the people. He also indicates the Igbo recognition of an organized leadership culture.

There are different recognizable categories of stakeholders in Igbo leadership: the traditional rulers (*Ndi Eze, Igwe, Obi*), titled men, elders, (*Ndi nze na ozo, Ndi okenye*) priests (*Ndi eze ala, Ndi Isiala*), other community leaders (like Presidents of Town Unions, Women Leaders of the Women Wing of the Town Unions, Youth leaders, etc.), Opinion leaders, Age grades, among others. All these, through their contributions, play vital leadership roles in Igbo land. The women, for instance, form a parallel union to that of men. Though their legislative power is confined to the

matters that concern them, they make great contribution to the development of the community (Ikwubuzo, 2018).

Going by Uchendu and Emenanjo's explanations that there is communal ownership of kingship and that it is an elected office, or in Emenanjo's view, not a divine right, how do we explain or rationalize the argument that it is the first son's primogeniture? One can presume that perhaps in order to avoid unnecessary friction and ensure fairness in the election of an *Eze*, *Igwe* or *Obi*, or even as a mark of respect, some Igbo communities in their wisdom might have decided to pick from the most senior family, but with time, it assumed the status of an established tradition. This is because the reality on ground is that most communities in Igbo land today treat the institution as hereditary and the right of the *okpara* - first son/the most senior family/lineage in the community, making individuals or families who feel it is their exclusive right ready to go the court to seek legal redress should the community for any reason make moves to deny them the position.

2.1.3 Marriage in Igbo Culture

Ubesie (1978) discusses marriage issue as something taken seriously among the Igbo. As he puts it: It is true that marrying a wife or getting a husband is important in the life of every man or woman, but it is not done in a hurry. In the same trend of thought, Ogbalu also emphasizes the importance of marriage: One thing that cannot be joked with is marriage. If a man acquires wealth, builds a house and does all other things but does not marry, he is not reckoned with. In the same vein, if a woman is very beautiful but does not marry, she is not recognised as a person (Ogbalu, 1981, p. 23).

Uchendu (1965, p. 51) further explicates the stages in marriage process thus:

No matter how the Igbo acquire a wife, the process of betrothing and marrying an Igbo girl is a long, ceremonious one. It often takes years and is seldom accomplished in months. Marriage is so important and central to the Igbo that nothing concerned with it is taken lightly. The whole process falls into four interrelated stages: asking the girl's consent, working through a middleman, testing the bride's character, and paying the bride wealth.

Ogbalu, Ubesie and Uchendu, all emphasize the importance of marriage in Igbo life, and do not see it as something that is joked with or taken lightly. While what Uchendu elucidated obtained in the past, people in the modern Igbo society, seldom find such time for long processes of betrothing and marrying for reason of time factor and engrossment with duty and business. They can after the preliminary visit decide on a second visit to monetize other stages in the marriage process. And it is now allowed.

2.1.4 Belief in Divination and Oracle

In Igbo traditional society, people believe in *afa* (divination) as a source of wisdom and knowledge, and its efficacy in unraveling the unknown. If, for instance, an abomination is dictated in a community, and the offender does not own up, the community may opt for divination to ascertain the culprit so as to know who is to relate freely with or with some level of suspicion (Ubesie, 1978, p.187). Related to divination is the belief in Igbo oracles, whose "common characteristics" Uchendu sees as "their

secret operations, the institutionalization of an “intelligent service” and the attraction of clients through a chain of contact agents (Uchendu, 1965, p. 100). Among the traditionalists, where there are issues or allegations that are shrouded in secrecy, doubt or uncertainty, oracular verdict can be sought; although it is also believed that an evil man who may be guilty can manipulate the oracle to his advantage but when this happens and the outcome contradicts popular thinking, the veracity of such verdict becomes suspect.

So, culture, from what has been explicated above, simply put, is the totality of a people’s way of life expressed in various human behavior and activities. It includes their diet, norms and traditions, their music and dance, their language, art, religion as well as all distinctive behaviors that make a group of people unique and distinctive from others.

2.2 Nollywood Igbo Films

This refers to the popular professional Nigerian home video dramas or movies, either in Igbo medium, or in English but set in Igbo societies, which made their debut with *Living in Bondage* in the 1980s, and have since then remained a major source of entertainment and widely consumed both in Nigeria and abroad.

2.2.1 Igbo Identity

“Igbo identity” refers to the unique characteristics, features or attributes that mark the Igbo out as a group of people distinct from other groups. The distinguishing characteristics include their culture, art, language, food, attire, music, etc. In other words, “Igbo identity” can be seen or defined through the lens of the Igbo culture.

2.2.2 Diaspora Communities

With reference to the Igbo, “diaspora communities” are Igbo settlements outside Igbo homeland at both national and international spheres. Today, a good number of Igbo people live in cities and communities outside Igbo land both in Nigeria and outside Nigeria. In the context of this paper we refer to such communities as diaspora Igbo communities.

2.2.3 Misrepresentation of Culture

By this, in the context of this paper, we mean an action or show “not representing culture exactly as it is or presenting something as culture when it is not” through inadvertent or deliberate distortion or adulteration of cultural reality as it concerns the Igbo.

2.3 Nollywood Igbo Films as a Vehicle of Culture Transmission

Nollywood movie is a product of Theatre Arts. Apart from its entertainment value and other sociological functions, video drama or movie is also a vehicle for cultural transmission. This is because the creative artists, of whom a film maker is one, do not create in a vacuum; they may embellish their works with social, political, religious and cultural elements. Film makers as creative artists colour their productions with the culture of the environment or locale in which their works are set. Theatrical displays are seen as one way of achieving the preservation and transmission of art and culture, and “the playwright, the artist, the musician, the sculptor, the novelist and so on, all try

to document the history and culture of their people as well as transmit them”(Duruaku, 2002, p.129).And through that, they “also present life as it is today; what man has become in the face of socio-economic and political problems, and how he strives to accommodate the new reality” (Duruaku, 2002, p.130). Duruaku agrees with Oduah (1993) in recommending that art and culture practitioners “package excellent theatrical performances loaded with information on their art and culture, for consumption within and outside their environment...” (Duruaku, 2002, p.130). Emeana (2001, as cited in Eze, 2005, p.188) reiterates that “Through the ages, the Theatre Arts, across the world, ‘have remained a veritable means of not only preserving and sustaining culture, it has been effective in the promotion of culture.’” Through the video movies set in Igbo society, Igbo culture can be transmitted. They then become, among others, a means of showcasing and introducing Igbo culture to the younger generation in diaspora communities. Eze points out further – and we agree with him – that theatre which also embodies Nollywood movies] “is not mere entertainment, it teaches, persuades, informs, elevates just as it entertains.”

The King (*Igwe*), Queen, Prince and Princess, all exercise their power and authority over their subjects within and outside the palace. The *Igwe* also called *Eze* can also be shown with members of his royal cabinet seated in his palace to listen to, look into or adjudicate on disputed issues, which affect the whole community or some of its members. Some features that define Igbo identity easily distinguish Nollywood Igbo films from films set in other ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. In the absence of the use of local languages in Nigerian films, mere sight of some cultural features of a typical Nigerian Nollywood film alone betrays the ethnic nationality where such film is based.

2.3.1 Synopsis and Analysis of the Culture Content of the Selected Nollywood Igbo Films

Some practices and actions inconsistent with Igbo Culture are discernible in a number of Nollywood films set in Igbo society.

Illustrations:

2.3.2 Film 1: *Silent War* directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu (2017),

In “*Silent War*”, the wife of the late *Igwe* is depicted as recommending who succeeds the king and discusses the issue with men who are the cabinet members of the late *Igwe*, insisting that her biological son be crowned king as against the one she had earlier presented to her husband (*Igwe*) after stealing him through the connivance of a matron from a hospital where she actually had a baby girl. Upon presenting him to her husband, the king, she deceives him into believing that he is his son. The king recognizes the boy as the heir apparent and gives him his blessing.

The king’s wife later gives birth to her a son and starts nurturing and grooming him as the authentic Prince and heir apparent to the royal stool. She despises and antagonizes the “first son” in the family and always reminds him that he is a “mistake” and does not belong to the family. She succeeds in convincing the elders but not her daughter and the youths who see the “first son” as a noble man both in character and intellect, and therefore, much more eligible to occupy the royal stool. Even *Igwe* himself, before his death, was convinced that the “first son”, *Ilouno*, would make a good successor. The young man’s character, discipline, comportment, maturity in handling issues and

his sense of responsibility endeared him to Igwe, his father. Aware of the preference for him, the “Queen” attempts to bribe the most vocal youth and a member of the cabinet to assist her pursue her ambition of installing her own biological son as the king but to no avail.

At the coronation ceremony, the Prime Minister makes a couple of futile attempts to crown the Queen’s choice king as he gets prevented by unseen powers. On his last attempt, the same unseen force causes the crown to fall off his hand. Apparently, the Prime Minister, knowing that it was a bad omen, is no longer willing to continue with the crowning exercise. The Queen picks the crown herself and as she attempts to place it on her son’s head, she gets struck down by a strange fire. She insists, boasting that what she says as the Queen stands, and will force the elders to do what is “right”, that is, complying with her inordinate wish. Ilouno, “the stolen first son”, is eventually crowned the king when all the attempts to crown his brother were not favoured by the gods.

2.3.3 Film 2: *Sword of Justice*, Produced by Precious Okafor and directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu (2017)

This is a story of a kingdom where Igwe’s two wives and their children are enmeshed in bitter rivalry. The first wife, an assertive, arrogant and overbearing woman, questions the legitimacy of her diffident and gentler co-wife as the second wife of Igwe, and by extension the paternity of her children. Her fear is that the son of her co-wife who is truly the first son of Igwe may eventually emerge a successor to Igwe’s throne.

The first wife’s children despise, deride and antagonize their half-siblings seeing them as illegitimate members of the family who have no royal blood in their veins, an opinion which they convinced the palace guards and maids to uphold. The guards and maids, therefore, treat them with disdain. Igwe who always sues for peaceful co-existence in his household, sees his first son, who is level-headed, more responsible and mature person than his haughty drug-addict half-brother, as a potential successor to the throne after him.

2.3.4 Film 3: *Palace Niggars* (sic)

In *Palace Niggars* (sic), Onoowu (the Prime Minister) nurses hidden ambition to unseat the Igwe and lords it over the community. Since the Igwe has sons who by tradition will succeed him in the event of demise, Onoowu feigns friendship with his second son, Ikenna, a drug addict who has abandoned his studies abroad and returned home. Onoowu brings the young man close him, and makes him believe that he is a better choice to occupy the throne than his father. He manipulates Ikenna and encourages him to lead irresponsible lifestyle, a life of drug addiction, always acting under the influence of hard drugs. He plots to make Ikenna the next Igwe so that he, Onoowu, will indirectly be ruling the kingdom.

To actualize his inordinate ambition of holding sway on the community, Onoowu pays somebody to poison a gallon of wine brought to Igwe by a wine-tapper friend of his. Immediately Igwe died, he accuses the innocent wine-tapper of poisoning him, convincing the members of Igwe’s cabinet that the man did it, and quickly recommends that the man should be killed to appease the gods for the abomination he committed.

A policeman intervenes and saves the man, ignoring Onoowu's insistence that the community's traditional method of handling such matter, that is, pronouncing a capital punishment, should be allowed to take its course.

Because Onoowu commands the loyalty of the majority of the cabinet members whom he has already bribed to support him, he also convinces them that Igwe's first son, Uzonna, who lives abroad at the time married a foreigner, which by the tradition of the land, disqualifies him from ascending the throne. The cabinet members again believed him without conducting any form of investigation to ascertain the truth of his (Onoowu's) claim. Deliberately, Uzonna is neither informed about his father's death nor invited to come and perform his funeral rites as the tradition demands of a first son. Having convinced the elders, he succeeds in installing Igwe's second son as the new Igwe and ostensibly supervises his stooge and controls the palace affairs on daily basis. The chief priest, the eye of the gods, visited the Igwe's palace to warn Onoowu of his activities in the palace. It is expected that the chief Priest who gives Igwe and the community spiritual support and direction would not be silent over the abuse of power in the kingdom after the sudden demise of the king. It is also not traditional for Ikenna to demand that people prostrate to him as shown in the film.

Meanwhile, Onoowu's daughter, Olamma, arrogantly parades herself as the Princess of the land, recruiting maids that follow her around the community. She even openly challenges and attacks Ujunwa, the legitimate Princess of the land who, unlike her, is humble, responsible, caring and loving. Olamma flaunts herself at Obinna, Ujunwa's lover, accusing Ujunwa of frolicking with him and polluting his mind against her. When she failed to get the attention of Obinna, she becomes sad and reuests her father to kill him to make her happy; her father, Onoowu, obliges her and sends a criminal to rape a girl and frame-up Obinna as the culprit.

The Chief Priest who had premonition that Obinna's life was in danger aids him to escape the community to a safe hideout before the hired rapist carried out his heinous act. The parents of the rape victim bring their daughter to Igwe, reporting that Obinna was responsible and Onoowu again is ouick to recommend that he be killed to serve as deterrent to others. The bloodthirsty palace guards who are immediately dispatched to go and arrest Obinna find only his younger brother and sister at home. They kill his sister and drag his brother to the palace where Onoowu, surprised that they did not get Obinna, persuades the Igwe to approve his brother's execution. He sneaks out of the palace to meet the executioners in the bush to confirm the killing of the young man.

Meanwhile, Uzonna, the late Igwe's first son and the legitimate heir to the throne who has been studying abroad returns home and finds, to his chagrin, the conspiracy of his younger brother and his cohorts in usurping the throne and demands his right of primogeniture. Onoowu blames him for not being around when his father died and promises to look into the matter while the usurper, Ikenna, warns him (Uzonna) to forget the throne and leave the community or else he orders his palace guards to kill him. In this episode, the only member of the late Igwe's cabinet who is not part of the conspiracy presents Uzonna as the right successor of his father and demands that the proper thing should be done, but the others who have already received financial

gratification insisted that the gods had already endorsed Ikenna, bringing in a fake priest to reinforce their spurious claim. Uzonna later reclaimed the royal stool.

2.3.5 Film 4: *Ezinwanyị Dị Uko* (sic) by Nwaonu Chiemelie Mishark

Ezinwanyị Dị Uko (sic) is a story of Adaeze, a princess and the only daughter of an Igwe, and her lover, Azunna, a poor hunter. The Igwe is against the relationship of Azunna and his daughter whom he prefers to be a bride of the son of a fellow Igwe from a neighbouring community and goes ahead to betroth her daughter (Adaeze) to him without her consent. Members of Igwe's cabinet agree with Igwe that it is his exclusive or sole responsibility to decide who marries her daughter.

In one of Azunna's secret meetings with Adaeze, the palace guards catch and drag him to Igwe who orders that he be mercilessly flogged. Thereafter, he, with the backing of his cabinet member, banishes Azunna and his poor mother to an evil forest from where nobody returns alive.

On the day of her marriage with her father's preferred suitor, Adaeze drops a cup of wine given to her by her father to identify the suitor and runs away into the evil forest where Azunna has been banished to die. After escaping through some supernatural assistance many perilous encounters with evil forces, she comes across two human skeletons which she suspects to be the carcass of Azunna and her mother who may have died in the evil forest. Through some magical powers given to her by a supernatural helper, she calls the dry bones back to their human forms and life comes back to Azunna and his mother.

At last Igwe concedes that young people have a right to love who they please and that love is a very strong emotion that has binding force. He abrogates the tradition of banishing people to the evil forest as a form of punishment in the land. And, no sooner has he finished his speech than Adaeze and Azunna return. Amidst joy, Igwe and the community receive and bless their marriage.

2.3.6 Film 5: *Egwu Onwa* produced by Samlex Electronics Prod. Ltd. (2015)

It may be necessary, as a preamble, for the sake of the non-Igbo readers of this material, to point out that *Egwu Onwa* is an age-long tradition of the Igbo that has almost waned in the modern Igbo society. Moonlight sports played significant roles in traditional Igbo society. The sports featured a variety of thrilling exercises for both the youths and adults. It afforded the adults the opportunity to relax and tell stories, and children, the opportunity to indulge in the games like '*Nchọ m̄ nchọ m̄*' (hide-and-seeK play), *òrò* (chase-and-catch) and other related sports. Moonlight plays combine both poetic and dramatic elements. The dramatic displays and poetic renditions that featured in the moonlight plays were not only for entertainment purposes but also for the physical and mental development of the participants. Although adults could participate, children who are the main participants could develop health wise, and some of the exercises help to boost their mental alertness.

Our Film 5, *Egwu Onwa*(Moonlight Plays) is a Nollywood home video movie that is not only centered in Igbo society but also presented in Igbo medium, Igbo language. As the title implies, it tries to recapture the features typical of rural life and environment in traditional Igbo society, the kinds of activities the rural dwellers engage in, the

atmosphere and the mood leading to moonlight plays. For instance, young people, particularly, girls fetch water from the stream or firewood from the forest for domestic use, and after their domestic chores, express desire to join in outdoors moonlight play - usually in an open arena or village square - which are characterized by singing and dancing, story-telling session with audience participation, etc. Moonlight activities proper, family relationships, love affairs among youths, marriage proposals, role of traditional ruler, incidents of kidnapping, rape, etc. are all showcased in the movie.

3.0 Analysis of Findings

Here we are to draw up points from the overview of literature

3.1 Interrogating the Cultural Content of the Nollywood Igbo Films

As we have pointed earlier, Nollywood Igbo films are characteristically easily distinguishable. But a close and critical look at what is depicted in most of the films, as evident in the examples cited above, raise a number of questions: Are all that are shown in the films true reflection of Igbo society and its culture? In other words, are they representation or misrepresentation and corruption of Igbo cultural identity? Can such films be veritable means of transmitting valid Igbo culture to, for instance, the diasporic Igbo youths/children – children born, say, in the United States of America, Britain or Ghana, who have not had any form of contact with Igbo culture - without misleading them? What kind of information on Igbo identity can be disseminated through such films for the benefit of such diasporic children and other non-Igbo consumers? These and other related questions are what this paper will address using the selected Nollywood films whose synopsis we have presented above.

3.2 Deviations from the Igbo Cultural Norms Shown in the Films

This is where we point out those things that are not in line

(a) Nobody bows to a Woman

One of the incidents that would strike anyone familiar with Igbo culture who watches **Film 1** is that in Igbo culture, a woman is not bowed to when she is greeted as “the Queen” demands of Ekezie when she walks into his discussion with her “daughter”.

In the movie, the elders justify the action of the Queen who exchanged her daughter with another woman’s son, arguing that she did it in the interest of the community. The elders, by their argument, want what ought to be an abomination to be swept under the carpet.

(b) A woman Does not Crown Anybody

Also shown in the film is the “Queen” making an opening speech, announcing the coronation ceremony and later attempting to place a royal crown on her biological son’s head. First, the Queen introduces and blesses her son for coronation before attempting to crown him. These acts cannot happen in Igbo life; they are seen as abomination in Igbo culture. The elders recommend and persuade Ilouno, who the gods accept as the king, to stamp the ancient staff on the ground as a ritual of appeasing the gods and reinstalling the Queen who automatically became ritually unclean and, therefore, stripped of her privileges and position after the abominable act of touching the crown.

The youths, in that episode, become the conscience of the community by drawing the attention of the elders to the danger of the young king doing what they persuade him to do – stamping of the ancient staff on the ground. This is very ironic because the elders ought to be the custodians of the people’s culture. The youths advise the elders to decide who among themselves should stamp the ancient staff on the ground instead; but they, knowing the disastrous consequence of doing so, decline and disperse.

(c) No Position of Queen in Igbo Land

In the leadership tradition of the Igbo where a traditional ruler is a stakeholder and obviously plays a vital role, the concept or position of “a queen” is non-existent, not to talk of having one who exercises overwhelming power and authority over cabinet members of the palace and the rest members of the community, whether the king is alive or dead, as portrayed in film 1, *Silent War*.

In Film 2, Igwe’s children from his second wife are shown to be constantly subjected to attacks and insults by their half-brother and palace assistants. Even where there are maids or house-keepers in the traditional ruler’s home/courtyard, they have no right in Igbo tradition to talk to any of the sons or daughters, legitimate or adopted, in a manner devoid of respect as depicted in the film, *Sword of Justice*.

(d) There is No Traditional Ways of Investigations

In Film 3, due to Onoowu’s affluence and influence on the community, majority of the members of Igwe’s cabinet endorse, without any form of investigation to establish the veracity of the weighty allegation, his recommendation that man he framed-up as having poisoned the king be put to death. Ideally, the sudden death of a king should be investigated to ascertain its cause before his burial, and not to be swept under the carpet. There are traditional ways of carrying out such investigation. Even the accused should be adjudged innocent until proven guilty through an accepted traditional process of swearing to an oath to prove his innocence or otherwise; and not to be condemned to death by traditional Prime Minister’s fiat as portrayed in the film.

(e) A Second Son Never Occupies the Throne

It is not the tradition of the Igbo to make a second son occupy his late father’s throne while the first son is alive. Another feature of the film that is alien to Igbo culture is that Onoowu’s daughter, Olamma, arrogantly parades herself as the Princess of the land, recruiting maids that follow her around the community. She even openly challenges and attacks Ujunwa, the legitimate Princess of the land.

There are three other incidents in this episode that are not in tandem with Igbo culture, namely, (i) the role of the palace guards in joining Ikenna to threaten to kill Uzonna. Even if two brothers are embroiled in kingship tussle, mere guards have no say in the matter; (ii) the elders who are aware of the tradition that it is the first son’s right to succeed father as king are shown brazenly arguing that the gods have chosen Ikenna to be king; and (iii) a Priest believed to be the custodian of the people’s religious tradition who should ensure that the traditional norms are not breached but strictly adhered to is also shown corroborating the claims of the elders loyal to Onoowu that the gods have approved Ikenna for the throne. In a good number of Igbo films, the gods are shown to be manipulated to pervert justice and wreak havoc on the innocent. And the elders,

usually cabinet members of a serving Igwe, are more often than not portrayed in Igbo Nollywood films as people bereft of logical thinking, and as people who are devoid of reason in their handling of issues.

The public lashing of Azunna and his banishment portrayed in Film 4 is not a known practice in Igbo society even where parents are opposed to their daughter's relationship with a young man. It should be pointed out, however, that Adaeze and her mother's constant expression of displeasure with the belief that "a woman has no say on any issue" is an interrogation of a tradition that muzzles or silences the voice of a woman.

(f) Igbo Moonlight Play is Never for Moral Laxity

In spite of all the trappings of Igbo life depicted in Film 5, *EgwuOnwa*, a critical scrutiny of the movie based on the cultural essence of moonlight plays in Igbo traditional society reveals that it is to a large extent a misrepresentation of the Igbo tradition of moonlight plays (*egwuonwa*). Moonlight plays, games or sports are essentially aspects of enculturation processes of the young in traditional Igbo society. Through the activities, younger members of the community are given cultural orientation. Instead, the movie writer creates the impression that the Igbo tradition of moonlight plays is all about lascivious thoughts and relationships, including moral laxity among married adults as given prominence in the film. Moonlight plays can, no doubt, provide an opportunity for youths to express secret randy emotions towards the opposite sex but that is not what moonlight play is mainly all about. Two episodes from *Egwu Onwa* illustrate the misrepresentations we have observed in the film:

A married woman is shown to have brought her male lover, a married man, to her matrimonial home to sleep with her while her husband was away on a trip, and her children out for moonlight play. The children came back to the house earlier than anticipated only to find their house door locked. And after a long knock on the door without any response, they are shocked to see their mother later open the door for her male lover to leave. She later buys cloths for her children to induce them not to disclose her unfaithfulness to their father but they decline the offer.

The story in this episode cited above is an illicit affair that can occur any time; not necessarily during moonlight plays when children have left home to join their playmates in the neighborhood. The Igbo frown at a man having an affair with another man's wife, condemn the action and impose appropriate sanction on the offenders as rightly portrayed in the movie.

In another episode, a young woman, Chinelo, is shown to have accepted to marry an older man who has sent his wife packing on the grounds that she bore him only daughters; no male issue. Chinelo has a young male lover whom she has known before her betrothal to the older man. She still continues to keep her relationship with the young man while living with the new suitor. She tactically avoids sexual intercourse with the suitor. And one day, she decides to procure sedative drug, which when administered on the man through food at dinner, will make him sleep all nights for six days and not touch her during the period. On the first day, after the man has slept off under the effect of the drug, she aids her lover to sneak into their room and with his assistance carries her suitor down from the bed and lay him on bare floor. She and her lover then sleep that night on her "matrimonial" bed, having an affair.

At her traditional marriage ceremony, rather than take a cup of wine given to her by her father to the man to whom she is betrothed, as a customary public declaration or affirmation of her consent to marry him, she gives it to her lover to the embarrassment of not only the suitor and his family but also many others who have gathered for the ceremony. Chinelo openly confesses that she never loved Okponku; and that it was her mother who forced her to agree to marry him based on her (her mother) old relationship with Okponku's mother. Chinelo's father then blesses her marriage with her true lover, an action which a number of people condemn. If one contrasts Chinelo's father's action with the cultural value of marriage in Igbo society, it is totally strange.

Chinelo's actions of drugging her suitor into stupor, aiding the sneaking of her lover into her supposed matrimonial room and sleeping with him in the presence of the suitor are all considered abomination in Igbo culture and cannot be overlooked as depicted in the movie. A young woman living with a suitor without being properly married to him, that is, when no customary requirement has been satisfied, as in the case of Chinelo in the movie, is not considered right. She cannot strictly be called a wife because such union has not yet been given any stamp of legitimacy; it has not fulfilled the Igbo traditional marriage rites. Similarly, a father cannot, during a traditional marriage ceremony where his daughter's suitor, family members, friends and well-wishers have gathered to formalize his relationship with the bride, give his daughter's hand in marriage to somebody else – a person who has neither presented himself nor done anything as in-law –and blessing the union at the same time, as done by Chinelo's father in the movie.

3.3 Some Causes of Distortion and Corruption of Igbo Cultural Practices in Nollywood Igbo Films.

The instances we have highlighted above as misrepresentation of Igbo culture entail some level of distortion and/or corruption of known Igbo cultural practices. Let us highlight some of the factors that occasion this.

Due to the dynamics and fluidity of culture, accommodating new or alien concepts and attitudes - sometimes occasioned by some external influences, contact through migration, dispersal or other social and historical factors - has become inevitable. Sometimes, the resultant changes upset the indigenous knowledge and worldview of a people, who have imbibed, assimilated or embraced the alien culture, and consequently leave traces of distortion, adulteration or corruption in the original culture, if it survives total abandonment. It has observed- and we agree with the view – that:

apart from the trans-Atlantic slave trade that populated Europe and Americas with good number of Igbo elements, the 20th and 21st centuries have also witnessed an unprecedented influx of the people into the western world perhaps in search of the greener pastures. As a result of cultural diffusion experienced both by the home front due to colonial incursion, neo-colonialism and by the Diaspora who presently are in serious romance with the western culture, much of the traditional practices have undergone serious modification. This is certainly consequent upon Igbo receptivity and amenability to change (Okide, 2016, p.167).

It is also true that culture, a people's "way of life", "is not a static thing because man continues to interact with his neighbours and that as he does that, he acquires new experiences and assimilates other cultures" (Duruaku, 2002, p.129).Duruaku, however argues that it is "not necessarily to change his way of life] but because of the need to fit into the "global village" of mega-cities, heterogeneity and co-habitation. Yet, he must remain unique and retain the thread with his past; maintain his collective individuality and distinctiveness."

Duruaku's view that the Igbo man "must remain unique and retain the thread with his past; maintain his collective individuality and distinctiveness" is undeniable but the truth is that the Igbo contact with western culture has had tremendous influence on the Igbo way of life, particularly in diaspora communities. The Igbo, like other African people that experienced colonialism, have lost aspects of their culture and some are still on the decline. There have been campaigns, orientation programmes, cultural emersions, acculturation programmes, as well as advocacies for adoption of means and methods of reviving Igbo culture and cultural consciousness, preserving, conserving and reaffirming Igbo identity not only in Igbo homeland but also in Igbo diaspora communities. One of the means of cultural transmission and orientation has been the electronic media, which many believe, can be complemented by Nollywood (Ikwubuzo 2012) and other social media that are now current. Nollywood Igbo films, due to the level of patronage it enjoys from the youths, are expected to serve, and indeed should serve, as carriers and mirrors of cultural values of the Igbo communities. Electronic culture dissemination is very essential for youths in diasporic Igbo communities. Some of the extant films serve that purpose. However, a good deal of what is portrayed in some of the films is inconsistent with the true character of Igbo culture. Two reasons for this can be identified:

3.4 Ignorance of Igbo culture and Adaptation of Films from Other Cultures

Some misrepresentation we notice in Nollywood Igbo films may be due to outright ignorance of Igbo culture on the part of the writers of such films. Some of them who might have not grown up in Igboland, perhaps, rely on information they gather from inauthentic secondary source, and may not bother to crosscheck their facts before representing them in movies. Some Nollywood films branded Igbo films and taken to be so by consumers are adaptations from films originating from places other than Igbo society. For instance, the influence of the West Niger dress code of maidens – the beaded headgear and related traditional attire - is now a common sight in Nollywood Igbo films. The incidence of secret cult activities and demonstration of powers of the occult that are sometimes noticed in some of the films are alien to Igbo culture. There seems to be an attitude where some foreign movies that are thematically and aesthetically appealing to film makers are adapted and cast into the traditional mould of the Igbo, while at the same time retaining some concepts that are alien to Igbo culture. When some film consumers watch such adapted films, they point at their colouration with elements of Igbo culture and conclude that they are Igbo films.

3.5 Deliberate Misrepresentation of Igbo Culture by Igbo Film Makers

While some of the elements we have described as distortion and corruption of Igbo cultural practices are attributable to culture change occasioned by the Igbo contact with

other cultures, colonial experience, etc., there are instances of deliberate misrepresentation of Igbo culture in some of these films. There has been an instance where an expert in Igbo culture, someone who is versed in Igbo culture was asked to moderate the making of a Nollywood Igbo films. He called the attention of the producer to some erroneous projection of Igbo culture in the film but to his amazement the producer insisted that the action should be retained. Such producer believes that some elements of exaggeration or modification will appeal more to his audience but does not care about the damage he does to the culture. This deliberate misrepresentation of reality has some implications for the film consumers, especially in diaspora Igbo communities and non-Igbo communities.

3.6. Problem of Conceptualization of Igbo Identity in Diaspora Communities through the Lens of Nollywood Igbo Films

The creative artist, no doubt, has the poetic license to use various narrative devices, intriguing actions or ominous incidents and suspense from time to time to hold his audience attention. The artist can even use his/her work of art to interrogate or criticize aspects of culture, but a deliberate misrepresentation of an acceptable and established cultural practices of a people could mislead the viewers, especially non-natives and diasporic young members of the said culture. Viewers in diaspora can get the wrong message about the Igbo culture, Igbo identity, and conclude that what they watch is the case. This can aptly be illustrated with an encounter this author had with someone recently.

Coincidentally, while this author was writing this paper, he met a Ghanaian friend of his, Mr. Thomas Amoah, who told him that Nollywood video films were widely watched in Ghana these days. What he finds so fascinating is the flamboyance of the Igbo kings (*Igwe*) and their palatial residences. He asked whether the kingdoms as portrayed in the movies are still the same in Igbo land today. This author's quick response was that the kingdom he sees in such films never even existed in Igbo land, talk less of whether it is still extant. Then, he (author) continued with the following elaboration:

Some features with which Igbo Nollywood films are embellished can better be described as alien to Igbo culture. These are mainly noticed in films that portray Igbo royal family and characteristics of such family. A portrayal of a typical *Igwe* or *Eze*'s palace sometimes presents a retinue of palace guards and maids usually dressed in uniform attires, serving in the palace or seen as body guards accompanying a flamboyant Prince or Princess to anywhere they go in the community, exuding royal aura. This may be in form of ushering them into a place they may be given red-carpet reception, with occasional spreading of flowers on their walkway. They may also be chauffeur-driven in expensive jeeps and flashy cars. A Prince can go for any girl of his choice even if it means forcefully taking over the girl from her lover/suitor, or getting her with the influence of his father, the king, against the will of the girl or her man. They are often portrayed as being above the laws of the land.

The dress code, the exaggerated paraphernalia of office, the fanfare of royalty that attends the King, the Queen, the Prince and Princess, the array of palace guards, maids and body-guards as well as the palatial environment with its aura, depicted in these

films are figments of imagination and alien to Igbo culture and Igbo kingship tradition. They are artistic innovations.

Truly, the Igbo have a tradition of leadership; and traditional rulers, sometimes referred to as royal fathers, popularly known as *Igwe* or *Eze* are major stakeholders in the Igbo leadership tradition. They dress in regalia that distinguish them and project their socio-cultural status in the community. Some can afford palatial residences and all the comforts of life depending on their economic and social backgrounds.

The discussion with Mr. Amoah was concluded by drawing his attention to the fact that cultural production in Nollywood films as it affects the Igbo is often corrupted and misrepresented. The film makers fail sometimes to present the positive aspects of Igbo way of life. For instance, wealth is usually linked to ritualism, cultism and occultism. The level of flamboyance, splendid palace organization and the nobility of princes and princesses sometimes portrayed in the movies are exaggerated to entertain movie consumers. Representing the wife of an Igwe as an overbearing, powerful and influential “queen” is inconsistent with the role of women in Igbo society; it is a distortion or perversion of cultural reality in Igbo society. In Igbo political system and leadership tradition, as elucidated earlier in this paper, the women organization is recognized and they play their role in the scheme of things as stakeholders in the community but the concept or position of “a queen” does not exist. An Igwe or Eze’s wife (referred to as “*Ügòezè*” in some communities) is accorded due respect in every Igbo community and she can, in collaboration with the leaders of the women organization, direct the affairs of women. She is not involved in palace matters. Reinvention of the portrait of Igwe’s wife as queen and her exaggerated roles, and sometimes excesses, or even, a feminization of the traditional stool in Nollywood Igbo films may appear desirable to the feminist rhetoric but has some negative implication for the conceptualization of Igbo culture and identity, especially by the diasporic Igbo youths and non-Igbo.

3.7 The Danger Posed by the Corruption of Igbo Culture in Nollywood Films

Mr. Amoah’s perception is definitely shared by many other non-Igbo consumers of Nollywood films, including, possibly the younger members of Igbo diaspora communities. Apart from the theme of kingship, misconception of Igbo identity is also possible in variety of other recurrent themes of Nollywood Igbo films. Such themes include but not limited to taking of human life through poisoning and evil sacrifice, murder, hired assassination, the rich looking down on the poor as unfit to marry their daughter, despotism, oppression of the less privileged by the rich, perversion of justice against the innocent without proper investigation, and banishing him/her, surviving brother(s) denying their late brother’s widow access to her husband’s property, and enlistment in secret cults as a fast means of becoming mega-rich. These and other topical elements in Nollywood Igbo films give the erroneous impression that the Igbo have those attributes and that their society is one pervaded with evil tendencies. They can only lead to misconception of the people’s true identity. The diasporic Igbo children/youths can on watching such films be scared and conclude that Igbo land is not a safe place to be. This is because when the Igbo youths/children in the diaspora who have had no contact with Igbo culture, or non-Igbo consumers, watch such films, they are likely to see whatever is portrayed as the culture of the people as true reflection of what obtains in Igbo society, except an adult corrects such impression. Such

assumption may be misleading as a good deal of the traits some of the films ascribe to the Igbo tends towards misrepresentation of, and is inconsistent with, the Igbo culture and identity due to elements of conscious or unconscious culture corruption in the films.

4.0 Summary of Findings and Conclusion

Observing that Nollywood Igbo video films serve as cultural index beyond entertainment, the paper has interrogated the authenticity of the cultural content of such films, demonstrating that there are elements of culture corruption, which constitutes misrepresentation of Igbo culture. The paper acknowledges that such corruption of Igbo culture in Nollywood films is capable of creating, and indeed creates, a problem of conceptualization of Igbo identity in diaspora communities and among non-Igbo consumers.

The paper finds among others that the misrepresentation of Igbo culture in Nollywood films can be deliberate on the part of the film makers, and notes that a deliberate misrepresentation of an acceptable and established cultural practices of the Igbo can mislead not only the viewers who are non-natives but also the younger members of the culture in diaspora communities, all of whom can get the wrong message about the Igbo culture, Igbo identity, and conclude that what they watch is true. This means that all the elements of corruption and misrepresentation of the Igbo culture in Nollywood Igbo films have far-reaching negative implication for the Igbo culture.

It is, therefore, being recommended, in conclusion, that parents, elders and other custodians of culture guide the younger viewers, especially in diaspora communities and educate them more on Igbo cultural identity in order to disabuse them of any misinformation or misconception arising from what they watch in Nollywood movies. This is important for the sake of uninformed viewers or younger members of the diaspora Igbo communities who are not familiar with some aspects of Igbo tradition. Film makers, producers, directors, actors and actresses are to note that through proper representation of the people's culture they are not only entertainers but also cultural ambassadors of their people.

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Appendix

List of Nollywood Movies Cited

- Film 1: *Silent War* directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu; MAK-VEE Production Ltd. (2017)
- Film 2: *Sword of Justice*, directed by Ugezu J. Ugezu; Produced by Precious Okafor (2017)
- Film 3: *Palace Niggars (sic)*
- Film 4: *Ezinwanyị Dị Ukọ (sic)* by Nwaonu Chiemelie Mishark
- Film 5: *Egwu Onwa*, produced by Samlex Electronics Prod. Ltd. (2015)