SUBJECTIVE EFFECT OF SOUND DESIGN IN NOLLYWOOD FILM: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF ANDY AMENECHI'S *EGG OF LIFE*

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Abstract
This work looks at the use of film sounds in Nollywood narratives from the subjective point of view of the director and the sound designer. Nollywood narratives tend to showcase professionalism in the application of music and sound effects in their narratives but film sound still leaves much to be desired. This research draws attention of scholars and filmmakers to the inappropriate application of sound effects in some Nollywood films which hamper the believability they try to create. Therefore, using Annabel Cohen's congruence associationist theory, Andy Amenechi's *Egg of life* was content analyzed, paying rapt attention to the application of sound effects in other to establish verisimilitude. It thus recommends that filmmakers should do proper research and also be tactical in their choice and application of sounds in other to enhance the whole aesthetics of their artistic productions.

Introduction
The synchronization of visual and auditory messages especially in Nollywood films gives the most appealing effect on the audience. Thus the viewers experience the total flow of the film story and get purged of the ills of the society he or she inhabits. This implies that through the appropriate application of sounds to films, it communicates to the audience and reforms as well as sustains the society's cultural values and heritages. Nollywood narratives seek to express itself in recognizable African ideologies. Thus, sound composition in Nollywood films portray the different culture through the application visual and sound composition conveying the intending message of the narrative. Just as costume, make-up, lighting, scenery, dances are utilized visually to represent African ideologies, so does Music and Sound effects accompany the visual representations amplify the narrative message. Nollywood films have been endeavouring to differentiate itself from western ideologies by appropriating sounds (aural and sound effects) to bridge the gap between old and contemporary cultural ideologies of the Nigerian (especially Igbo) culture, and Africans at

large. Albeit, most old and few New- Nollywood narratives show some lapses as result of Filmmakers not paying attention to details. In fact, some of the film sounds seem too abstract, as such leaves room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience. Little wonder, Josephine Mokwunyei (2008, p.397) is of the view that they (Nollywood) incorporate western forms into drama and further gives her recommendations. Whereas, Nollywood films seek identity with African ideology and consciousness are not totally lost in the application of music and sound effects, as such it reflects the importance of music in the society he or she writes or produces for. According to Innocent Ebere Uwah

> Songs accompany filmic storylines in Nollywood. Most often they introduce the next sequence by using thematic issues in the films to highlight actions and reactions of characters. In this way "songs reveal the utmost depth of the singers' feelings and desires" (Livtak, 1996: 70). Yet, they demonstrate Nollywood's style of using them as a very important element of the folktale (film) aesthetics (Ogundele, 2000: 100). As Kunzler submits: "with simple words, these theme songs comment on the story or assess its morale" (Kunzler, 2007: 7); while Barlet argues in the context of all African films that "music is never gratuitous. When it comes from a traditional source, it contributes to the film's aim of perpetuating memory. When the film describes a painful reality; the music plays its part in conjuring away the anxiety and the difficulties" (2000. 185).

Aesthetically, film tends to subject the audience to stay focused with the lens of the camera as their eyes and ear identify the visual codes and synchronized sounds code. Thus, images and sound tap into our deepest fears and joy. By playing on our emotions it purges us of ills in our attitudes, redirecting our perception of things in life. For emotion plays a great role of shaping and reshaping of our moral values.

Music is defined based on its context of usage in film. Its application in film has the potential effect to influence an audience's perception and interpretation of any visual narrative, film music surmounts its role of creating emotional feelings in films, but produces meanings in synch with film images it accompanied. Music can be defined as the composition of different sounds elements that are not just pleasing to human ear but commutatively narrate a story. It

can also be defined as an artful arrangement of sounds across time. According to Nsikan Sam Nkana (2008, p.161),

> Music is the most common non-literal sound. It could be very effective and communicative in television drama if well used. Music can be used as signature tune (theme music), or as a rhythmic pattern to show the tempo of events happening on screen. It can also be used in descending scenes. Music may not be used uniformly in all the scenes of a play. The dialogue and the event in each scene determine the accompanying music. But in some drama presentations, the signature tunes are used throughout, whether they fit the pattern or not. Music can change according to the demands of each scene. The simple principle is if the actor walks, music should walk; if he runs, music should run, if he jumps, music should jump, if he turns, music should turn as well. Every action taken by the character must be complemented with music.

The point made above is that, music is an effective communication tool in film production. Thus, a well recorded musical sound enhances the overall quality of a motion picture. Nkana N.S reiterates further that music aids in relating the theme of a film story. It equally shows the tempo of events in the film story through a rhythmic pattern. Music being a composition of different sounds is used in the accompaniment of motion picture. Herbert Zettl (2005, p.327) highlights that "Sound in various manifestations (dialogue, music, sound effects, and the like) is an integral part of television and film. It represents the all-important fifth dimension in the total field of applied media aesthetics." This implies that music, dialogue, and sound effects are referred to as sound in film. Moreover, the three auditory elements have the same process (i.e. reverberation effects) applied to them. To this effect, Zettl reiterates further that "sound and noise are production of audible vibration (oscillations) of the air. The difference between sound and noise is based on its communication purpose." Sound is organized and has purpose. While noise is considered an unwanted sound at a particular point in time in which Zettl sees it as being essentially random. The same audible sound can be sound at one time, noise at another. As a result, a film without good audio output, utilizing the three auditory elements will be communicatively boring to viewers. In this light, Femi Aloba (2001, p.185) submits that, "well recorded audio will engage an audience's sense and will ultimately give a more enjoyable experience." Thus, the use of

appropriate sound designs enhances communication in film production by stimulating viewers' senses to the film story.

The sound in a motion picture is composed of dialogue, music, and sound effect. One of the most important thing to note in motion picture is sound. Sounds in movies are very important because the audience can hear dozens of distinct sounds all at the same time and can separate and process all that information if the sound is effectively applied. Therefore, much more information can be transmitted from the filmmaker to the audience via music and sound. Thus, the goal of a filmmaker is to give the audience as much information as possible. If there is too little information, the audience becomes bored. Sound is transmitted through vibration that is noise of any frequency within the approximate range of 20-20,000 hertz, capable of being detected by human organs of hearing (Femi Aloba, 2004, p.185). Isa Abuja (2004, p.193) defines sound as sensation due to stimulation of the auditory nerves and auditory centre of the brain, usually by vibrations transmitted in material medium, commonly air, affecting the organ of hearing. Thus sound in film design can be defined as organized vibrations synchronized to a visual image which stimulates viewer's emotion when seeing a film story. It is the appropriate application of different sounds to a film story which must be believable but may not be real that creates an effective impact on audience. Since film is visual it uses image, dialogue, noise, music, thus these are manifestations of sound. Every sound in a film communicates meaning with some cultural undertone which is encoded in tune with the film story. This research will base its discussions on this issue highlighted above.

The Subjective Effect of film Sound on audience
Subjectivity then means "expressing or bringing into prominence the individuality of the artist or author. It equally means relating issues or representation of real life or natural objects. (American Heritage dictionary of the English language. 2009). Thus the viewers see the film story from the filmmaker's point of view and likening it to his or her past experiences. Most times film x-rays a real life issue which is becoming indistinguishable. Thus film sound leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, rather the eyes and ears perceives the messages encoded by the film maker. According to Gillian Rose. 2007, "Subjectivity' entails the acknowledgement that individuals are indeed subjective: that we make sense of ourselves and our worlds through a whole range of complex and often non-rational ways of understanding. We feel, we dream, we fantasize, and we can react to things in ways that feel beyond words. Psychoanalysis addresses these sorts of emotional states (and indeed would argue that rationality too is often secretly dependent on these other non-rational states of mind). In relation to the visual, this means psychoanalysis often focuses on the emotional effects of visual images, on the way remains as it were, vague, suspended- numinous' (Hall 1999:311) as cited in Gillian Rose, 2007. P.110). Carboni Camilla

Thus, a subjective audience in his experiences understands a film better as he recognizes the sound effect encoded in synch with a film. In this view Chris Dobrian 1992 , states that "Every input is a stimulus available for us to interpret as information and from which we can derive further information. Our physical sensory receptors our ears, eyes e.t.c, can well be thought of as information "transducers" which convert external stimuli changes in air pressure, light, etc –into nerve inpulses recognized by the brain scientists and philosophers have advanced many conceptual models of what the brain does with these nerve impulses to drive sound activity shapes how we perceive and interpret. This depends on how the sound designer, video editor and the director demonstrate the power of sound to alter our understanding of the different visual images related to us. Thus, the synchronization of appropriate sounds to the signified images such that when a certain sound is heard the audience expects to see the implied images of the sound they heard. For example, two people in a sitting-room are discussing, then a sudden bang on the door and the two gentlemen are startled. The audience hearts will be racing at some clues to what they heard but yet to see visually in the film, they get eager to know what is about to unfold. On the other hand, a director may wish to show where the two gentlemen were discussing and "we hear the creaking of door opening. If the next shot shows the door, now open, the source of the off-screen sound. But if the second shows the door still closed, the viewer will likely ponder his or her interpretation of the sound (maybe it wasn't a door after all?)" (Bordwell and Thompson (2004, p.298). Based on this view, sound not only shapes how we perceive and interpret, it equally clarifies image events, contradicts them, or renders them ambiguous. In all cases sound track enters into an active relation with the image track. Likewise, from the examples given above and some films, depending on the genre of the film (Horror and Crimes stories) use sound creatively to cheat and redirect the viewer's expectations.

According to Robert Bresson (director) as cited by Boardwell and Thompson (2004, p. 317), "the eye solicited alone makes the ear impatient. Use this impatience." To this effect, sound in film helps to direct and control what the audience eyes see. In film we hear the sound that puts us in an anticipating mood before we see the camera shot of the action. But we are made to see another action going on as the actor reacting to the sound we heard. Moreover, films with dark scenes make use of sound to a larger extent. In conveying information about the action, putting sound over a black screen or dark images tends to guide our senses to what is happening in the dark scene. This has the effect of intensifying the audience attention greatly. The sound designs described above can be achieved and other quality sound design can be applied if the sound designer is knowledgeable and experienced in sound synchronization. Therefore it is with great experience that a filmmaker creates and identifies poor sound synchronizations. It is based on this experience and skill that he creates appropriate sound effects that gives vitality to a film. Thus appropriate sounds applied stimulate audience emotions as they (see and hear) receive the message included by the filmmaker. Abuja Isa (2004, p.195) states that, "the ability to judge sound quality is largely based on experience.

Eight percent of all bad quality sounds is the result of over-mixing: recording it too high level. Learn to recognize this and many cases of bad quality will be eliminated."

Congruence Associationist Theory of understanding film-sound

According to Annabel Cohen (2005, p, 15), "the qualitative nature of Human psychology enables researchers to test the Models of the Mental interaction of musical and visual information presented in a film or video. One possibility is that associations (that is meanings) between musical and visual elements simply mean that experimental psychology aids to test the influence of music and sound in a film. This is based on how music and sound effects of a film stimulate the viewer and their ability to convey meaning as the visual story flows. Thus music and sound effects are important factors contributing to the meaning of a film production. The multisensory context is typical of everyday experience. Thus, visual information co-occurs naturally for instance, a passing car produces both visual and auditory impressions; a breeze creates effects that are heard and seen. Therefore motion picture provides correlated information to both the ear and the eye which is a common source of multisensory information. This theoretical model of Congruence associations proposed by Cohen is a multi-stage model that attempts to account for meaning derived from narrative, visual images, and musical sounds. In essence it enhances the understanding of film- music communication. Since it deals with meaning it is also rooted in semiotics which relates to signs and its meanings.

A critique of Semiotic fields of filmic sounds in selected films

Semiotic fields of filmic sounds refer to the treatment of sounds to relate or represent the sounds we are familiar with. Van Leeuwen (1999, p. 23) as cited in Betty Noad (2010, p. 2) explains that, "semiotic fields as a sound or group of sounds is positioned as field, it is thereby treated as existing not in the listener's social, but in his or her physical world. This concept refers to sound in a sound design that can be perceptively positioned. However, it is also the case that there is an opposite of perspective and that is 'immersion' or 'wrap-around' sound (van Leeuwen, 1989, p.28). It is pointed out that immersive sounds are often characterized by 'low pitch or tone, such as foghorns, which seem to come from everywhere at once and the listener feels fully integrated and immersed in the environment (Van Leeuwen 1999, p.28). A modern dance club is another example, where low frequency sounds seek blend and diffusion rather than clarity and focus and the listener is immersed in the centre of the sound… flooded by it (Schafer, 1977, p. 118 in van Leeuwen, 1999, p.29)".

In developing good aesthetics in synchronization of sound in film, the most common sound design method is to lay on the timelines of your editing suite different sound effects to create a new interesting sound out of two or three old, average sounds. For example, the sound of a bullet impact into the carcass of a pig may be mixed with the sound of a melon being gouged to add to the "sickness" or "gore" of the effect. If the effects are featured in close-up, the designer may also add an "impact sweetener" from his or her library. The sweetener may

simply be the sound of a hammer pounding hardwood, equalized so that only the low-end can be heard (Tom Kenny, 1998). The low end gives the three sounds together added weight so that the audience actually "feels the weight of the bullet hit on the victim. If the victim is the villain, and his death is shameful, the sound designer may add reverb to the impact, in order to enhance the dramatic beat. And then, as the victim falls over in slow motion, the sound editor may add the sound of a broom whooshing by a microphone, pitch shifted down and time-expanded to further emphasize the death. For example in the film *Apocalypto* (2007) directed by Mel Gibson, an epic movie which has a lot of fighting and bloody scenes, we were made to feel the weight of the villager's spears and weapons pierce through the villagers body and the gore sound of blood gushing out immediately the Persian soldiers' is pierced. This is effect is achieved with the aid of sound making us have a feeling of the spare movement through the air and its heavy sound as it pierces their body. Consequently, in the film *300* (2007) by Zack Snyder, Ganni Nauri, and Mark Canton titled 300 Spartan soldiers, is an epic film that showed a war between Spartan and Persian army. But the Spartan soldiers died sorrowfully after being sold out by one of their own Spartan. In this film we were made to feel every detailed sound of the visual images and sometimes our attention is drawn to a particular image with the aid of sound synchronized to a close-up shot. We see how the soldiers move and sway in the battle field and each swift movement of their swords and spears we felt it through the aid of sounds mixed and synchronized in tune with the film. And when their spears or swords cuts a skin we hear the sound and feel the weight of the driving of the sword into their opponent's body. If the film is science-fiction, the designer may lower the "whoosh" to a minute frequency to give it a more scientific feeling.

In the film Egg of life, the director projected the African identity by adopting the African form of storytelling. This concept was also adopted in a foreign made film titled *300*. These two films employed narrative African narrative form in different styles. Of which, Egg of Life has the pure African concept of people gathering round real story. Whereas, *300* had the narrator identified in the film as one of the *300* soldiers who was sent back to narrate the story of how they fought. But the Egg of Life had the narrator being visible at the beginning of the film and at intervals in the background of the visual story. Moreover, the film egg of life employed good use of some African instrumental sounds which gives it the feeling of an epic movie. Once the sound track of the film is played the film is identified anywhere. This local instrumental sounds explored in the film were informative. For example, in the beginning of the film when a child is being born the audience is made to have the feeling that the king is in an intense mood. And when the child was born the music lightened up the mood informing us that the king was about to smile. Consequently, whenever the maidens get to the point of trials, the viewer gets the feeling of distinctive eerie sounds that gets the audience heartbeat racing. Therefore, it is undeniable that music and sound effects, in their typical roles, serve to reinforce, alter, and augment the emotional content of a filmic narrative. Musical sound provides a cue for the viewer concerning whether the narrative is intended to be perceived as scary, romantic, funny, disturbing, familiar, and comforting (to

mention but a few) depending on the narrative case or situation. In this capacity, the role of music is significantly enhanced by the level of ambiguity inherent in the visual scene. Specifically, the more ambiguous the meaning of the visual image, the more influence is exerted by the musical score in the process of interpreting the scene (Scott D. Lipscomb and Telchinsky, 2009, p.3). Thus music conveys the scope of a film, effectively communicating the film story. As a result, it defines the genre of the film at a glance. Moreover, music establishes a "narrative's placement in time of the film. Film scores often serve to "authenticate the era' or to provide a sense of nostalgia" (Stessy and Lipscomb, 2003, p.410). As a result, the study reveals that sound if effectively applied to a film can aid in the communication of a moving image. This is achieved through the creative impute of the sound designer and the director in the representation of reality.

The film *Egg of life* employed good use of some African instrumental sounds which gives it the feeling of an epic movie. Once the sound track of the film is played the film is identified anywhere. This local instrumental sounds explored in the film were informative. For example, in the beginning of the film when a child is being born the audience is made to have the feeling that the king is in an intense mood. And when the child was born the music lightened up the mood informing us that the king was about to smile. Consequently, whenever the maidens get to the point of trials, the viewer gets the feeling of distinctive eerie sounds that gets the audience heartbeat racing. For example, at the first test where they met the lost souls of the night, Ebube the whirlwind, the designer made us have the scary sound effect of these gods. The sound effects used gives us a pre-information with a resounding strike of a bass guitar indicating danger. This danger effect could have been achieved more if the designer had adapted from natural sound like birds (e.g. owl or bat sounds) and some local instruments like big wooden gong or maracas to create rattling effect, which can be eerie. Moreover, eerie sounds can be generated through some cultural activities for example during *Ekpe* festivals, in the darkest night people get to hear sounds generated through the winding of a half cut ruler stick with a tiny tread attached to it. The sounds generated from this local effect gives the impression that a god is passing –by or talking. On the other hand, it creates an effect of a powerful ghost passing- by. The designer had a good impression of the spirit world and its transition from the human world to the spirit world was well differentiated through the use of echoing of *ogbanje* voices and claps. This scene of the spirit world was differentiated from that of the lost souls. The lost souls had rattling sounds with percussion instruments. The rattling sounds can be blended with a steady heartbeat. This equally puts the viewer in fear and suspense of what is going to happen at that point.

When creating sound effects for films sound designers and editors do not generally concern themselves with the verisimilitude or accuracy of the sounds they present. The sound of a bullet entering a person from a close distance may sound nothing like the sound designed in the above example, but since very few people are aware of how such a thing actually sounds, the job of designing the effect is mainly an issue of creating a conjectural sound which feeds

the audience's expectations while still suspending disbelief. Christopher Boyer a sound designer who designed the sounds for *Star wars* and working with directors who were not just looking for powerful sound effects to attach to a structure, rather he was playing with sound (and not just sound effects, but music and dialogue as well) all through production and post productions. What directors like Francis Coppola, Walter Murch, George Lucas, and Ben Burtt found is that sound began to shape the picture. Sometimes as much as the picture shaped the sound, the reception by the film sound community was unanimous in its praise, and to this day the sound job is regarded as the *ne plus ultra* in terms of creative use of the medium. The soundtrack of the movie *Apocalypse* was crafted in San Francise by a large crew headed by Walter Murch, whose sound design credit was accorded billing block status on posters (Tom Kenny 1998).

Subjectivity is thus not merely evident in the encoding and decoding processes of film, but is fundamental to the cultural aspects surrounding film, as well as to the psychological motivations driving the film industry, by way of the spectators desire to watch. Of course, the satisfaction of seeing a film by an audience starts with the desire to watch. Robert Stam explains that, "Bordwell offers a cognitive alternative to semiotics to explain how spectators make sense of films. For Boardwell, narration is a process whereby films furnish cues to spectators who are interpretative schemata to construct ordered intelligible stories in their minds, from the point of view of reception, spectators entertain, elaborate, and sometime suspend and modify their hypothesis about the images and sounds on the screen". However, representation of reality plays a crucial role in understanding literature and art as a whole since ancient times. Plato and Aristotle are key figures in early western literary criticism who considered art as a form of representation. Aristotle considered each representation; verbal, visual, musical as being natural to man. Therefore, what distinguishes man is his ability to create and manipulate signs. Aristotle derived mimesis as natural to man, thus he considers representation as necessary to learning. Plato in contrast, views representation with more caution. He recognized that art is a representation of life, yet also believed that representations create worlds of illusion leading one away from reality. Deducing from Plato's argument, one can imply that represented images through film intervenes viewer and reality. Thus, filmmakers draw ideas from signs that are obtainable around their environment which is socially accepted and culturally agreed (Emelobe, 2008, p.428). The viewers are informed and educated through interpretative signs and codes. These interpretative signs and codes which are encoded with the aid of visual and auditory elements not only catch the eye but draw the viewer into the information being presented. This information in codes is interpreted in the viewer's mind comparing and likening what they see to their environment or experiences. Regrettably, a study of the Nigerian video films reveals the use of inappropriate sound designs in tune with their stories. This is ascertained in Galadima USA (2004, p.144) who posits that, "some films even over-use the theme music, using it whenever there is a gap in dialogue or to cover up noisy scenes.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, film sound enhances the visual image which adds to the subjection of the filmmaker's communicative idea of the narrative. It warrants appropriate application of minute sounds to give illusion of diegetic and ambience to enhance the narrative. Thus it boosts the aural representation of the plot which can make the audience transcend the limitations of cinematic medium and believe the conceit presented before them. Therefore, it is pertinent that Nollywood filmmakers pay attention to detail on the application of music and sound effects in communicating meaningful ideologies that are interpretive of the narrative. As such, that it leaves no room for imaginations but explicitly produce illusionary reality.

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Filmography:

Egg of Life
Director; Andy Amenechi, Producer; Obumneche Ezeananyaeche, and Ojiofor Ezeanyaeche, Cinematography; Muhammed Abdullahi, Film Editor; Fidelis Eweta, Sound; Osondu Ezeribe, Actors; Padita Agu, Sam Ajah, Funke Akindele, Ozo Akuburze