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THE PORTRAYAL OF WITCHCRAFT, OCCULTS AND MAGIC IN POPULAR NIGERIAN VIDEO FILMS

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian video film industry has emerged to become the first "popular" film industry in black Africa. Its means of production and consumption has redefined the parameters of African Cinema. The video films employ themes and images that captivate the audiences' imagination and curiosity. Some of the most used themes in the Nigerian video films are those relating to the supernatural, magic and witchcraft. Whilst some scholars and filmmakers criticise the prevalence of themes of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural, it is these very themes that draw local audiences. This research project explores images and themes of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural in two genres of the video films; the evangelical or Christian genre, and the horror or voodoo genre, using the films *End of the Wicked* and *Child of Promise* as case studies of the two genres respectively.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Grace Kumwenda

(Name of candidate)

26 day of September 2007

To my husband Benjamin

for the love and support

that you continuously gave me during

the writing of this research report.

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CHAPTER 1

1 INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian film industry, popularly known as "Nollywood", is the third largest film industry in the world after Hollywood of the United States of America (USA) and Bollywood of India (Special Assignment, SABC)[1]. It has emerged to become the first successful "popular" film industry in black Africa[2]. Despite the financial constraints that the industry faces, Nollywood has unintentionally or unconsciously contested the dominant and mainstream cinematic formats, such as the 35mm films, to cultivate its own film aesthetic and audience through the so-called "video film". The video film, also produced in Ghana, refers to those films that are "primarily shot on video in a variety of formats…" (Nathan 2). Onwochei refers to these films as "the Direct-to-Video model" of film (1). They are also referred to as "straight to video" films, unlike Hollywood's and Bollywood's feature films that are first released in cinemas before reproducing them in home video formats. Even though video films are also produced in Ghana, this research will specifically focus on the video filmmaking practice of Nigeria.

1.2 The Nigerian Film Industry: A Historical Perspective

During colonisation in West Africa, film was introduced by the colonialists to propagate their values and ethos. Ukadike notes that "the films identified ideologically and aesthetically with the social cultural values of the producer nation" ("Black African Cinema" 105). Ofeimun affirms this line of argument asserting that "…motion picture was brought to Africa, not so

[1] Hollywood is the largest film industry in terms of revenue. However, Bollywood (Indian film industry) is the largest industry in terms of number of films produced per year. In 2003, India produced 877 feature films and 1177 short films as compared to Hollywood which released about 473 films in the same year (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia).

[2] "Popular" in this context refers to a film industry whose success is located in its appeal to mass audiences within the African continent as compared to films whose success is located in elite audiences such as films produced under the paradigm of African Cinema

much for Africans, but as a means of imperialist encirclement and cultural overcoming of the natives" (Ofeimun 3). The films that were screened in Nigeria by colonialists purported to showcase the supremacy of the colonial nations so as to render natives voiceless and backward.

The first film screening in Nigeria occurred on 12 August 1903 at Glover Memorial Hall in Lagos. It was screened for ten days (Owens-Ibie 1-2). This marked the beginning of film during colonial times. Almost two decades later (1939) the Colonial Film Unit (C.F.U) was established. During this time, film was also used as a tool for education as evidenced in the screening of educational documentaries on farming, health and other important issues through the mobile free cinemas that would tour Nigerian villages. In 1947, the Colonial Film Unit was dissolved and Federal Film Unit (F.F.U) was established. Owens-Ibie observes that the organisation still maintained the policies and strategies of the former Colonial Film Unit. In 1979, the Federal Film Unit was changed to become the Nigerian Film Unit (2).

The films that used to be distributed and exhibited in Nigeria were mostly foreign films from the United States of America, India or China. American cowboys and Chinese kung fu fighters found their way in Nigerian theatres. The subject matter of these films did not capture the experiences, values and beliefs of Africans[3]. The need, therefore, for a cinema that embraced African values and beliefs remained. Africans longed to see familiar faces, landscapes and most of all, they wanted to see themes that would resonate with their cultural lives. In Nigeria, the need for local themes and stories reflecting local experiences is evident in popular culture as a whole, be it in music, video films, theatre and, most importantly, literature. Balogun discusses the Onitsha market literature phenomenon whose developmental trends are very similar to that of the video filmmaking in Nigeria (176).

[3] It should be noted that some of the moral values of the foreign films are basically the same as those dealt with in African films; the triumph of good over bad and crime.

The Onitsha market literature phenomenon started in 1947. Nigerian writers began to write "for a local audience, tailoring their works to a society where literacy was only beginning to become widespread and where there was still relatively little worth" (Obeichina Book Review). The works of this literary genre were published in cheap format (pamphlets), in a similar fashion to video as a cheap form of film production. They were easily available, affordable and dealt with local themes which were appealing to local audiences (Balogun 176). Like African (art) films, such as *Black Goddess* (1978), whose popularity was largely in European elite circles and not in Africa, writers such as Wole Soyinka and Chinua Achebe were famous in literary circles, but "they were not widely read in their own country (Nigeria) where the literate masses preferred the Onitsha market literature" (Balogun 176). The Onitsha market literature phenomenon addressed the need for local stories and themes in the same manner that the video phenomenon addresses the need for local images and content in the Nigerian film industry. Adesanya affirms this by arguing that the moral and thematic content of the Nigerian popular videos are more similar than different to those of the Onitsha literary tradition (49).

The first indigenous film production in Nigeria was launched with the release of *Son of Africa* (1970), a Lebanese-Nigerian production. This film, however, was surrounded by huge controversy because Nigerian contribution to the film was minimal (Ukadike 144). In the same year, however, an adaptation of Wole Soyinka's novel, *Kongi's Harvest,* was produced. After this film, many films such as *Bullfrog in the Sun* (1971), *Amadi* (1975), *Ajani Oguni* (1975), were produced. It should be noted that at this time Nigeria was producing its films in celluloid format. Onwochei notes that in 1986, filmmaking in celluloid format ended because of devaluation of the Nigerian currency (2). Ukadike also observes that,

> During this period, as a result of currency devaluation, the Ghanaian Cedes and the Nigerian Naira became valueless in international monetary exchange, thus making hard currency inaccessible to filmmakers for the importation of film equipment, the purchase of raw film stock and the accomplishment of postproduction tasks. (Ukadike 128)

This financial restraint gave birth to the video film in Nigeria. Productions such as *Living in Bondage* (1992), a film in the Igbo language, led the process of video filmmaking. Since then, the Nigerian film industry has developed tremendously. According to *Special Assignment*, the Nigerian video film industry releases not less that a thousand films a year, making an annual turn-over of about 800 million Rands.

The average Nigerian video film is shot in about ten or more days with little or no pre-production research (Special Assignment, SABC). Editing is done using either Avid or Final Cut softwares in the shortest period of time to reduce production costs (Nathan 2). It is for such reasons that the technical quality of the video films is compromised. This has led some critics to argue that the video films lack artistic expressions and cinematographic depth. As Ukadike notes, a filmmaker's creativity lies in his or her ability not only to represent reality but also to reorganise, reinvent and restructure that reality into filmic codes. These filmic codes include "mobility of the camera, variation of distances, change of angles, perspectives […] utilization of transitions and montage… [to tell a story]" (156). However, Nigerian video films are known for their lack of depth in perspective, unmotivated camera movements and unsynchronised sound. Unlike the established Francophone filmmakers, most Nigerian video filmmakers have not been trained in the technical skills of cinematography.

Apart from the poor technical quality of the video films, Ukadike observes that even the films' narratives are mostly rendered in predictable and sloppy structures (133). The narratives' dramatic structures are often poor, such that, storylines have little emphasis on a coherent dramatic structure such as beginning, climax and resolution. He observes, however, that the industry's preoccupation with local themes and images attract huge local audiences who are satisfied with local products despite technical problems (Ukadike 133). The video film, therefore, has attained its own position in Nigeria as a vehicle and medium of cultural and traditional expression through its emphasis on local themes and images. Furthermore, the flexible methods of exhibition, distribution and production in Nollywood enable widespread availability of the films in local markets to the extent that Nollywood has become a household name in Africa.

As indicated, critics have observed that the Nigerian film industry's preoccupation with profit-making has compromised the artistry and aesthetics of the video films. For instance, Adeleke argues that recent Nigerian video productions lack quality and authenticity due to lack of research into the culture of the society in which the films are based(49). As a matter of fact, it is not surprising that there is a lack of research in the productions considering the nature of the productions and the amount of capital that is invested into these productions. It should be noted, however, that financial restraints are not the sole reason for poor quality, there are other factors contributing to low quality productions in Nigeria. Ukadike observes that "while filmmakers here [Nigeria] meet enormous financial constraints, they are also responsible for compounding some of the other problems affecting the quality of their films" ("Black African Cinema" 164). Some of these factors include a lack of professionalism among the filmmakers. In Nigeria, anybody can be a filmmaker and a star. The producer of *Living in Bondage* (1992), Kenneth Nnebue, was a businessman dealing in blank tapes and selling foreign films. Needless to say, most filmmakers lack an educational background in

film production and dramatic art. There is a need, therefore, for the industry to invest in the establishment of training institutions that can train actors, directors, camera personnel and editors. This is one of the ways of dealing with the many problems that the Nigerian film industry faces.

However, the establishment of film institutions to train filmmakers in Nigeria raises other critical debates. Most film schools around the world base their curricula on dominant approaches to cinema such as the classical Hollywood template. Even though alternative filmmaking may be part of these curricula, they are often taught within the frameworks of dominant approaches to cinema. The question, therefore, that arises is: to what extent would such a training (one that focuses on dominant cinema) enrich the unique aesthetic? At the same time, the issue of costs need to be considered. In restructuring the Nigerian film industry, therefore, many factors need to be put into consideration.

Apart from the poor technical quality of the Nigerian video films, Adeleke explores other challenges and limitations of the video film industry. He compares the Nigerian celluloid filmmaker of the 1970s to the video filmmaker of modern Nigeria. He argues in favour of the celluloid filmmaker by asserting that they opted for good productions in terms of quality, creativity, education and entertainment whilst the 'pseudo-professional' filmmakers (as he calls video filmmakers) prefer emotional and sensational films that lack lustre and most of all that negatively stereotype African cultures (49). In as much as Adeleke's concerns can be appreciated, his sweeping statements nullify all the efforts that the Nigerian video filmmakers have made. It can be suggested (without making excuses for the video filmmakers), that they have made a film industry out of an economically difficult scenario. Constructive criticism should, therefore, point out both weaknesses and solutions to enhance this new cultural aesthetic.

Adeleke further points out some of the adverse effects of video film on the cinema-going culture. He observes that since the inception of the video film, many cinema halls have been closed and illegitimate video clubs which encourage members of the public to loan a film for a specific period of time have developed, leading to financial loss for producing companies since the money goes to the club owner. He further asserts that the film-going culture is on the wane because cinema halls are no longer in existence for film exhibition (53). Accordingly, the ending of the cinema-going culture "problematises" processes of exhibition and distribution in the sense that filmmakers have to make profits only from video films sold to individuals. This kind of profit is unwarranted considering the high rate of video piracy in Nigeria.

It should be noted, however, as Okome observes, that the so called film-going culture in Nigeria was patriarchal. It was the men and young boys who used to go to cinema halls to watch films. The video film has opened up new spaces for viewing films that incorporates women as audiences. The video film can be taken home and be watched in the privacy of their homes. As Okome points out, evidence shows that women constitute a large proportion of audience of the Nigerian video film (5). This therefore implies that even though Adeleke regards the wane of the film-going culture negatively, there is a positive outcome that has emerged from it. Furthermore, each aesthetic comes with demands that define it. The video film demands new approaches to film consumption, exhibition, distribution and marketing. That is what defines video film as a new aesthetic altogether that is different from mainstream cinema.

The problems, however, with methods of distribution and exhibition as employed by Nigerian filmmakers pose problems in terms of piracy as earlier indicated. Nathan indicates that "like

much film distribution in the Third World, piracy is a constant problem [in Nigeria], particularly given the fact that the films originate and are distributed only on video" (1). Filmmakers lose a lot of profits through this act of piracy. Haynes and Okome argues,

> Popular videos are rapidly pirated, sometimes by the marketer entrusted with distributing the film. But the greatest problem is piracy by video rental clubs, which rent out films with no mechanisms for paying royalties to the producer. (69)

Thus, piracy will always be inimical to the development of this industry. Efforts, therefore, need to be placed by both government and other institutions to reduce this problem.

Filmmaking in Africa has a relatively short history. Comparably though, the northern part of Africa (non-black/Arab Africa) has a longer filmmaking history than its Southern counterpart (Sub-Saharan Africa). For instance, Albert Samama from Tunisia is regarded as the first African to direct a film. He produced a short documentary entitled *Tunis* in 1907 (Gugler 2). Gugler notes that 2,800 feature films were produced in Egypt between 1924 and 1999 (3). On the other hand, filmmaking in the southern part of Africa (black Africa) only became evident around 1957 with the production of *Afrique sur seine* by Mamadou Sarr and Paulin Soumanou Vieyra (Gugler 3). Some African countries such as Senegal and Burkina Faso have attempted or managed to produce different films that are motivated by African scenarios, values and beliefs. Out of these (most of which would be considered 'art' cinema), some have won awards at film festivals yet only few have gained popularity among local audiences (Nathan 2). Larkin affirms the above assertion by arguing,

> The bitter irony remains, though, that films produced under the rubric of African Cinema are rarely screened in Africa itself and are thus kept from reaching the masses that often form their subject. (4)

Contrarily though, the Nigerian video films have won no internationally recognised awards, yet their popularity among African audiences, and also to an extent Africans in Europe, is not questionable[4]. Despite the controversies surrounding the technical quality of these films, it seems that Nigerian video films give the audience what they want and expect to see from film entertainment (Ukadike 164).

What makes Nigerian video films a success is also a matter of the sheer size of its local market. Nigeria is one of the largest countries in Africa. It has a population of more than a hundred million, representing twenty percent of the total population of the Sub-Saharan Africa. It is one of the most densely populated countries in Africa (Haynes 2). This high population provides a large local market for the video films even before the films are exported to other African countries. It is estimated that each film has the potential of being watched by a minimum number of fifteen million Nigerians and five million non-Nigerian poeple (Taiwo 2004). Currently, Nigerian video films are exported in most African countries such as: Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, Zambia, Sierra Leone and Senegal. According to the *ArtMatters*[5] website, "in Kenya, 90 percent of homes with movie players have at least one Nigerian video, VCD or DVD". The situation is more or less similar in other African countries. In Malawi, for instance, many local video rental shops distributing Nigerian video films have been established in townships. People borrow Nigerian video films for two or more days at a very low cost, gaining easy access to the video films. The audience base for

[4] Even though the Nigerian video films are not recognised in many international awards, the African Movie Academy based in Nigeria has established an annual award ceremony that honours African filmmakers. Nigerian video films, among others, are recognised and honoured in these ceremonies. The awards are commonly known as AMAA (African Movie Academy Awards).

[5] ArtMatters is a Kenyan website that discusses culture and the arts. It was established by Ogova Ondego.

Nigerian video films seems to be enlarging also with the introduction of DSTV channel 102, *African Magic,* where video films from Nigeria and other African countries are screened. *African Magic,* aired in most African countries, screens Nigerian video films to parts of Africa that would have otherwise been difficult to access. In a way, therefore, the market for Nigerian video films is large enough to sustain the film industry.

Nigerian video films are produced in local languages and in English. Some of the languages are: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Olatunji explains that language is an important medium of communication and cultural expression (qtd. in Adeleke 4). One of the first video films, *Living in Bondage,* was produced in Igbo. Ekwuazi, however, notes that there are fewer films produced in the Igbo language as compared to films produced in Yoruba and Hausa (132). Table 1.0 below quantifies the production of films in Nigeria from 1994 to 1998[6].

TABLE 1.0: PRODUCTION OF FILMS IN NIGERIA

	Dec. 1994	1995	1996	1997	Jan-May 98	Total
No. of video films	3	193	252	226	122	796
In English	1	15	62	114	54	246
In Yoruba	2	161	166	89	59	477
In Igbo	0	15	22	19	6	62
In Hausa, Itsikiri, Pidgin	0	2	1	4	3	10
Celluloid Films	0	0	1	0	0	1

As the table indicates, the most popular local language films are those produced in Yoruba. One of the reasons behind the success of the Yoruba films in Nigeria is probably because these films are a derivative of the 'famous' Yoruba Travelling Theatre (Ukadike 156). In an

[6] The information in this table is from UNESCO courier as referenced in the cited works. However, it should be noted that film production in Nigeria has increased tremendously over the past decade, hence recent information would probably show higher figures than those shown in this table. Furthermore, mathematical additional corrections were made to the table due to the fact that the original table was miscalculated.

interview with Ukadike, Ugbomah, a renowned Nigerian filmmaker, noted that the Yoruba films are "oriented towards cultural plays and drama" which have an already established audience, hence their success (Ukadike 156). Adesanya makes a vital observation as to why the Yoruba language films are much more successful than the films produced in other local languages. He asserts that whilst movie going and watching is a family activity for Yoruba families, it is not the case with the Igbo and the Hausa. For the Hausa and the Igbo man, video films are for wives and children who stay at home to watch on video cassette recorders (VCR), while he goes out to his own social activities (Adesanya 48). Since the man is often the bread winner, he will only occasionally buy video films because watching films is not his social priority. The Yoruba, therefore, offer a better market for the video films than the other major ethnic groups due to social cultural practices and customs. However, it is important to note that whilst this research acknowledges the role that local language video films play as a cultural phenomenon, it limits its analysis to English language video films.

It is also important to note that video films in Nigeria are a product of hybridity; there are many factors that influence the form, content and structure of the films. Of particular interest is the influence of melodrama. Haynes observes that there are three types of melodrama that have influenced the video narrative in Nigeria: the Anglo-American television soap opera, the Latin American telenovella and the Indian commercial film (22). For instance, the elements of the Latin American telenovella are very evident in the video films, as a kind of a soap opera, in which one can predict the ending at the beginning of the series. Similarly, most video films have predictable endings. Furthermore, the influence of the soap opera genre may explain why the video film's major audiences are women. Fiske argues that soap opera is an engendered television genre that leans more towards the feminine side of spectatorship. This is because of its characteristic, structural and ideological features that appeal *more* to female

audiences than male audiences[7]. Such elements include: presence of "male characters who are sensitive", independent and powerful female characters, validation of relationships and other elements (179). These elements are evident in Nigerian video films. All this implies that even though the video film is a totally new aesthetic in Africa, it is not independent of influences from other filmmaking traditions. Like other aesthetic forms, this cultural phenomenon is highly hybrid.

Myths, folktales and religious beliefs also influence the narratives. Most of the films that deal with supernatural issues, for instance, are highly influenced by well-known myths and rumours of witchcraft, cults and magic that circulate within everyday activities.

Nigerian video films are produced in different genres. It is, therefore, important to explore these genres. "Audiences know the genres of their culture very well and as so do filmmakers" (Bordwell and Thompson 109). The filmmaker's choice of incorporating certain themes instead of others is largely influenced by the genre in which the narrative is told. Bordwell and Thompson observe that "some genres stand out by their subjects or themes" (109). For instance, the genre of romantic comedy stands out by the theme of love. Other genres are determined by the way in which the narrative is presented. The Nigerian video films fall into distinguishable genres. Nathan observes that there are four main genres in Nigerian video film. These are Voodoo or Ghost stories, Love stories (Romance), Historical epics and Gangster stories.

The voodoo genre, which is sometimes referred to as the horror genre, focuses on issues of witchcraft, ritual killings and occults. This genre employs images of events and things that are logically or naturally unexplainable. Human beings turn into snakes or other animals as in

[7] Despite arguments that indicate that soap operas are mostly watched by female audiences, recent research has shown that men are just reluctant to acknowledge their soap opera viewing. This, therefore, implies that soap operas appeal *more* to women *but* the viewership is not exclusive to them only, it also includes male audiences.

Sakobi: The Snake Girl (Ejiro 1998); ghosts avenge someone's death and manifest in physical forms as in *Miserable Wealth* (Okoh 2003); and witches, gods and ghosts move through barriers such as walls as if there were no material barrier as in *Angel of Darkness* (Opeoluwa 2003), *End of the Wicked* (Benson 1999) *and Living in Bondage* (Rapu 1992). It can be suggested that the use of these surreal images enables the achievement of horror effect on audiences. Different genres are normally differentiated by the codes, metaphors and signs that are employed within the film text. Bordwell and Thompson suggest that "heavy makeup is usually prominent in the iconography of horror" (121). This is true of Nigerian horror video films. Ghosts, witches, gods and witchdoctors use heavy makeup to dehumanise themselves. Other codes that are highly employed in Nigerian horror films include red costumes for gods and witchdoctors, use of drumming when a ghost, god or witch is about to appear, and rapid dissolves for transitions to indicate transformations in shape or movement.

The love or romance genre embodies themes of love, care, forgiveness and acceptance. Films such as *Against my Wish*, *My Love, Butterfly, Still in Love, Play Boy, Felony, You and I Forever* and many more fall within this genre. Ukadike asserts that "romance is the most admired genre because of the similarity of plots to the love stories often told during regular evening story telling when families re-enacted folktales[…] (*Video booms in Anglophone Africa* 133). The basic story line mostly involves a man and woman in love. In most cases, the relationship between the two is hindered by cultural differences, lack of acceptance of the woman in the man's family, or another woman. It should be observed that this genre sometimes entwines with the horror genre. In such cases, the practice of witchcraft or magic is used to hinder the development of love. In most cases, love triumphs at the end of the romantic narratives even though there is always an exception to the rule. For instance, *My Love* tells a story of two lovers from different social and economic backgrounds. The girl comes from a rich family whilst the boy comes from a very poor family; the economic

differences become a barrier to their love. The girl's parents do not accept the poor boy as a suitor for their daughter, which leads the girl eloping with the poor man. Disaster befalls the couple when the girl's pregnancy becomes complicated and she needs surgery. Since the man is poor he cannot afford the surgery, and the girl's father refuses to help. The girl dies. Fearing that he could not live without his lover, the poor man commits suicide. This narrative therefore, ends tragically, providing a Shakespearean tragic intertextuality that questions the main theme that the film expounds: love.

The Historical Epics are mostly the retelling of Nigerian history. The narrative is usually grounded in local culture and traditions. Most tend to romanticise and exoticise Africa and its traditions. On the other hand, the gangster genre mostly focuses on urban crimes. It draws from foreign or western cultural elements of the 'inner city' in terms of modes of dressing, language and lifestyles of the characters in general. In reference to mainstream gangster films, Hayward notes that "the gangster film is highly stylised with its recurrent iconography of urban settings, clothes, cars, gun technology and violence" (147). These are the same conventions and codes that inform the narrative of the Nigerian gangster genre. The characters tend to use African-American accents with huge amounts of profanity which is quite unexpected in African narratives. Similar to western genres of gangster film, the pace of the films tend to be fast, even though most of the narratives are informed by poor and simplistic story lines that are mostly vulgar to local audiences. One of the most used props in this genre is a gun, which is often used as a symbol of urban violence. Thus, the narrative is mostly infused with a lot of unrealistic and unmotivated violence.

Apart from the four mentioned genres, Onwochei suggests that comedy is the genre that "currently holds the record of highest selling production in Nigeria" (4). He observes that Ogoro's *Osofia in London* (2004), sold more than 400,000 copies and is regarded as one of

the video films with highest profits (4). Some of the most popular films that belong to the comedy genre include *Ukwa*, *My Daily Bread* and *Aki Na Ukwa*. Okome adds to the list of genres by discussing what he refers to as the "Hallelujah genre" which is also called the Christian genre. The Hallelujah genre deals with Christianity and treats the Christian religion as a solution to modern-day problems. The advance of Pentecostalism in Nigeria is highly prevalent in this genre. There is always conflict that builds up between evil and good, indigenous traditions and Christianity. Okome put it as follows,

> The horrific, the juju man, in this tradition of narration [Hallelujah genre] is caged and conceptualised as the epitome of darkness to be exorcised or cast into hell. (17)

In all these conflicts, Christianity becomes synonymous with 'good' and triumphs over evil which is portrayed as synonymous with African traditional religions, occults or Satanism. This research will focus on only two genres of the Nigerian video film, the Hallelujah and the voodoo genres which places focus on themes of witchcraft, occults, religion and the supernatural to a greater extent than other genres.

Audience expectations are vital for the success of the Nigerian video film industry. In reference to the Ghanaian video film industry, Meyer suggests that "the new Ghanaian filmmakers completely depend on their audiences' approval and in order to make a somehow profitable film, they have to ensure to meet spectators' expectations" (2). Similarly, the Nigerian video film industry is driven by audience expectations. Filmmakers construct their narratives around stories that satisfy the audiences' expectations and wants, without which the film would be unsuccessful on the local markets. The development of specific genres within any film industry thus reflects audience expectations and desires.

Furthermore, the Nigerian video film industry has encountered great commercial success. Every week, at least twenty new local films are released (Nathan 1). Most of these films deal with issues, themes and values that are locally understood and identified within the Nigerian context. Local audiences recognise faces, places and cultures of their own. The technical problems of the films seem to be 'problematised' more by the critical and academic community and less by the audiences who watch these films. In as much as the role of film critics can never be downplayed, a film's commercial success does not depend highly on critics, Nigeria video films being a good example. What counts is the audience's response to the films (box office). As long as Nollywood continues to meet audience expectations through its narratives, it will continue to be commercially successful in African markets and beyond. The commercial success, audience popularity and the fact that it has become the first large film industry to emerge in black Africa, magnifies the need for academic research in order to throw more light as to the nature of the industry and its products.

The success of the popular video films can be attributed to many factors. The most important reason for their popularity among local audiences is the films' ability to engage in local themes and images and, most of all, to draw from the rich culture and traditions of Nigeria (or broadly speaking, of Africa). These local themes and images range from domestic, religious, political, cultural and supernatural issues. Amongst all these, however, the 'visualisalisation' of the supernatural and an invisible realm incorporating witchcraft, occult activities and magic prevails in most genres of the Nigerian video films. Haynes affirms,

> …the supernatural appears routinely, as even the most "modernized" of Nigerians may have recourse to "traditional" magic when under the sort of stress to which these melodramatic films routinely subject their protagonists. Witchcraft as a weapon in domestic or neighbourly antagonisms, mysterious fates that can only be elucidated by

> a diviner, selling one's soul to a dark occult power for the sake of wealth-all are stock elements in the videos. (3)

Films such as *End of the Wicked*, *Child of Promise*, *Blood Money*, *Sakobi: The Snake Girl*, *Ogbaje*, deal with themes and images that attest to what can best be referred to as "the supernatural". In the evangelical or Christian genres of the Nigerian video films, the supernatural activities are mostly "placed in the framework of Christian dualism of God and the devil" (qtd in Meyer 2). In as much as it can be appreciated that the Nigerian video film industry has attracted attention and criticism for its poor technical quality, most criticism is directed at the films' content, such as, an overemphasis on "negative themes" like witchcraft, occults, ritual killings and magic. For instance, Gray notes Okome's observation that African intellectuals dismiss the Nigerian video films for "playing up" themes of witchcraft that perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africa (Gray 2). However, to Nigerian or African audiences at large, these themes, though 'negative', deal with pressing issues that affects their lives, hence they expect to encounter them when watching these films.

Amidst these criticisms, however, it should be noted that whilst there may be a recognisable body of academic works on dominant cinemas, for instance, Hollywood and to a lesser degree, Bollywood, there is little scholarly research on Nollywood since this is a relatively new industry as compared to the others. Furthermore, McCall indicates that much research on the culture of video production, consumption and the social contexts of video watching remains to be done (81). An effort, therefore, to interrogate images of Nollywood beyond superficial criticism becomes necessary.

In addition, images and themes of witchcraft, occults, ritual killings and magic has largely been a field for anthropological research rather than film analysis. The Nigerian video films'

preoccupation with these images and themes is, however, opening up a new field of film analysis. Thus, this research aims at interrogating images and themes of witchcraft, magic, ritual killings, occults and religion in Nigerian popular video films. Specifically, the research will explore how the Nigerian video films portray these themes and images either as cultural activities within mainstream African traditional religion, or as a moral evil to African society and culture within a broader context of Christianity as the "acceptable" religion in post-colonial Africa.

To interrogate images and themes of witchcraft and the supernatural, the research will employ a thematic and semiotic analysis of two Nigerian video films belonging to two respective genres. These films are *End of the Wicked* (Benson 1999) and *Child of Promise* (Okoli 2004). The selection of these films is premised upon the fact that both are preoccupied with themes of witchcraft, magic, the supernatural and religion. This will facilitate an in-depth analysis of the images of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural as depicted in video films. This analysis will also make brief references to films such as *Oja Dike* (Ezeanyaeche and Egbon 2004), *Bonds of Tradition* (Orji 2004), *Angel of Darkness* (Opeoluwa 2002), *Lion of Africa* (Opeoluwa 2001), *Ogbaje* (Opeoluwa 2002), *Two Troubles One God* (Smith 2003) *and Front Page* (Obi 2004).

Semiotics, also referred to as semiology, "borrows conceptually and terminologically from research in linguistics and anthropology" (Roth 1). By definition it refers to the scientific study of signs and the meanings a text may convey. Semiotics can be applied to any text, be it literary, theatrical or filmic text (Chandler 6). Film as a text contains many signs in the form of images, light, sound, colours and words which may signify something within the social and cultural context in which the film is produced. For instance, an image of an owl hooting in a tree near a village may connote ideas of witchcraft in the Nigerian cultural

context. The same image, however, may have a totally different connotation in other cultural contexts. This implies that signs and codes in a film may have a culturally connotative meaning within the society and culture from which the film is produced and yet have other meanings in other societies.

Writing in 1995, Peters observes that semiotic analysis has been a field of interest to filmologists in past decades. He argues that filmic images are complex and provide "a real goldmine of semiological finds and an enormous challenge to semiological research" (7). Roth further observes that film semiotics "proposes to construct a comprehensive model capable of explaining how a film embodies meaning […] and signifies it to an audience" (8). Against this background, semiotic analysis will enable this research to deconstruct meaning, both connotative and denotative, from the Nigerian video films whilst respecting the context in which the films are made. This requires an understanding of Nigerian societies, their customs and beliefs. The research will pay special attention to how metaphors, symbols, camera movements, camera angles, editing, acting styles, costumes, lighting, special effects and mise-en-scene as filmic signs and codes convey meaning and reinforce themes of witchcraft and the supernatural. For instance, in reference to the Hallelujah or Christian genre of the popular video films, Oha (197) notes "the differences in the ways evil spirits and good spirits are semiotized in the video [*The Great Mistake*].

The good spirit that presents the message of pardon to Bayonle [character in the film, *The Great Mistake*] is wrapped completely in white, while the devil that engages him in mischievous argument is dressed in black" (197). This kind of costuming has implications for it reinforces the traditional western image of the devil as evil (black) and God as good symbolised by the colour white. The colour symbolism of black as evil or the devil and white as good and God is also apparent in the Yoruba cosmology. Awolalu indicates that "the

Yoruba believe that the Supreme Being is pure and they associate the colour white with him" (4). He further notes that things such as white chalk and cotton wool (which is also white in colour) has a connotative implication of purity among the Yoruba. Colour symbolism, therefore, is quite important to this research because most of the images under study contain such symbolisms. This is just an example of the iconography of video films which will be analysed in greater depth. Thematic analysis will be supplemented by semiotic analysis of the films, which will also identify the iconographic elements of the two genres selected for analysis.

To offer interpretation, the research analysis will draw from anthropological theoretical discourse including Taussig's theorisation of mimesis and alterity. Mimesis is one of the contemporary theories in media. The term is a derivative of a Greek word *mimesis* and it literally means to imitate. For the applicability of this concept to this research, mimesis will not be regarded as imitation as such but as the artistic representation of ideas. Taussig's formulation of the power of mimesis as he explains it will be vital to this research. "Alterity" is a term that refers to difference or otherness. This concept will be employed to explore how the images of Christianity are presented in contrast to images of witchcraft and occult. The analysis of the Hallelujah genre will examine how the images and themes of witchcraft, African traditional religions and others are constructed in alterity. The research will further employ two other concepts from Taussig, as explored by Meyer in her analysis of Ghanaian popular video films. These are exposition and revelation. These concepts will be explored further in another chapter.

In the Voodoo (Horror) genre and the Hallelujah (Evangelistic) genre, images and themes of witchcraft, the supernatural, ritual killing and religion are dealt with to a great extent. In the Hallelujah genre, witchcraft and ritual killings are treated as an evil to society. The battle

between evil and good is, therefore, manifest between witchcraft and Christianity. On the other hand, the voodoo genre does not portray a black and white representation of witchcraft as being evil. Of the two case studies, *Child of Promise* belongs to the voodoo genre whilst *End of the Wicked* is from the Hallelujah genre.

This research employs close textual analysis, i.e., film is regarded as a text that embodies meaning. The films were watched several times to observe how images of witchcraft, ritual killings and the supernatural are portrayed. Scholarly commentaries on the Nigerian film industry are used as additional sources in conducting the analysis.

This research project consists of six chapters. The first chapter states the aim and the rationale of undertaking the research, and how the objective of the paper will be met in terms of methodology and theoretical approach to the research. The introduction further discusses the historical background of the video film in Nigeria.

The second chapter locates Nigerian cinema in a political space by exploring the political and economic debates of the Nigerian video film practice. To achieve this, the chapter interrogates notions of "cinema" and African Cinema. The relevance of these concepts to the current video film phenomenon is also examined. The discussion in this chapter further incorporates terms such as First Cinema, Second Cinema and Third Cinema to contextualise Ukadike's suggestion that Nigerian video filmmaking could be regarded as a 'first cinema' that can compete with dominant first cinemas on its own terms ("Rethinking Third Cinema" 127). This chapter then links the first cinema concept to thematic questions. The chapter argues that Nigerian video filmmakers incorporate local themes and images of the supernatural that resonate with the local audiences' beliefs and value systems to achieve

entertainment and commercial success, thereby positioning Nigerian video films as 'first cinema' for Africa.

The third chapter discusses local themes in Nigerian video films and how they resonate with their audiences' belief and cultural values. This chapter also provides an overview of Nigerian cultures, religions and beliefs which frame and inspire the plots of the video films.

The fourth chapter deals with the actual analysis of the film's occultist, magical and supernatural images. It deals with the evangelical or Christian genre of the Nigerian video films, making references to the film *End of the Wicked* and other films within the same genre. Apart from conducting a semiotic analysis, it also explores the portrayal of Christian dualism in which Christianity appears to be a symbol of hope, restoration, and morality whilst the occultist activities and other traditional African beliefs and religions appear to be a symbol of evil, death and negativity.

The fifth chapter deals with the horror or voodoo genre of the Nigerian video films making references to the film *Child of Promise* and other films within the same genre. This chapter, therefore, first provides a synopsis of the film C*hild of Promise* and then it undertakes a close textual reading of the film by deconstructing the codes, signs and metaphors of the film. At the same time, this chapter pays specific attention to the iconography of the horror genre of the Nigerian video films from a broader context. Thematically, the analysis will focus on images of witchcraft, occult, the supernatural and religion. Film language (camera angles, lighting, editing) is analysed, employing semiotics as a tool. Recurring codes, signs, metaphors and their implications are also interrogated. The analysis also examines if these images reinforce cultural references to Nigerian cultures.

The sixth chapter concludes with discussions of the findings of research. It further identifies the next set of questions that the research findings raise. The implications of these questions are further outlined whilst offering recommendations, if necessary.

CHAPTER 2

2 LOCATING NIGERIAN CINEMA WITHIN A POLITICAL SPACE

The term 'cinema' has multiple meanings. It can be used to refer either to films as cultural products or to a venue or location where films are viewed (Chambers 102). In its most general usage, the word may refer to the industry or the art of making films and also to the body of works ranging from academic literature to any documentation on films. There are many forms of cinemas. These include: National Cinema, Third Cinema, African Cinema, and many more. All these are used and applied in academic discourse, sometimes without interrogating the implications of such terms.

The discussion of the concept of "cinema" as an opening interrogation in this chapter is important considering the fact that video film making in West Africa, specifically Nigeria, has redefined the parameters of what is perceived as African Cinema. Nigerian video films "fall outside current paradigms of academic film criticism" hence opening up new approaches to the study of African Cinema (McCall 80). Jell-Bahlsen notes that "the emergence of Nigerian video films is extremely significant in the discourse on African Cinema because video signals African film productions that are made for and accepted by African mass audiences and produced in Africa by African producers" (618). It is, therefore, vital for any academic paper to interrogate this notion of African Cinema in relation to Nigerian video filmmaking.

This chapter undertakes a brief discussion of African Cinema and the notion of Third Cinema to contextualise the political and economical space of the Nigerian video filmmaking[8]. Even though a theoretical discussion of these concepts may appear to be out of place in a textual and semiotic analysis such as undertaken in this report, it is important to note as Gabriel does

[8] Third Cinema films are "films with social relevance and innovative style and above all, with political and ideological overtones" (qtd in Willemen).

that "…because film is a collaborative effort and of multi disciplinary interest, it naturally demands a socio-economic and ideological analysis of production, exhibition and distribution" (5). He further observes,

> What is suggested here is that any definition of film outside of the economic and social sphere has a tendency to see meaning in "form" alone. A study which treats film strictly as a metasystem, does not take into account the external factors influencing it or the ideological mediation in operation, is misleading, and a gross error in any analysis of cinema. (6)

A textual, thematic or semiotic analysis that is conducted without considering the social, economical and ideological contexts of films may often be lacking because film is produced within ideological, economical and social parameters. This chapter, therefore, offers some social and ideological contextualisation of Nigerian video films before turning to the semiological and thematic context in the next three chapters.

Vieyra's interrogation of African Cinema leads to the question: Does African Cinema exist with regard to the connotation of the word 'cinema' (195-198)? African cinema is defined as "the creative form of expression by Africans and people of African descent, that follows or is based in African narrative traditions, especially oral, is usually expressed in African languages and thereby expresses, despite the huge diversity of cultures on the continent, a common set of values and also promotes the unity of African people" (Said UB)

Vieyra asserts that the components of cinema are in different stages. The first stage is the research component. This stage allows the initial setting up of an industry to produce technical materials. He argues that cinema in this sense does not exist in Africa because

almost all technical materials for production are imported from all over the world. He further argues that Africa is in its early stages of setting up its own editing studios and production companies (195-196). This argument is echoed by Ukadike who asserts, "in the case of cinema, the industrial foundation of the African film industry, seen in its entirety, is still a mirage" (59). It can be suggested that Ukadike's usage of "entirety" in his statement is very crucial in the sense that from the time that Vieyra was writing (1989) about a non-existent film industry in Africa, many changes have occurred. Apparently, some countries in Africa such as South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana seem to be ahead of others in the development of film industries. Viewing, however, the African continent in its entirety as Ukadike does, the development of such an industry is still minimal.

Vieyra takes the argument further by asserting that "it is enormously difficult to put a production apparatus in place because of lack of infrastructure, of resources, of capital and above all, because of the lack of a positive political will" (195). This argument can again be contested because the recent vibrancy of the West African film industry especially in Ghana and Nigeria has entailed a viable and organised commercial system of film in Africa. The fact that the commercial system in African film industries, specifically Ghanaian and Nigerian industries, is different from mainstream film industries such as Hollywood, does not nullify their existence. On the other hand, Vieyra's observation of a lack of a positive political will in Africa is indeed one of the factors leading to weak or even non-existent national cinemas.

The discussion of the concept of 'National Cinema' raises the debate as to whether the Nigerian video film industry can be regarded as a National Cinema. A National Cinema is geographically located. Since Nollywood mostly refers to the Nigerian film industry, it can be suggested that within the geographical margins, Nollywood fits into the National Cinema paradigm. Problems, however, arise when the rest of the elements of a National Cinema are

placed in perspective. One of the most important characteristics of National Cinema is that the government plays a very influential role in enabling the productions through funding and provision of production facilities. In this sense, the Nigerian video film industry cannot be regarded as a National Cinema. The industry is privately owned by businessmen and the government plays no role in enhancing the production capacity of Nollywood. It can also be suggested that thematically, the video films do not largely deal with national issues. In as much as it can be appreciated that domestic issues, religious issues and others together inform the "national", the issues are more universal than geographically bound in Nigeria alone, nor are they intended as part of a national building project. In this sense then, Nigerian video films cannot be regarded as a National Cinema. It could be suggested, however, that Nollywood has great potential in developing Nigeria's National Cinema.

In 1989, the number of cinemas (places or venues where films are viewed) in the whole of Africa was almost 2,500 which is very minimal as compared to the former Soviet Union which had cinemas totalling 140,000, yet the populations of the two were almost equal (Vieyra 196). The minimal existence of cinemas as infrastructures of film exhibition affects the processes of exhibition and distribution of local African films and international films. With cinemas non-existent or minimal in most African countries, Nigeria being one of them, local filmmakers have to deal with marketing and distributing their films as home videos only. This decreases the gross profit gained from each film as compared to filmmakers who gain from both the cinema sales and home video sales. The existence of a minimal number of cinemas (building structures) in Africa, the lack of a developed industrial base for film and also lack of National Cinemas leads Vieyra to contest the existence of an African Cinema (196). He argues that in Africa, we are at a level of African Films and not an African Cinema. Most film critics and writers, however, still prefer to use the term "African Cinema" to refer

to film activity and production emerging from the continent. Lott defends this position by asserting,

> I would like to insert a word of clarification regarding the prevailing use of the term cinema to refer to films as such, for example movies that were made to be shown in theatres. I believe that this restrictive usage is unfortunate, since some fairly good films about black people have been made for television [or sometimes home videos as in the case of Nigeria]. (90-91)

Sometimes, the term African Cinema is, therefore, used to connote African films in general. For instance, Ukadike, in his book *Black African Cinema,* generalises all kinds of filmmaking experiences including the Nigerian and Ghanaian video films as cinematic practices. Okome also does not drop the usage of cinema to refer to Nigerian video films, but he chooses to refer to the Nigerian film practice as "Periphery Cinema" to "denote a cinematic practice that does not fit neatly into the political space of Third Cinema but has a lot to do with the moral character of the narrative of visually marginal peoples" (4). It seems, therefore, that Okome generalises the usage of the term cinema to any filmmaking practices as Lott holds (90-91). Okome's reference to Third Cinema will be discussed thoroughly at a later stage. At this point, however, it is important to turn to the notion of African Film.

What makes a film African? Can there be an 'Africanness' attributed to films from Africa? The whole notion of 'Africanness' is abstract hence very complex to deal with. Discussing an African Cinema or African films implies a sense of homogeneity of all films from Africa which is misleading. As Mhando argues,

> That approach [of looking at African films as homogeneous] needlessly suggests a cultural homogeneity that is often false or at least so porous as to leave the fabric of its reflection unwieldy. (1)

Within 'Africanness', there are many national, ethnical and tribal diversities. A good example is the Nigerian video filmmaking practice. It is an industry that reflects Nigerian's ethnic diversity. This is the case because filmmaking in Nigeria is divided along ethnic margins. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are the major ethnicities that are very active in film production. If, therefore, such kind of diversities can be apparent in one country, what more with looking at filmmaking from the whole African perspective?

This issue is highly contested in academic circles. Some academics deal with it by looking at the aesthetics of African films. Tomaselli, Shepperson, Eke and Diawara are such scholars. They argue that an African film should get its inspiration from oral literature hence suggesting a theory of orality. "An awareness of [oral] African literature will not only provide the filmmakers with a better sense of the ambiguities of representation in Africa, it will also help them to put into an African context the lessons learned from European schools" (Diawara 199). Diawara asserts that Senegalese filmmaker, Ousmane Sembene, is one of the African filmmakers who draws inspiration from oral literature. For "not only does he [Sembene] replace the griot as the chronicler or storyteller of his people's history, but his films can also be compared in some respect to traditional Yoruba Theatre"(Diawara 200).

The aspect of orality in African films is evident in Nigerian video films. Haynes and Okome affirm this by asserting that "The videos' sub plot-filled, sprawling, rhizomatic plot structures have affinities with oral narrative patterns and with indigenous conceptions of fate and destiny" (59). The narratives tend to draw heavily from folktales and myths that were passed

on from generations to generations through the word of mouth. For instance, the stories and myths of *Abiku* children amongst the Yoruba of Nigeria are narrativised in the Nigerian video film *Twins*. *Abiku* children, also known as *Ogbanje* amongst the Igbo of Nigeria, are "wandering spirits who specialise in the sadistic mischief of finding the way into wombs to be born in order to die" (Ajibade). The belief in *Abiku* children is an aspect of Yoruba religion which involves a belief in reincarnation (Ajibade). It is this Yoruba belief in reincarnation that informs the plot of *Twins*. In the film, a woman who aborts a pregnancy at a young age is haunted and tormented by her own children who are a reincarnation of the aborted twin babies. The aborted children, therefore, are brought to birth again at a later stage of the woman's life just to revenge their death through the initial abortion. This is one of the films that draw inspiration from myths, beliefs and folktales that are orally transmitted in Nigerian societies.

Some of the interesting features found in most Nigerian folktales and more broadly in African folktales, are music, dance, proverbs, metaphors and ritual and traditional spiritual language. As Ogundele affirms in reference to music, "songs are a very important narrative element of the folktale aesthetic" (100). Most of these features are adopted into filmic codes in Nigerian video films to produce what Ukadike refers to as "film aesthetics that are African" (202). For instance, in the film *Child of Promise,* the main character of the film, Azuka, uses folkloric music to sing to spirits and the river goddess to allow her passage to draw water from the river of death. She sings the same song to each spirit or person that she meets blocking her way to the river. In folktales, or in African Cinema as in this case, songs are often sung to connect stories. "In the style of cinematic flashback and flash forward, the song emerges out of what has happened [Azuka's wicked sister-in-law demanding that Azuka should draw water from the river of death in hope that the spirits will kill her there], what has been said or done before, drawing attention to what follows and what may later develop" (Ukadike 216-217).

The films also employ the use of spiritual and ritual language, proverbs and most of all a lesson that is learnt at the end of the narrative just as it is the case with folktales. What is most interesting about the narrative of this film (*Child of Promise*) is the fact that although it draws inspiration from the Nigerian folktale, the story is similar to a Malawian folktale about an orphan who was ill-treated by her stepmother just as Azuka was. The stories are similar in all aspects from beginning to end. The narrative structures of most Nigerian video films, therefore, attest to oral African traditions.

Whilst it can be appreciated that oral tradition informs the narratives of African films, Murphy argues that it should not be regarded as the sole determining factor of what an African film can be (244). This opens up a set of questions as to whether a film that is not informed by oral tradition can claim to be an African film. Considering Murphy's observation, it can be asserted that the probability of producing an African film that is not informed by the oral traditions is a possibility. This allows for flexibility in defining the parameters of what an African film can be.

The aspect, however, of Nigerian video films drawing from myths and folktales raises another important debate about marketing. The video films may be popular in Africa, but can they attain the same popularity with international audiences? This question becomes vital considering the fact that international audiences may not identify with the myths, folktales and the film narratives as a whole. It is against this background that Haynes observes that "Nigerian video films do not answer to an American audience's cultural desire" (2). This is even true of other European audiences who find the Nigerian approach to film narrative as shocking and exaggerated.

Experiences and inspirations of Africans as audiences and filmmakers are quite complex and different from those of westerners (Tomaselli, Shepperson and Eke 59). The complexities of such experiences make it almost impossible to capture them into a visual narrative using western theories and aesthetics as tools for developing African films. For instance, the development of video filmmaking in Nigeria as a different cultural aesthetic can be attributed to the specific Nigerian economic experiences that might never be experienced by filmmakers from other countries especially those with stable economies. The contents and themes that the Nigerian video films deal with are specifically relevant to the African, or specifically, the Nigerian, experience. Referring to films made in southern Africa such as *Mapantsula*, *Neria*, *More Time*, *Flame*, *Jit* and *Maangamizi*, Mhando argues that these films "are produced to the tastes of the audiences whose ideological and cultural reception is approximated by the filmmakers as to contain aspects of irreducible cultural and cinematic affinities."(2)

Tomaselli, Shepperson and Eke point out that integration of the spiritual and material has always been an important part of Africans hence this is incorporated into African narratives. Notions of myth, dreams, and religion are all part of that narrative (57-61). It can be suggested that the Nigerian video films adhere to the above assertion. Their thematic and visual preoccupation with spiritual and supernatural issues pertains to this. In dealing with themes and images of witchcraft, magic, occults and ritual killings, the storylines are mostly complex, employing flashbacks and fade-in transitions to showcase dreams that foretell the future. Through special effects, Nigerian video films portray complex spiritual and supernatural realities like ghosts, gods and demons. Accordingly, films that incorporate the experiences, beliefs and destinies of Africans can fall within the paradigm of African film.

> The beliefs, attitudes and values implicit in any film tend to resonate with those beliefs, attitudes and values which are dominant in the society from which the film originates. (qtd. in Ekwuazi 99)

Ekwuazi extends Diawara's argument by asserting that not only can African films draw inspiration from oral literature, but that the films should also embody cultural references, a slow tempo or pace that mirrors the slow paced African life and music that reflects Africa (104). Whilst this assertion might be valid in its own way, it can be argued that it is both simplistic and prescriptive. For instance, Ekwuazi's suggestion that African films "should" embody elements such as slow tempo to characterise slow paced African life, essentialises Africa as being timeless, slow, rural, primitive and pre-modern as mostly depicted in western discourses and films such as *Tarzan* and again, homogenises a vast and diverse continent. As Murphy affirms,

> During the colonial era, cinematic images of Africa effectively served to reinforce the western vision of the 'dark continent', viewing Africa as a wild and savage place, existing outside of history. (239)

This kind of prescriptive approach to African Cinema reinforces western images of Africa that need to be deconstructed. It is interesting, though, to observe the way in which Nigerian video films at times tend to follow in the tradition of depicting Africa as being slow and timeless. In the film *Oja Dike*, an adaptation of Disney's *Lion King,* Africa is depicted in the exact way that *Lion King* depicts it, i.e., as timeless, primitive, slow and undeveloped. This kind of representation is also reinforced in the Christian genre of Nigerian video films in which anything or anyone linked to Christianity, a western religion, is depicted as being civilised and developed whilst anything to do with African traditional religions and beliefs is

depicted as being backward. Okome affirms this line of argument by observing that "traditional spirituality represents the old ways of things and is bad, backward and barbaric. Christian spirituality is the new way forward. It is the light" (17). A good example of this portrayal is in the film *Cry of a Virgin*. The setting of this film is a village. From the beginning of the film to almost the end, the film revolves around the village and the witchdoctor's shrine which is under a tree. Towards the end of the film, the setting shifts to an urban setting in which there is a Christian church and all its members are well dressed as compared to those in the village. Unlike the villagers, they dress in a 'civilised way' (western attires) and their mode of transport is by car. This kind of depiction implies that all that is 'African' is backward and primitive whilst all that is western like Christianity is civilised hence constructing a simplistic binary that is false.

In debating about African cinema and what films from Africa might be like, it is important to avoid being simplistic and prescriptive. At this moment it is vital to put into context Murphy's observation,

> Therefore the category of African Cinema [African film in broad terms] should be used descriptively rather than prescriptively: one cannot force the cinema of an entire continent to adhere to some preordained programme [such as having a slow tempo and African music as asserted by Ekwuazi]. (247)

Murphy's observation is quite accurate considering the fact that it allows for much more creativity and originality in opening up the parameters of African films. The "arts" can never be prescribed. Prescribing an art entails that its whole essence of originality and creativity is lost. This, therefore, would even bring in a flexibility of ascribing 'Africanness' to Nigerian video films.

Africa is constantly referred to as the Third World because of its economic condition. Ukadike observes that many of the world's poorest nations are in black Africa, hence the use of Third World in reference to Africa (105). Some cinematic practices in Africa that are grounded in the experiences and struggles of the Third World are referred to as Third Cinema. Against this background, it is important to distinguish Third Cinema and Third World Cinema. Guneratne asserts that Third World Cinema denotes a cinema of poverty and lack. It is a cinema that is in need of funding from the West (7). It may not necessarily have political themes as in Third Cinema. On the other hand, Sison asserts that Third Cinema seeks to portray a Third World vision of social and cultural emancipation hence it is political (1). Sembene's films are frequently referred to as Third Cinema because of their political and ideological themes. For instance, Sembene's *Black Girl* (1966) explores the maltreatment of a Senegalese woman who is taken out of Africa to work as a maid for a French family. In reference to the Nigerian video film making, Okome asserts that "the practice of the popular Nigerian video film production is implicated in the idea of Third Cinema in more ways than one" (3). He argues that one of the characteristics of Third Cinema is that it incorporates narratives with strong moral character and Nigerian video films fall within this characteristic. "The cinematic practice defines itself in close ties with the narrative of morality of its audience" (3). The video-film is defined in its own aesthetic and it is oppositional to mainstream cinema and in this sense, it becomes Third Cinema as well. He, however, argues that the Nigerian video film does not adhere to this concept because the films lack political themes. Whether the Nigerian video film can be regarded as Third Cinema is an issue to be contested and this will again be explored later. A focus on the notion of Third Cinema is relevant to contextualise further discussion.

Teshome Gabriel, one of the most renowned theorists of Third Cinema, referred to Third Cinema as "films with social relevance and innovative style and above all, with political and ideological overtones" (qtd in Willemen). The concept of a Third Cinema automatically implies that there is a First and a Second Cinema. Willemen cites Solanas who gave comprehensive definitions of these terms. "First Cinema is the model imposed by the American film industry" (Chanan 2). Chanan further asserts that this cinema is designated to provide commercial success to the production company and also it leads to the absorption of capitalist values (2-3). Solanas phrases this idea with clarity,

> First Cinema expresses imperialist, capitalist, bourgeois ideas. Big monopoly capital finances, big spectacle cinema as well as authorial and informational cinema. Any cinematographic expression…likely to respond to the aspirations of big capital, I call first cinema. (qtd. In Willemen 9)

The Hollywood film industry is one of the best examples of First Cinema, being primarily a commercial cinema. Second Cinema refers to what is also called art cinema or auteur cinema. Art cinema is "a film genre with a loose narrative, often experimental, presented as a serious artistic work" (Wikipedia Encyclopaedia). Second cinema focuses on artistic expressivity more that entertainment. This cinema is "often nihilist, mystifacatory" (qtd.in Willemen 9). This implies that the cinema does not explain how the characters, plot and other elements fit together to form a narrative. Cinema becomes a vehicle of individual artistic expression and the director becomes the "author" of that work. Unlike First Cinema that aims at commercial viability to huge audiences, second cinema targets sophisticated audiences or the elite of the society. Its films are often exhibited in 'art house movie theatres' which are special theatres that are mainly located in large cities.

Third Cinema came as an alternative to both First and Second Cinema. As a notion, Third Cinema was coined in the 1960s by Argentinean filmmaker Fernando Solanas and Spanish-born Octavio Getino who wrote a manifesto called *Towards a Third Cinema*. Willemen argues that even though Third Cinema as a concept was coined in reference to experiences of the Latin Americans, this term cannot be limited to Latin America alone. He cites Gabriel, who argues that,

> Third cinema includes an affinity of subjects and styles as varied as the lives of the people it portrays…[its] principle characteristic is really not so much where it is made, or even who makes it, but, rather, the ideology it espouses and the consciousness it displays. (qtd. In Willemen 14)

Gabriel's assertion implies that any film that contributes ideologically to Third World struggles and oppression can be implicated within the category of Third Cinema irrespective of where it is made or who has made it, for instance, some black cinema in the United States of America and United Kingdom. Willemen asserts that if Third Cinema is as varied as the lives of the people it depicts, the implication is that it embraces culturally specific forms since the lives of the people are governed by cultural institutions that have boundaries (15). Willemen further raises the question as to whether it is possible to find a unifying aesthetic for non-Euro-American Cinema. He argues that if it is possible, then Third Cinema is not as varied as it claims to be.

It can be argued that Willemen's discussion, that Third Cinema is not as varied as the people it portrays, lacks validity. The fact that Third Cinema embodies a wide variety of cultures and nations does not imply that common ground cannot be found. Lott addresses this by arguing that if Euro-Americans who are also caught up in their own ethnic rivalries can construct a

concept or an aesthetic for themselves as a globally dominant white group, how can it be so much more impossible for non-white peoples to construct a global counter-aesthetic such as Third Cinema by which they can defend themselves (93)? Thus, according to Lott, the best way of addressing the issues that Third Cinema is too vague or general because it encompasses a unifying aesthetic is to recognise the fact that "this objection misleadingly imputes uncontested essentialist paradigm" (92).

As already asserted, African Cinema is often seen as part of Third Cinema. This is the case because, in most cases, there is an attempt in African Cinema to use cinema as a tool of education and also as the voice of the people (Ukadike 126). At times, however, African Cinema is also regarded as Second Cinema. This is the case because African cinema narratives often draw elements from both Second and Third Cinema. For instance, the films are "characterised by politically charged themes, stories set against a backdrop of indigenous struggles against oppressive colonial conditions…" hence attesting to Third Cinema (McCall 86). At the same time the films are praised for their artistry, cinematography and composition by an elite audience in Europe hence attesting to the category of Second Cinema (McCall 86). The African francophone filmmakers like Ousmane Sembene and Med Hondo are some of the pioneers of Third Cinema in Africa. Their works, however, have artistic expression that follow in the tradition of Second Cinema or European art cinema. In the Anglophone African countries, especially Ghana and Nigeria, filmmaking does not fall neatly within the paradigm of Third Cinema. It lacks both political themes and artistic expression. It is for this reason that Okome coined the term 'Periphery Cinema' to refer to Nigerian video filmmaking phenomenon.

Ukadike also recognises that the Nigerian video film industry does not fall perfectly within the Third Cinema category. He argues that the West African video filmmaking "attests to the

manifestation of what might be called a real 'first' cinema, a cinema which competes with the so called First Cinema of the West on its own terms" (Ukadike 127). He makes this argument with several points in perspective. The West African video films have attained popularity and they are commercially successful like 'first cinema'. The use of quotes in Ukadike's usage of the word "first" in reference to West African filmmaking pertains to the fact that the video filmmaking practice in West Africa cannot neatly fit into the paradigm of First Cinema of the West. It is merely a variant of First Cinema. West African filmmaking becomes 'first' cinema merely through the underlying premise that the films are produced for profit and commercial success and most of all as pure entertainment. They may not use big capital for production and they may not be produced in celluloid format as in the West; the fact, however, remains that the video films of West Africa have "crystallised a unique cultural art" and aesthetic that, as Ukadike argues, can contest first cinema on its own terms hence creating a 'first cinema' for Africa (127).

Locating Nigerian video filmmaking practice into a theoretical space, therefore, entails finding a paradigm that is both relevant and applicable to the social cultural context of the industry itself. From the discussion in this chapter, it is clear that whilst the video filmmaking practice may be implicated in certain discourses such as Third Cinema or African Cinema to an extent, the practice does not totally fit into these paradigms. For instance, even though the Nigerian video films draw their inspiration from oral traditions as it is the case with African Cinema, they lack political and artistic expression that differentiates them from Third Cinema, Second Cinema and African Cinema. However, Ukadike's suggestion that Nigerian video filmmaking can be implicated in the idea of 'first cinema' for Africa offers an alternative approach to the study and analysis of the emergent industry.

To end this theoretical interrogation at this point without discussing the upcoming paradigm such as the African popular arts paradigm would be insufficient. The African popular arts paradigm is discussed by Haynes in his introductory text to the book *Nigerian Video Films.* He asserts that this paradigm is a multidisciplinary discourse drawing from fields of social history, anthropology, Marxist literary criticism, cultural studies and literary theory (Haynes 13). What makes this paradigm relevant to the study of Nigerian video films is the fact that some of the concepts within this paradigm were constructed around Nigerian arts such as Yoruba travelling theatre, Fuji music and juju music. Elements of these popular art forms have found their way in the narratives of the video films, hence, there are many similarities between these art forms as a whole.

Some characteristics of this paradigm include the fact that the arts blend themes and issues of modernity and tradition. For instance, the conflict between western civilisation and traditional beliefs are explored. The paradigm further indicates that the arts do not require formal training. For instance, no formal training in film production as it is the case with the Nigerian video filmmakers. The arts usually use minimal finances which include little or no support at all from the state or government. Clearly all these characteristics fit perfectly into the political space of the Nigerian video films and offer an alternative way of analysing the new phenomenon.

As Haynes indicates, however, the paradigm has its own limitations. The word 'popular' is controversial. Haynes indicates,

> When it emerged in the 1980s, it had to struggle against leftist condemnation of "the Popular" as politically useless or worse: a repository of false consciousness that prevented the masses from seeing the truth of their condition and acting to change it. (15)

The word "popular" is, therefore, regarded as being theoretically misleading and forming a paradigm based on such a word may be unrealistic. It is further observed that this paradigm falls outside the field of academic criticism because of its problematic usage of certain terms such as "popular". This, therefore, means that in fitting the Nigerian video films within this paradigm, careful interrogation and analysis needs to be undertaken. As pointed out earlier, this paradigm is not entirely relevant to the study of this research. This is the case because the paradigm seems to settle at description level without necessarily offering interpretations as this research demands. Its discussion in this chapter was, however, relevant to offer a through overview of the theories that can be implicated in the phenomenon of Nigerian video filmmaking practice.

CHAPTER 3

3 SUPERNATURAL THEMES IN NIGERIAN VIDEO FILMS

This chapter explores themes that are recurrent in Nigerian video films placing focus on themes of magic, ritual killing, religion and witchcraft. Before undertaking this task, there will be an overview of Nigerian beliefs so as to contextualise the society in which the films are produced and the audience for whom the films are produced.

3.1 An Overview of Nigerian Beliefs

Nigeria as a country is characterised by a multiplicity of religions and cultures. It is a country that has more than two hundred and fifty ethnic groups (Haynes 2). This implies that the cultural and religious beliefs are highly diverse. In spite of the fact that there may be similarities in beliefs and values amongst different ethnic groups, each group has its own beliefs that differentiate it from other ethnic groups. There is a diversity of religions, worldviews and philosophies amongst different ethnic groups.

There are three major ethnicities in Nigeria and these are, the Hausa-Fulani, the Igbo and the Yoruba ethnic groups (Rakov 1). These major ethnic groups have their own respective impact on the production of Nigerian video films as discussed in the first chapter. Furthermore, the beliefs and cultures of each ethnic group also have distinct influences on the narratives of Nigerian video films.

Whilst Christianity and Islam are prevalent in modern Nigeria, African traditional religions are still in existence[9]. In traditional religions of West Africa, specifically Nigeria, the

[9] Most African Traditional Religions do not exist in their original form. Rather, they have been modified and informed by other religions such as Christianity and Islam to create a synchronised form of African Traditional Religions.

spiritual world is associated with a pantheon of deities and spiritual beings (Kenny, Oye and Taiwo 1).

The Yoruba believe in *Olorun* as the Supreme Being in the creation system. The spiritual world of the Yoruba also involves other gods and spirits like the water spirits (*Wata, Oya, Ogbesse, Oni* and *Oshun*), farm god (*Orisa oko*) and many other deities (Ojo 162-183). For the Yoruba, spirits and gods dwell in rivers, trees, animals, hills, land and other physical objects (Ojo 159). In the Yoruba belief system, therefore, the spiritual universe is at one with the physical, visible universe and "the two intermingle and diffuse each other" (Kenny, Oye and Taiwo 1).

The Yoruba cosmology and worldviews have always found their way into popular arts, be it in music (Fuji and juju music), drama (Yoruba Travelling Theatre) or literature (Onitsha market literatures). Of particular interest is the way these supernatural views have been expressed and dramatised in the famous Yoruba Travelling Theatre. Yoruba theatre is highly rooted in Yoruba myths, folktales and other world views. Ogundele asserts that,

> The travelling theatre has its orientation from the *alarinjo* itinerant entertainment tradition, which mixes spectacles of wonder and magical transformations with acrobatic dances and haunting music in a way that is continuous with the world of folktale. (100)

The thin line between the visible and invisible world, natural and supernatural world, that was often portrayed in the plays of the travelling theatre started to be expressed in the televised plays that were screened in Nigeria. These televised plays celebrated the Yoruba worldview and beliefs. It is not surprising, therefore, to observe that the same themes and worldviews

that informed the narratives of the Yoruba Travelling Theatre and the televised plays are also expressed in the video films especially the Yoruba language films and to an extent, the English language films. For instance, many video films have attempted to explore the relationship between the river goddess (spiritual) and human life (physical). The film *Child of Promise* portrays how the river goddess called *Wata* affects the physical world[10]. The river that she inhabits is sacred and nobody is allowed to go there. The river is also called 'the river of death' because any human being who tries to go there is killed. It is important though to note that the video films' portrayal of the river goddess is at times negative. She is portrayed as a goddess who causes harm to everybody who does not adhere to her commands. This kind of representation is quite problematic considering the fact that to the Yoruba, the river goddess is more than what the video films portray. In the Yoruba cosmology, the river goddess possesses human qualities which include both positive and negative. She may get angry or happy, depending on whether her followers are obedient to her.

Furthermore, it is important to note Ogundele's observations on the video films and the expression of Yoruba culture and traditions. He observes that the current video films can be placed on two sides. Firstly, there are those films which deal with the traditional culture and belief systems of the Yoruba. On the other hand, most video films deal with modernity and secular themes such as lavish lifestyles, wealth and others. However, he criticises those films that deal with Yoruba culture and traditions as being superficial. He asserts,

> When the video films bring in the supernatural realm, which is so much an inseparable part of the totality of Yoruba life, the result is not the natural supernaturalism of the travelling theatre, but Gothicism. (111)

[10] The river goddess is known by different names among different ethnic groups in Nigeria and beyond. The most common name, however, is *Mami Wata*, a Pidgin English for "mother of water". Among the Efiks of Calabar, the goddess is known as *Afianwan*. The river goddess's main role is to protect the rivers, streams, lakes and other water bodies. She protects coastal lands. It should be noted that the river deity can sometimes be male, hence, a god.

The depiction of the supernatural in these films is more about the wrath of the deities and the negativity of traditional beliefs. They rarely portray the interdependent worlds of the supernatural and natural as it is the case in Yoruba cosmology.

The Igbo believe in *Chineke*, "a Father-God, up in heaven, creating and sustaining the universe by his omnipotence and omniscience" (Onuoha 80). The Igbo God is perceived as the creator of everything. Onuoha indicates that the Igbo God is not the same as the Christian God. The Christian God is a trinity whilst the Igbo God is just one (81). According to the Igbo, *Chineke* does not deal with humans directly. He uses his seven ambassadors who are *Anyanwu* (controls the sun), *Ala* (queen of morality), *Igwe* (agent of instant justice), *muo-Mmiri* (queen of the sea), *Ahiajoku* (lord of agriculture), *Ekwuru-Ochie* (lord of fortune) and *Agwu-nsi* (lord of divination and healing) (Onuoha 82). Like the Yoruba, "Igbo ontology affirms the validity of both the material world and the spiritual world" (Onuoha 92).

The Igbo place value on personal achievements, be it in terms of wealth or other signs of success. It is this philosophy that informs the narrative of wealth in Igbo films. Most of these narratives of wealth weave in notions of the occult and witchcraft. This is exactly what happens in the film *Living in Bondage* (1992). The main character, Andy, joins an occult group for wealth. It is within this framework that Andy kills his wife to offer a sacrifice to gain riches. It can be argued, therefore, that the films embrace the worldviews and philosophies of the Igbo people. However, it is important to note as Haynes and Okome do that "while Igbo films also frequently involve magic, they are much less likely to invoke a whole traditional cosmology and pantheon of deities" (86). This is quite a contrast to the Yoruba films that tend to dwell heavily on the Yoruba cosmology as a whole. This clearly indicates the fact that wealth among the Igbo is one of the highest regarded values of life.

The Hausa are the largest among the three major ethnic groups. Most of them believe in Islam (Rakov 1). Johnson indicates that the culture and the worldview that the Hausa films depict is that of Islam (202). Films from Hausa tend to draw more from the Indian films hence, they place emphasis on themes of love just like Bollywood films do. Most of them do not deal with issues of the supernatural like the Yoruba or the Igbo films. This is the case because the Hausa has had a large influence from Islam to an extent that even their traditional religions have undergone the same influence. Most Hausas are, therefore, Muslims.

It should be noted that there are also many other ethnic groups in Nigeria which this paper has not discussed. All the ethnic groups have their own cultures, myths and belief systems that are diverse and complex. Nigeria as a whole, therefore, is a land rich with many diverse myths of the supernatural, the invisible and the spiritual universe. For instance, the Ibibio ethnic group of Nigeria believe that laws and customs were handed down to the human population from spirits (Offiong 2). The Ibibio ethnic group does not stand alone in the belief of the spiritual world. Almost all the other ethnic groups in Nigeria have their own diverse beliefs about the spiritual world. Against this background, Igwe argues that "Nigeria is a society where most beliefs are still informed by unreason, dogmas, mythmaking and magical thinking" (1). He further notes that in Nigeria, beliefs of juju, ritual killings as a source of wealth and protection, charms, ghosts and the spirits are still prevalent and widespread (1). Some Nigerians believe that ritual killings can bring wealth, power and money even though this belief lacks basis in reason and science (Igwe 1). For Nigerians, everything that happens in life has a spiritual bearing. Kenny, Oye and Taiwo observe,

> For Africans, nothing happens by accident or chance; everything must be caused by an agent. Evils such as suffering, misfortune, diseases, calamity, accidents and various forms of pain are caused by evil spirits acting through human agents who employ incantations, mystical power, medicine and other secret methods.(1)

Thus, stories of the supernatural, including witchcraft, highly affect people's lives in Africa (Kenny, Oye and Taiwo). With reference to the Ibibio tribe of Nigeria, Offiong observes that people in Nigeria are obsessed with stories and beliefs of witchcraft and "that such beliefs are central to their cosmology" (78). Witchcraft in Nigeria is mostly regarded as the cause of almost all evil things that happen to individuals: sickness, personal failure, infertility, other ailment and ill luck (Offiong 78). In a sense, therefore, witchcraft is inimical to Nigerian societies and witches are treated with disdain. Accordingly, Offiong observes that witches work in the dark, at night and they cannot be seen by those who do not practice witchcraft (79). He further indicates that witches can transform their humanly bodies into vultures, animals or birds like owls to harm their intended victims (84). These kinds of beliefs about witchcraft are highly evident in the horror and evangelical genres of Nigerian video films. A good example of this is depicted in *End of the Wicked* which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter. The Nigerian video film industry has provided a medium in which Africans generally, and Nigerians especially, can face their fears of witchcraft (among others) and have a visual perception of something that is rarely seen in their real lives but rather talked about, feared and discussed (Ukadike). Through special effects, the Nigerian video film has brought on screen things that are almost impossible to portray otherwise. Gugler echoes this thought by asserting,

> Special effects allow them [filmmakers] to make the invisible forces visible: audiences witness ghostly apparitions; they may watch a woman leave her body and transform herself into a vulture/ witch [This happens in *Sakobi: The Snake Girl* and *End of the Wicked*]. This revelation of the occult confirms its existence, enhancing the credibility of beliefs in the occult. (178)

Witchcraft in Nigeria has sociological and psychological roles (Offiong 121). Offiong asserts that "belief in witchcraft provides the Ibibio [of Nigeria] with a theory of causation for misfortune, death and illness" (121). This belief in witchcraft relates to notions of myth in which people have to create stories to explain the existence of the world around them and situations that happen to them. According to attribution theory, human beings have an intrinsic need to explain events and things that happen to themselves and to others (Gleitman 432-433). This need to explain things and events may lead people to create myths that help to rationalise the occurrences of events and situations. The Nigerian video films, therefore, have been a medium in which these myths and beliefs are expressed and visualised.

The preoccupation of Nigerian video films with themes of witchcraft and the supernatural attracts the curiosity of a huge African audience, hence its commercial success as a 'first cinema'. Ukadike makes an important observation by asserting,

> …even when they [video themes] are rendered in aesthetically sloppy structures [or technically poor], as they indubitably were in the first video films, they [themes] are still able to galvanize such massive audience appeal. (131)

The themes and contents of the video films, therefore, affect their ability to be commercially successful and entertaining, hence their 'first cinema' position. As Ukadike argues, however,

the most important thing is to look at the Nigerian video films in relation to the construction of African subjectivity. Furthermore, McCall cites Abu-Lughod (1997) who stresses the need of integrating the interpretation of media texts within their social contextualisation, hence this paper's objective in analysing themes of witchcraft, religion, and the supernatural as they relate to West African societies and most importantly, notions of good and evil in relation to African religion, witchcraft and the supernatural.

Nigerian narrative is distinguishable in terms of its themes and images. Ukadike asserts, "since the inception of African celluloid filmmaking, indigenous themes have sustained the narrative patterns of African films" (131). It can be contested, however, as to whether the Nigerian video narrative is sustained by the so-called indigenous themes. McCall suggests that the Nigerian video films "reproduce elements of western cinema and indigenise those appropriations" (81). The video films are, therefore, mostly a product of hybridity. In as much as they deal with indigenous themes, they also draw heavily from conventional western narratives as indicated earlier. Larkin argues that intellectuals "lament what they see as westernisation, no matter how it is refracted through a popular African imagination…" (4). Most of these observations about western elements in Nigerian narratives arise from the fact that video filmmakers are fascinated with the depiction of "elite lifestyles and wealth" and "the representation of the most sensationalised side of African life" (Larkin 4). Ukadike puts it in this way,

> …video [in Nigeria] has become a fertile ground to display the current quest of wealth. Here you are not going to find lots of naked village-maiden breasts (as in francophone films) but rather high-profile upper class, middle class and lower middle class people, especially businessmen and women "who have made it". (Video Booms in Anglophone Africa 138)

Many of these video films are set in urban sectors. In these films, images of mansions, chiefs (business tycoons) and luxurious cars are central to the narrative. It can be argued that these kinds of video films are perpetuating modernity and a culture of consumerism in post-colonial Nigeria.

Whilst some few scholars are concerned about the 'westernisation' of the video films in Nigeria, others like Okome expresses concern about the predominance of highly evangelical themes in the video films (Larkin 88). The video films which treat the evangelical themes are sometimes funded by Christian organisations and churches. These films tend to promote Christian doctrine through their images and themes. The dramatic conflict in these films is between good and evil which is represented by the devil, traditional religion, witchcraft and Jesus Christ. The conflict is usually resolved when a protagonist realises that he or she was in the dark by following other religions. The protagonist then adopts the Christian doctrine and all his or her affliction ends when he or she becomes 'saved'. Some of the films that deal with evangelical themes include *Power to Bind*, *The Anti-Christ*, *Wasted Years*, *The Price* and *End of the Wicked* (Okome 14). Thus, these films are influencing the conversion of Nigerians to Christianity.

Some of the other themes that are integrated in the video films' plots include corruption, traditional customs, urban crime and romantic love. The themes of witchcraft and the supernatural, however, have been another area of controversy. Some scholars argue that by placing emphasis on witchcraft, sorcery and 'jujus', the Nigerian video film place much focus on negative values. As Adeleke comments in reference to witchcraft, "the films' contents portray excessive sorcery, witchcraft and caustic expression" (53). This excessive portrayal of negative values, it is argued, does not provide a true reflection of Nigeria not to

say Africa as a whole. Ejike, however, observes that Hollywood is known for its James Bond detective stories and Bollywood for its romance. Ejike, therefore, questions if there is anything wrong for Nollywood to be known for its horror films which places emphasis on themes of witchcraft, sorcery and magic. He questions, "What makes it right for the horror film to come from Hollywood, and fetish if it comes from Nollywood?" (1) One can, therefore, question the validity and objectiveness of criticisms against Nollywood's preoccupation with the so called 'negative themes'.

3.2 Cults and Ritual Killings in Nigerian Video Films

Ritual killings, also called ritual sacrifices, refer to the practice of killing people for ritual purposes. Among "ancient people" in Africa, ritual killing was practiced in order to offer sacrifices to deities. These ritual sacrifices took the form of both animal and human sacrifices. Among the Yoruba of Nigeria for instance, human beings were and are still regarded as the highest form of sacrifice. Contrary to many beliefs and opinions,

> Human beings were offered not because of a sadistic desire for wanton destruction of life or a lack of respect for human life, but mainly because the people's philosophy of life with regard to sacrifice held that it was better to sacrifice one life for the good of the community than for all to perish. (Awolalu 168)

However, colonisation and other western influences led to the reduction of human sacrifices because they were considered to be barbaric. In recent decades, ritual killings in Nigeria has taken another form altogether. It is not done for the good of the community anymore but for self-uplifting and personal satisfaction. Whilst ritual killings were initially performed within the confines of tradition and religion, they are now performed within the confines of modernity and private space. Igwe indicates that "among Nigerians, there is a belief in a

special kind of ritual, performed with human blood or body parts that can bring money or wealth" (1). It is this kind of ritual that is excessively portrayed in Nigerian video films. In the video films, some characters that may belong to a cult may kill their relatives so as to gain wealth. Okwori explains that "the dominant refrain in these films is the utilisation of rituals and grotesque characters to generate contexts in which wealth and riches transport the characters from a normal reality to a world of fantasy" (8). Most of these ritual sacrifices are placed within an urban context in which moneymaking and possession of riches position the characters on the top of the social strata. As Okwori indicates, however, the moral of the films is to place ritual sacrifices as inimical to society (8).

Considering that there is very little literature on the topic, this research report explores Okwori's arguments in details. In his paper, Okwori explores how rituals of human sacrifice are presented as being an effective means of getting wealth in Nigerian home videos. He argues that even though the intent of the films is to denounce the human sacrifice rituals as a means of getting rich in the Nigerian society, the films tend to have contradictory meanings. He asserts,

> The stated moral intent of the films is to present a form of bad behaviour in order to discourage people from engaging in it, yet more than anything else, the video films validate the efficacy of rituals in the way and manner that the characters in the filmed rituals are portrayed: fabulously rich and successful. (7)

Okwori presents two main reasons for this argument. First, in these films, constitutional law does not take its course after characters' confessions of ritual killings. One would expect the law to intervene in such a situation because ritual killings are murders. The narratives, on the other hand, present the Christian God as a solution. In as long as the character accepts God

after confession, she/he escapes any kind of punishment. Thus, the characters do not suffer any consequences for their actions; if they do, the suffering is usually temporary, coming to an end after confession. Thus, Okwori argues that the ritual killings become validated because there are no real consequences for doing them.

Secondly, Okwori argues that in films where there are occult groups, it is only one character (mostly the protagonist) who suffers any consequences, and these are temporary. The rest of the group continues to be successful. He further argues that in most cases, this temporary consequence is motivated not necessarily by the failure of the rituals, but by the fact that the character did not conduct the ritual in the right manner. He contends, therefore, that instead of negating the rituals, "the films actually endorse and legitimise them" (22).

The film *Miserable Wealth* (2003), however, subverts some of Okwori's arguments and observations. Despite the fact that the film is set within the dualism of Christianity and ritual killings, its end is quite different to most of the films of this genre. The film revolves around Harry who decides to get rich after being dumped by his girlfriend because of his poverty. The means, however, which Harry employs to get rich, are devious. He kills for wealth. Harry's father and brother are some of his victims. All this is revealed to the other brother, David, through a vision that God reveals to a 'woman of God.' At the end of the narrative, the police arrest Harry for the murder of his brother and father. In this film, therefore, the law takes its course hence subverting Okwori's observation that as long as the character confesses to his murders, then God forgives him and the law does not take its course.

The ritual killings in the video films mostly open the plot up to other themes. For instance, most of the people who practice ritual killings belong to cult groups. The activities of the cult are mostly evil. A good example can be drawn from *Blood Money*, a Nigerian video

production. In this film Mike, played by Zack Orji, joins a cult called the Vulture Men to find money. Mike kills his mother as a condition upon which the money can be relinquished to him. The narratives brings out the fact that once a character is involved in one ritual killing, chances are high that he will be involved in more so that he can make more money.

Ritual killings in Nigerian video films are not only undertaken for riches and wealth. The ritual killings may sometimes aim at a different desirable outcome. For instance, in the film *Angel of Darkness*, a man joins a cult and conducts ritual killings so as to win a political position as a state senator. Sometimes ritual killings may be done to increase one's lifespan (Onwochei 4). In most cases, ritual killings may be committed merely because the perpetrator wants a certain part of the body of the victim or human blood. It is asserted that for the ritual killings to be effective, the killer has to kill a close relative such as wife, mother or children.

The question, however, that one may ask is whether the imagery of the ritual killing is a true representation of real-life scenarios. Onwochei observes that stories and issues of ritual killings pervade the cultural landscape of the Nigerian media (4). For instance, Igwe narrates an unfortunate story of a 13 year old Nigerian boy, Adam, who was killed in London for ritual purposes. He further observes that in 2001 there were so many real-life cases of ritual killings "in the Lagos metropolis that one of the nation's major newspaper, *The Punch*, published a scary headline: *'Ritualists Lay Siege to Lagos*'" (1). The films' themes of ritual killing therefore "succeed in the local market as audiences want to be conversant and updated with the daily mysterious realities (Onwochei 4). Ofeimun argues that "I dare say the video films are actually giving back to us a mirror image of the way we are, the ways in which we behave and mis-behave…" (13). This, therefore, implies that the themes and images of the video films are a mere representation of everyday realities.

3.3 Witchcraft in Nigerian Video Films

According to the Ibibio of Nigeria, witchcraft is regarded as "some mystical or supernatural power that causes harm including death (Offiong 82). Accordingly, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines witchcraft as "the art or craft of the wise, as the word witch is allied with wit (to know)" (qtd in Awolalu 80). In common day usage of the word, witchcraft entails psychic powers that an individual may have to cause harm to other people. As already indicated in this research, Africans, Nigerians included, are obsessed with issues of witchcraft hence, it is not surprising to see many images and themes of witchcraft in Nigerian Video films.

The narratives that employ witchcraft themes are predictable. They are generally placed within the framework of the conflict between good and evil. In these narratives, witchcraft is employed to attain certain evil outcomes, such as to kill or bring harm to certain characters for selfish reasons, such as revenge. The climax of these narratives occurs when the witch succeeds in his or her plans hence causing suffering to other characters in the film. The downfall of the witch, however, mostly marks the resolution of the conflict and the end of the film.

One of the most overused themes in the witchcraft narratives is the portrayal of the image of women as witches. Okome observes that "the diabolical image of the mother as the witch of the family is part of the larger construct of the place of women in contemporary Nigeria" (19). One reason that may explain why the image of the female witch rather than the male witch is popular in these narratives may be attributed to the belief that the Yoruba hold that witches are mostly women and male witches are in the minority. It is further believed that a woman is the head of the council of witches (Awolalu 86). However, The Ibibio of Nigeria believe that it is the men who are mostly witches but women are thought to be the most dangerous as

compared to men (qtd in Offiong 82). The predominance, therefore, of the images of the female witch in these narratives may be the filmmakers' attempt to depict the extreme and most dangerous forms of witchcraft. On the other hand, however, Ogundele observes that the motif of the woman as a witch was also recurrent in the Yoruba Travelling Theatre. What makes the two scenarios different, however, is the fact that in the travelling theatre, this image of woman as witch was highly balanced with the image of woman as mother "with whom rest the ultimate and mystical powers of rescuing the community (or the individual) when in dire straits, and of ensuring corporate happiness, peace and survival" (112). It can, therefore, be suggested that what the video films need is balanced representations of women.

The image of the mother (in-law) as a witch is often a nexus of evil. The mother-in-law in the video films may bewitch her daughter-in-law by causing her barrenness so that her husband should leave her. This is always the case when the daughter in-law is not accepted into the man's family. At times, the witch may be a young lover who wants an already married man. In these cases, charms are used in food or just psychic power to gain the man. An instance can be drawn from *My Best Friend*. Uju, a second wife, uses charms to win the love of the husband and she succeeds. The activities of witches in these films vary from one film to another. It should be noted also that images of male witches in these films also exist though to a lesser extent. Male witches may harm or kill their victims because they want power or property in form of land or at times for revenge.

There is another simplistic gender binary that the films depict that is worth noting. As indicated earlier, images of female witches are more prevalent than male witches. On the other hand, there are more images of male characters who conduct ritual killings in the films as compared to women characters. It is against this background that the weak/strong gender binary emerges, though subtly, in the films. Men, being strong can afford to physically kill in

ritual killings. Women being weak cannot be physically involved, hence they use witchcraft or psychic powers to achieve their goals. Thus, in this way the Nigerian video films are perpetuating traditional gender stereotypes rather than deconstructing them, which is quite problematic.

The image of the witchdoctor or the traditional priest also plays a vital role in the witchcraft narratives. The witchdoctor's role is meant to be that of a healer and positive influence in society. The Nigerian video film, however, often constructs the image of the witchdoctor or the traditional priest as someone who abuses his supernatural powers to help to kill and harm people. A good example can be drawn from the film *Cry of the Virgin*. In this film, the witchdoctor helps evil men of the community to kill the protagonist's parents so that they can take away the victim's land. In *Suicide Mission,* a witchdoctor/ priest helps a woman to control her husband with witchcraft charms by placing his image in a bottle. The witchdoctor or priest is, therefore, portrayed as a perpetrator of witch and evil activities, hence locating them in an evil space. Okome notes in *End of the Wicked,*

> The fetish priest is vilified and demonised in such a way as to reconstruct the absolutely grotesque in local tradition. He is the grotesque, the unknowable. He is the one to be uprooted from the social fabric so that order and light are brought back to this suffering society. (17)

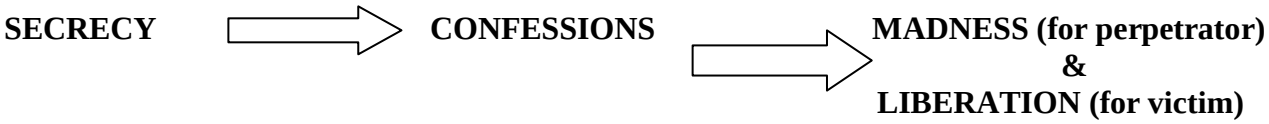
Another interesting aspect of the witchcraft narratives is the way secrecy, confessions and madness tend to intertwine in the plots to bring about climax and resolution of the narratives. Witchcraft, being inimical to societies, is treated with disdain to an extent that those who practice it maintain a certain code of secrecy. This secrecy informs most plots of witchcraft narratives. The films portray witchcraft as a secret cult (*End of the Wicked*). Only those who

are members of that cult may know the activities and the people involved in it. Those, however, who do not belong to the cult may suspect but do not have concrete information on the activities. In *End of the Wicked*, Lady Destroyer's activities of witchcraft are unknown to her family yet she causes irreversible damage to it. Her daughter-in-law suspects that something is wrong but she is still not aware of Lady Destroyer's witchcraft powers. Thus, secrecy in these narratives propels the narratives forward whilst maintaining a certain sense of suspense for the audiences as they wait for the moment of revelation, of which in most cases leads to the resolution of the dramatic conflict.

The revelation emerges in different ways depending on which genre the story is being narrativised. In the evangelical or Christian genre, this moment is reached when a 'man of God' or 'woman of God', who in most cases plays the role of a pastor reveals the witchcraft activities to victims of witchcraft at the same time revealing the perpetrator of all the afflictions that the victim may have encountered as a result of witch activities. It is often through prayer that the revelation occurs. As a result of the revelation, the victim's afflictions are ended and the perpetrator loses his or her sanity, hence madness. In other genres, the revelation moment may be achieved through the witch's own confession. The video films tend to portray confessions as being an important aspect in almost all kinds of narratives. Confessions attain a power of their own whereby a victim is liberated from his or her afflictions upon the antagonist's confession. Thus secrecy, confession and madness inform and propel the witchcraft narrative to its end.

It should be noted that this is a basic interpretation of the narratives. There are other witchcraft narratives that may be much more complex hence the following diagram merely offers a basic understanding of these narratives.

Basic Dramatic Structure of Witchcraft Narratives



3.4 Magic in Nigerian Video Films

Magic is defined as an attempt by humankind to tap and control the supernatural resources with the help of invisible beings be it gods or spirits (Offiong 33). African magic, also called black magic, is often regarded as an irrational and primitive science. Frazer calls it 'bastard science' (qtd in Offiong 33). Black magic can be both positive (sympathetic magic) and negative. In this paper, however, the word extends to other activities and spiritual beings such as ghosts.

Meyer in her exploration of "the magic in and of film" in Ghanaian popular cinema, interrogates how the invisible forces impinge on the physical and visible world (2). She makes this interrogation using two Ghanaian popular video films as case studies. Although Meyer construct her discussion around Ghanaian film industry, her observations are relevant to the study of Nigerian video film. The reason behind this may be that there are more similarities than differences between Nigerian and Ghanaian video films. These video films are all set within the paradigm of West African cosmology and belief system hence Meyer's observations are important to this research report.

What is even more interesting about Meyer's paper is the way she contextualises Taussig's concepts of revelation and exposure (Meyer 2). Meyer asserts,

> …the notion of exposure is part of a hierarchical perspective affirming the superiority of scientific thinking which unmasks magic as false and based on mere superstition, the notion of revelation criticises magic from within, thereby leaving intact the idiom itself. (2)

With this observation in context, Meyer argues that watching popular video films in Ghana that constitutes the narrative of magic and invisible forces does not make the audience attain superior rationality through exposure of such activities but rather affirms their existence "at the very moment of […] revelation" (2). This observation even applies to Nigerian video films. As observed earlier, the video films' narratives are mostly created and interpreted in such a way that they do not question the existence of magic or the invisible forces. If anything, they affirm their existence. The films merely reveal the existence of the invisible forces such as ghosts who avenge their death (in *Miserable Wealth, Blood Money, He Lives in Me*), gods and oracles who influences the physical world (in *Cry of a Virgin, Ogbanje*), demons and witches who causes harm to human beings (in *Angel of Darkness*) and angels who protects human beings (in *Angel of Darkness*).

Meyer makes another important observation by presenting a contrast between the witchdoctor and the pastor versus the camera. Both the witchdoctor and the pastor are portrayed as wise people who can transcend into the spiritual and invisible realm through their supernatural power. Meyer observes that like the witchdoctor and the pastor, the camera "is engaged in revelation rather than exposure of magic" (12). In the films, the camera goes into the domestic space to reveal the diabolical sources of wealth; it reveals the existence of ghosts, demons and witches. In this sense, the camera becomes a tool of revelation just as the witch doctor and the pastor (Meyer 12).

3.5 Religion in Nigerian Video Films

As indicated earlier there are many religions in Nigeria. These are Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions. These religions have found their expression in the Nigerian video films as they also have in popular literature. Oha asserts that "a very interesting fictional representation of two opposing forms of relationship between African traditional religion and Christianity could be found in Chinua Achebe's classic novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1989)" (1) . This relationship is also portrayed in the video films.

The history of religious film in Nigeria goes back to as early as 1907 (Okome 14). Catholic priests used to screen religious Christian films to Nigerians so as to convert them to Christianity. Currently, the video film plays a role in disseminating the Christian doctrine and bringing in new converts. Of interest is also the way the films expose evil and devilish activities. Film in Nigeria has become a tool and a voice for Christian pastors. One of the films under analysis in the next chapter was produced by Helen Ukpabio, a renowned Nigerian pastor who uses video as a medium of disseminating Christian rhetoric. In an interview with Okome, Ukpabio indicated,

> As ministers of God, we preach the gospel by different means… and we also discovered that this video film is a new thing in Nigeria and a lot of people are watching. (qtd. In Okome 14)

African traditional religions are also showcased in the video films. Most of the historical epic narratives tend to portray many deities and gods such as the river goddess. Within this genre, African traditional religions are portrayed in a celebratory mode as compared to the evangelical genre which tends to portray African traditional religions as opposed to Christian doctrine and, therefore, as primitive, barbaric and timeless. These films tend to construct a

simplistic binary representation between the two at the same time downplaying the complexities of African traditional beliefs. For example, if *Mami Wata* is portrayed in the Christian genre, she is depicted as a goddess full of wrath and anger, where as tradition beliefs depict her both as loving to her faithful devotees and full of wrath to those who disobey her.

In the film *Ogbanje*, the oracle known by the name of the film, is portrayed as being the cause of barrenness in the main character Ada. He is a sacred and most feared oracle that the villagers avoid. This is quite a contrast with the representation of the Christian God who is held in awe and respect but not necessarily feared in this sense. The villagers in the film are forbidden to go to the Ogbanje's temple to avoid provoking his wrath. In the film, Ada and her husband who are not necessarily Christians, refuse traditional ways of cleansing to appease the Ogbanje. They choose to do the cleansing in the Christian way. The Christians are only introduced at the end of the narrative to offer the solution to Ada's barrenness. True to most films that belong to the Christian genre, the Christians pray over the Ogbanje shrine and they succeed in destroying him. Once again the Christian doctrine is glorified and the African traditional oracle, Ogbanje, is vilified and defeated at the end of the narrative.

It is this same simplistic binary representation of African traditional religions and Christianity that informs the sub-plot of the film *Abuja Connection*. *Abuja Connection* narrates a story of two women who compete against each other and employs all means available to them, including magic and use of charms, to be successful in Abuja. One of the women has never had a successful marriage. Upon inquiry as to why she was never successful in marriage, she found out that when she was young, she was given to a deity as his wife. It was because of this that she never had a successful marriage despite her efforts. The film portrays the fact that the deity can never allow her to get married to another man. She is the deity's property and wife despite being given to him against her will. In this film, the deity is depicted as evil

and jealous in the sense that he holds the woman in bondage against her own will. Thus, the film places the god within a patriarchal and evil domain. As expected in this genre, Christianity comes in to offer the solution. Upon being 'born again', she is set free from the bondage of the deity and she can remarry. This simplistic representation of African traditional religions and Christianity in the video films is quite problematic. The Christian video films offer Christianity as a solution. Being foreign or western is portrayed as a better solution as compared to African traditional religions.

The depiction of African traditional religions in the historical epic genre, however, is quite different and this difference needs to be noted. In this genre, the African traditional religions are celebrated in a sense. In as much as its gods may be portrayed as fearsome, there is a balanced representation. The gods are presented as being accessible to human beings and influence the physical world positively. In cases where their anger may have been provoked, the anger can be appeased through traditional modes such as sacrifices. In the film *Child of Promise*, the river goddess is depicted as being sacred. She is held in reverence. When she is provoked, she demands that people should not visit the sacred river that she inhabits. When Azuka, the main character of the film, is forced to go to the sacred river, she negotiates with the spirits and the river goddess until she comes back alive. The film, therefore, balances its representation of the gods and spirits. They are depicted as being both sacred and understanding. This kind of representation is lacking in most narratives of other genres.

In conclusion of this chapter's discussion, therefore, for Nigerian's 'first cinema' to achieve the two goals of commercial viability and entertainment, it has to meet the expectations of its local audience. Gugler notes that "the content of video films produced in Nigeria and Ghana are market driven" (178). At this point, the link between content of the film and 'first cinema' comes into play. Ukadike asserts,

> "…the video makers have turned toward local but universalised themes which, when rendered as drama and comedy, allow the African video film to draw bigger crowds into the movie theatre [or in their own home viewing space] than its celluloid predecessor [hence bringing commercial success]" (131).

For a film to be commercially successful and entertaining, it has to bring out local themes that will resonate with the audiences' value systems and perceptions. In this case, themes and images of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural satisfy the local audiences' tastes which are mostly a result of curiosity about these issues. The film has to draw on cultural references to which the audience can relate. It is within this line of argument that the Nigerian films' preoccupation with themes of witchcraft, magic, religion and the supernatural becomes relevant.

CHAPTER 4

4 *END OF THE WICKED*: WITCHCRAFT IN THE EVANGELICAL GENRE

End of the Wicked belongs to the Christian genre of the Nigerian popular video films, also known as the Hallelujah genre. The analysis emphasises how the film as a text conveys meaning to its intended local audience, by examining the iconography of this genre. Taussig's theoretical concepts of revelation and exposure and also mimesis and alterity will be employed to interpret the images of witchcraft, the supernatural and occult in the film.

End of the Wicked is an expository narrative of witchcraft activities. The film's narrative and images affirm local people's beliefs that most harmful occurrences and life's misfortunes, such as sickness, death, barrenness and lack of success in business, are caused by witchcraft. As it is the case in most Christian genres of the Nigerian video films, the dramatic conflict is built up between evil and good, witchcraft and Christianity. Lady Destroyer is the nexus of evil whilst the pastor is the nexus of good.

The story of the film centres on the Amadi family. Chris Amadi, husband to Stella and father of their two children, lives in an urban area in Nigeria. The family lives with Chris's mother who, unknown to any member of the family, is a witch who belongs to a coven. Chris's mother, also known as Lady Destroyer, brings chaos and confusion to the Amadi family through her practice of witchcraft. She causes discomfort to the family at night through dreams and physical torture. Chris's two children wake up at times screaming simultaneously in the middle of the night because of a bad dream, claiming that "somebody was pressing them". It is at this same time that Lady Destroyer leaves her physical body to go to witchcraft meetings. At the meetings, all members of the cult transform into animals such as lizards, dogs and owls. The leader of the cult calls the transformation to animals as "turning into

glorious bodies". The film portrays activities of the witchcraft coven and their plan to cause havoc and misfortunes in different families, including Chris Amadi's family. It is Lady Destroyer herself who offers Chris, her own son, to be devoured, tormented and tortured by the witches. The witches cause confusion and destruction in the Amadi household by negatively affecting Chris's business, marriage and children. True to the witches' plans, confusion runs through the Amadi household. The children are influenced to join the cult, Chris's relationship with his wife sours and his business suffers tremendously. Despite efforts by Chris's wife to seek help after suspecting that something might be wrong, Chris ignores all the signs and his wife's advice. He appears to be under a spell and he listens only to his mother who continually offers to help by taking him to a witchdoctor. As the narrative progresses, Lady Destroyer is shown at the coven spelling a curse upon her daughter, that she should never be able to conceive. In a parallel action, the daughter is then shown at the same time mourning from the pains that she feels from her uterus.

Chris is then taken to a witchdoctor by his mother who claims that it will help to solve all the confusions and misfortunes in his life but all this is to no avail. Stella, Chris's wife, becomes 'saved' or 'born again' with the help of a female pastor who visits their home. Chris refuses the call to salvation. Stella starts praying frequently and in the process she becomes protected from Lady Destroyer's powers. Chris, however, who is still vulnerable, dies from the wickedness of his own mother.

It is a custom in most Nigerian ethnic groups that when a husband dies mysteriously, it is the wife who is the primary suspect of causing the death of the husband (Igwe 1). Thus, in *End of the Wicked*, Stella is suspected of killing her husband. These suspicions are even supported by Chris's mother. As expected within the tradition, Stella is expected to drink a concoction to prove her innocence. If she is guilty, however, the concoction will make her mad. Stella

refuses to drink this concoction on the grounds that she is now a Christian and she cannot "conform to the worldly standards" by drinking the concoction. In the presence of the whole community, her pastor then offers to pray about the situation as long as she is given two days. She indicates that within these days, God will reveal who killed Chris and she, together with Stella, goes into prayer. Amidst the prayer, Chris's mother becomes mad and confesses to killing her own son and causing her daughter to be barren. She confesses in shame whilst surrounded by children and other people.

Amidst her confession, an animal-like creature comes out of her body and she dies. The story therefore ends with witchcraft exposed, destroyed and put to shame. The pastor and Stella triumph with their religion and beliefs.

The ending of the narrative positions Christianity as morally superior, better and capable of destroying all sources of witchcraft. Even though Lady Destroyer is exposed and destroyed at the end of the narrative, the film does not expose the dealings and activities of the witchcraft coven as whole. One would, therefore, safely assume that even though Lady Destroyer is dead at the end of the story, the activities and dealings of the witchcraft coven still go on with the other members of the coven. The storyline does not wholly deconstruct the coven, its leadership and the rest of the members. There is no revelation that Chris's children joined the coven and there is no indication that at one time or another, the coven is destroyed through the pastor's beliefs and prayers. The story therefore deals with this issue not holistically but by merely focusing on one family and one witch. Through lack of narrative closure of the sub-plots, the film implies that witchcraft is a continuing event.

End of the Wicked is just one of the films that deals with the theme of witchcraft among many. It is also just one of the films that place witchcraft within the Christian dualism of evil

and good. Other video films within the same Christian dualism explore themes of Satanism and cults. *Day of* A*tonement* (Benson 2005), for instance, focuses on the relationship of cults and Christianity. In all these films Christianity is depicted as triumphing over both cultism and Satanism.

In the title sequence, *End of the Wicked* opens by declaring this film as an "expository sequence" on witchcraft. This opening statement is both vital and crucial to the analysis of this film. By definition, to expose, entails an act of revealing something that was hidden. Exposure does not nullify the existence of the exposed; in this case it rather affirms the existence of something evil, bad, or fetishistic. Meyer notes that "… the notion of exposure is part of a hierarchical perspective of affirming the superiority of scientific thinking which unmasks magic as false and based on mere superstitions…" (2). Whilst scientific thinking may use exposure to falsify the presence of magic, *End of the Wicked* and many other films within this genre employ exposure to fetishise magic and witchcraft as evil and degenerate. The camera in these films becomes the eye for that exposition. It goes into places where the human eye cannot reach. In *End of the Wicked* for instance, the camera becomes an instrument of exposing what happens at the witchcraft covens. In essence, no human eye that is not part of the coven can witness these acts and yet the camera witnesses and exposes the acts. In this genre of the video films, therefore, exposure is in essence a vital element of the narrative.

The other aspect of exposure as Meyer indicated is that of a hierarchical perspective. Exposure usually entails that the exposer is equipped with superior knowledge whilst the exposed is passive and negative in a sense. This is exactly what is constructed within the narratives of witchcraft or magic as placed within the Christian dualism framework. The exposed, in this case witchcraft and witches, attain a passive role. The exposer, the pastor and

Christianity in *End of the Wicked* attain the active agency of deconstructing the world of witchcraft and witches by unveiling and unmasking all the dark activities that happen and that are mostly hidden to the human eye.

What is interesting about the film under discussion is that the actor who plays a Christian pastor, Helen Ukpabio, is in reality a pastor of a Nigerian Pentecostal Church (Okome 15). Her role, therefore, as the exposer of witchcraft in the film attains a controversial double reading of the film, fiction and reality. One is forced, therefore, to ask if this exposure is meant to be read from a fictional perspective or from one grounded in reality. Her roles both in the film and in reality, therefore, open up a new perspective in terms of reading the film.

From the fictional aspect, the narrative is constructed in such a way that Christianity and all the characters related to it are portrayed as possessing superior moral knowledge and power that enables them to dismantle and disrupt the activities of witchcraft. Okome, however, observes that "Ukpabio's video films massively deconstruct the power of the devil [witchcraft, magic etc] from a cultural base of local episteme but do not quite dispel the potency of the power of the devil in the socio-psychological frame of the community, her primary constituency" (15). This confirms the assertion made earlier in this discussion that the exposition that occurs in films such as *End of the Wicked* and other films of the same genre does not necessarily nullify the existence and the potential harmful power that witchcraft have on individuals within the narrative. If anything, the exposition merely achieves to portray the exposed witchcraft in *End of the Wicked* as being evil whilst Christianity as being the answer to all the misfortunes that may be caused by witchcraft. It can be argued, therefore, that in as much as the Hallelujah genre may take an expository role on witchcraft and other activities, the films affirms the existence of such activities. In

affirming the existence of witchcraft here, Satan/devil elsewhere, the films necessitate the need for Christianity as a good religion hence reinforcing its moral superiority.

In watching the film, *End of the Wicked* one's attention is drawn to the way colour is semiotised. Oha argues that in Western Christian discourse, there has always been a colour differentiation in term of representing the devil and God (197-198). White is always aligned with God who is pure and good. Hence connotatively, goodness is also aligned with white. On the other hand, the devil is always aligned with black. Black connotes hideousness, darkness, secretiveness and evil. Since Christianity is a western religion as Oha indicates, most of the video films tend to represent anything devilish in black and anything good in white. This colour semiotics is one of the elements that run through costuming of characters in almost all the video films which belong to the Christian genre. In *End of the Wicked*, the witches at the coven are all dressed in black including their leader. This same type of costuming is also found in the films *Angel of Darkness* and *Power to Bind*. In *Angel of Darkness*, the angel of God who comes to help is costumed in white whilst the devil is costumed in black. Black and white, therefore, become symbols of differentiation and alterity between evil and good, witchcraft and Christianity. It enlists the witchcraft practice as being evil even without the audience watching the whole narrative.

Whilst Oha criticises the binary representation of black and white in relation to evil and good respectively in the Christian video films as being western stereotypes that are criticised by racially sensitive scholars who interpret the colour symbolisation as aligning God to white people and evil or the devil to black people, it is important to note that this colour differentiation of white as good and black as evil is not only found in western discourses but also in traditional African discourses. Many ethnic groups, for instance, the Yoruba, believe that their gods or deities are pure, hence they also assign whiteness to these gods. Awolalu

indicates that "the Yoruba believe that the Supreme Being is pure, and they associate the colour white with him" (4). Referring to a Mami Wata ritual, Drewal also indicates that "cleanliness, *whiteness*, and other sweetness permeated the scene. Songs accompanied the sacrifice of a *white* goat and chickens" (177)[11]. It is clear, therefore, that contrary to Oha's implication that the representation of white as being pure and good is a stereotype in western discourses alone; white is a connotative symbol of goodness and purity even among Africans generally, and the Yoruba ethnic group specifically.

Most of the films of the Christian genre employ dreams as part of the narrative. It should be noted, however, that the use of dreams is not limited to this genre alone. In almost all the genres of the Nigerian video films, dreams are an important aspect of the narrative. They are mostly portrayed as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual. The dead can sometimes talk to the living through dreams in these films. Of interest, however, is the way dreams have been coded into the narrative of *End of the Wicked*. In the sequence in which Lady Destroyer offers Chris to the coven to be tortured, there is parallel action in which Chris is shown (in a long shot) tossing around in his sleep indicating that he is having a bad dream. This shot cuts to his dream in which two masquerades are chasing him[12]. As the masquerades catch up to him, there is a close-up shot of his face screaming, as the shot dissolves back to scenes of the coven as they start to curse Chris. The sequence constructs a tight connection between Chris's dreaming, his dream and the activities of the coven as they curse or 'bewitch' him. In this case, the dream becomes the bridge connecting Chris to the witchcraft activities. Tomaselli, Shepperson and Eke argue,

[11] The italic is the author's own emphasis.
[12] Masquerade refers to the use of masks, headdresses and costuming to conceal one's identity. In African ontology, a masquerade may refer to a person wearing masks and costuming to conceal his or her identity for religious rites and dance to represent ancestral spirits or deities.

> In African ontologies, the dream is in the realm of existence as part of the "linking current" in which contact is by nature established with the spirit world, the gods, ancestors and unborn (the future) as well as the human essence, thus creating a sense of universal unity and interrelation between the living and the dead. A revelation in a dream thus becomes very significant and spiritual. (61)

The film, therefore, brings out this African ontology and beliefs in which dreams are revelations and are taken seriously. Because Chris does not take the dream seriously, he is doomed. The film explores the whole idea of dreams as they relate to the physical and spiritual world. Chris's dream is not just a dream; it is depicted as a revelation of what is happening to him in his spiritual life. In this genre of Nigerian video films, therefore, dreams are a substantial medium of revelation and exposition. At other times, it is through these dreams that angels and God speak to Christian characters of this genre thus affirming Tomaselli's observation that they are a link to the spiritual and supernatural. Using special effects such as fade-ins, dissolves and others, dreams in the narrative are connected to actual occurrences to portray realities and revelations. The interplay between dreams and reality in the film and also in other films, inclusive and exclusive of this genre, blurs the boundary between the two. By juxtaposing dreams and reality within the same linear narrative, the films constructs a sense of fluidity in space and time of both the spiritual and the physical, hence affirming the African ontology in which the two are closely intertwined with each other. In this narrative, the spiritual is tangible and manifested through the medium of dreams. It is not placed in the "other" space and time. Daily observes that the dream metaphor is also present in mainstream cinema,

> Films such as *A.I.* (2001), the visionary *Kurosawa's Dreams* (1990), *Vanilla Sky*, *Minority Report*, […] explore dream life and waking life and conclude that distinctions between the two are often blurred or indiscernible. (1)

A distinctive feature of Chris's dream cannot go unexplored within this analysis. This is the masquerade that chases Chris in his dream. This type of sequence is also found in the video film *Bad Blood* (Obi 2005). In this film, a character dreams of a masquerade chasing him. The masquerade face dissolves into the face of his jealous Aunt who is planning to kill him in cinematic reality. Sownmi indicates that in West Africa, masks or masquerades take a variety of forms, one of which is to conceal the identity of the person wearing it (2006). Even though masquerades traditionally have spiritual and ritual functions within West African societies, in these dreams, they embrace a different space and meaning. Masquerades (in dreams) in the Christian genre of film narratives are emblematic of witchcraft and evil. In this genre, therefore, the masquerades attain an evil symbolic meaning. Thus, masks are a key element in the iconography of this genre.

However, it is interesting to observe how the Christian genre of Nigerian video films has demonised the masquerade which is an icon of African traditional religions. In African traditional religions, masquerades and masks are made and dressed "to be physical manifestations of ancestral or mythological spirits… (Sownmi 1). The one who wears the mask and masquerades may perform certain ritual and religious functions and more importantly, they link the ancestral spirits to the people. The Christian narratives denigrate the sociological and spiritual function of the masquerades in African traditional religions by constructing them as evil. The films (*End of the Wicked* and *Bad Blood*), therefore, enlist a reading that suggests that the masquerade is fetish (and evil) thereby denouncing and demeaning the traditional religions that use masquerades as positive religious icons.

The names of characters are central to Nigerian video narratives irrespective of genre. In most cases, the characters' names reflect the kind of persona that they have in the narrative or reflect the kind of challenges that the characters will go through in the video narrative. The video films usually use local names that suggest specific meanings. Even when foreign names are used, they usually suggest certain meanings and readings within the film. In *End of the Wicked*, the antagonist, Chris's mother is called Lady Destroyer. Her name already suggests certain elements of her personality. She is placed within the evil and wicked space of the narrative. As indicated earlier, she is the nexus of evil and the cause of misfortunes in other characters' lives. Her name directly denotes her destructive persona. Her role in the film elicits a sense of disruption and discomfort in the targeted audience. Her role as a mother would traditionally suggests that she is loving and caring. Contrary though, her role as a witch in the narrative conflicts with the traditional reading of the motherly role. Instead she is a total contradiction of what a mother ought to be. As her name indicates, she destroys her own children. She is heartless, evil and cruel. The narrative demonises her to an extent that there is no trace of maternal love in her persona. Her character disrupts the audience's comfort zone. How could a mother be so evil and cruel to her own flesh and blood?

However, Lady Destroyer's destructive persona is the one that carries the plot forward. Her actions heighten the narrative's conflict. Resolution will be attained by the destruction of Lady Destroyer herself. Thus, this resolution offers a relief to the audience who now are faced with the fact that evil represented by Lady Destroyer will never triumph. Fundamentally though, her name and actions achieve their purpose in the narrative, that of bringing destruction.

An important aspect of the visual motif of horror films is the sound effects, especially the music. Kelleghan indicates that "Different musical instruments and noises create different emotional impacts…. Music has power to affect the visual field and imagination" (1). Thus, the potential of music within the horror genre cannot be underestimated. It creates the atmosphere that a director intends and most of all it creates tension that characterises most of the horror films in general. Furthermore Hubinette affirms,

> It is quite easy to forget that the fear factor of almost any horror film would decrease dramatically (if not completely vanish) if the auditory features were removed or altered to something not befitting horror film. (1)

Music, therefore, is a crucial aspect of the horror genre. In Nigerian horror genre, music also plays an important role in creating the required atmosphere which in most cases is tension and fear. It is interesting how music is employed in *End of the Wicked* to achieve the horror effect. The film opens with humming or wind-like sounds that have obviously been synthesised to produce an 'other' worldly sound. The visuals that accompany this sound are 'out of the world' as well. Human beings are shown flying against a sky background creating an immediate impression that these people are flying in the sky. The flying people look scary with their bulky hair, black costumes and big scary eyes. The sound in the opening sequence becomes the motif for all witchcraft meetings. It introduces or announces the upcoming visuals of the coven meetings. The sound is not very loud and at the same time, it is not that soft. In this way, the audience does not hear the music as such, rather, they feel it. Director John Carpenter argues that music in the horror genre should not be heard, it should be felt,

> …But you shouldn't be sitting there listening to music, or aware of it. It should be working on you […]. I don't want you to be aware of the technique. I just want you to feel it. (qtd. In. Kelleghan 1)

This sound is very disruptive and very discomforting for an audience. It creates a tense and horrifying atmosphere for the film. In a discussion undertaken with film studies students about the sound in the opening sequence of *End of the Wicked*, it was observed that even though the sound is poor, it achieves its purpose by setting the pace and atmosphere of the film to its intended audience.[13] Thus, the sound or music complements the visuals in creating the horror or witchcraft narrative.

A musical instrument that is often used in the horror genre of Nigerian film, but rarely used in *End of the Wicked*, is the African drum. The African drum is used only twice in *End of the Wicked*, but it is the most used instrument in other films of the same genre. In *End of the Wicked*, the sounds of the drum are used to complement Chris Amadi's dreams. In the first dream, he is being chased by masquerades. In the second dream, his wife is about to kill him. In both dreams, the African drum is used to create intensity of actions and a tense atmosphere. In the first dream, Chris's running rhythm is complemented by the rhythm of the drum. The narrative is brought to an accelerated action sequence as the film cuts back and forth between Chris being offered at the coven and his dream. Osofisan indicates the role of the African drum by asserting,

> A product of science and art, fusion of tension and sonic wave, the drum provided [still provides] the first paradigm for the shape of artistic articulation, presiding as it did over

[13] This discussion was undertaken by seven fourth year film studies students at University of Witwatersrand and the author on 7th August 2006.

> ritual and ceremonial occasions, voice of priest, griot, cantor and chorus, mnemonic womb of communal contact and aesthetic mediation. (312)

Thus, the drum provides the filmmaker with a way of expressing his artistic ideas and in this case, of constructing the narrative of his or her choice. In other narratives of this genre, the drum is often used to complement visuals depicting the activities of a witchdoctor or traditional priests to construct a sacred or scary atmosphere in the films. At times, it may be used to imply 'Africanness'. The drum in most of these films attains the iconic properties that denote African tradition.

Another interesting motif in the evangelical or horror genres of the Nigerian video films is the use of the mirror as a link to the spiritual. The mirror is also an element that is at times used in films from both Bollywood and Hollywood. In these films, however, the mirror is used as a symbol of finding one's identity and subjectivity. The link of mirror and identity is drawn from Lacan who theorises that "at eighteen months or so, the child first sees his own reflection in the mirror. He recognises that he (or she, of course) is simultaneously part of, and separate from the rest of the world" (Gischler 1). Thus, this is the stage of identification. Many filmmakers, especially from Hollywood, have used the mirror as a metaphor or symbol of characters' self identification (subjectivity), hence Lacanian theorisation is at times used in film analysis. In the horror or evangelical narrative of Nigerian video films, the mirror is used as a symbol of something totally different. It is used as a link to the spiritual. In *End of the Wicked*, Lady Destroyer uses her mirror to connect to the leader of the witchcraft coven so as to gain power to destroy her daughter in-law. In *Angel of Darkness*, a man connects to his occult leader through the mirror. When he gazes into the mirror, the first image that appears is his own reflection. This reflection, however, disappears when after calling for him, the occult leader appears in the mirror. The use of the mirror as a symbolic link to the unknown

is probably drawn from the fact that one cannot see behind the mirror. It is a symbol of that vast and immense unknown and physically unseen. Thus, in the iconography of the Nigerian video films, the mirror is a link to the spiritual, the unseen and the unknown. It is, however, very important to note that the mirror is never used as a connection medium to the Christian God. It is only used as a connection point for cults and witchdoctors. For the Christians in the narratives, the symbolic connection between God and his people is the Bible. Hence the Bible and the mirror have similar functions.

In *End of the Wicked*, space (locations or settings) and time play a vital role in the narrative of witchcraft and occult as they relate to the fetishistic, the hidden and the exposed. Activities of the witchcraft coven are set under a tree affirming local beliefs that witchcraft meetings happen under trees, and at night as indicated in previous chapters. This enlists a symbolic reading in which witchcraft is the fetishistic, hidden practice that belongs to darkness, hence the time of activities. An interesting symbolic interplay comes out in the narrative through the use of space and time in relation to witchcraft. As indicated, all the activities of witchcraft happen at night when the city is asleep. It is assumed that the activities are hidden to non-initiates. However, Lady Destroyer's confession sequence is set in a public space during day time. This setting in terms of space and time elucidates darkness/ light symbolism that is often found in Christian discourse in which through light, all darkness and evil is revealed. The activities of Lady Destroyer are hidden to the public, her exposure, however, is to the public.

Other activities of the narrative occur within an interior space, mostly in Chris' house. The use of interior space suggests a sense of privacy and safety. On the contrary though, the narrative of *End of the Wicked* suggests the lack of safety and protection even within interior spaces. Walls in the narrative of witchcraft and ritual are not barriers against evil. For in this

genre, witches can move through material barriers and cause harm to their intended victims. In fact, all the harm that happens to characters happens within the confines of their own space. In the narrative of ritual and witchcraft therefore, the interior space does not suggest safety and protection for the characters. Rather it suggests their vulnerability and lack of safety from activities of witchcraft.

At this point, it becomes useful to draw on Taussig's anthropological conceptualisation of mimesis and alterity. Taussig's conceptualisation helps explain the reason why there are many images of witchcraft, occult and magic in Nigerian video films.

The concept of mimesis refers to "the nature that culture uses to create second nature, the faculty to copy, imitate, make model, explore difference, yield into and become other" (xiii). This tendency of creating replicas is found in art, and the camera can be regarded as a tool of mimesis. However, whilst mimesis can be discussed in reference to imitation in other paradigms, this research rather adopts the representative aspect of mimesis. In art, mimesis can be viewed rather as an artistic expression that "represents" certain issues and ideas and not necessarily simple imitation (Maran 203). Maran distinguishes between representation and imitation by asserting that "representation relates more to the interpretation made by the creative subject, whereas the result of 'imitation' is rather copying or duplication" (ibid). Whilst sculpture, painting and drawing may follow the imitation aspect of mimesis, performing arts, be it stage performance or film performance, tend to be representational. Processes of interpretation are involved at all stages of filmmaking; for instance, the director's interpretation of a script. What is relevant, however, is Taussig elaboration of the power of the represented subject. He observes,

> The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy [representational] drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power (xiii).

This line of argument raises questions about whether the representation of cultic, witchcraft and magical images in Nigerian video films, such as *End of the Wicked,* is a means of gaining power over the feared activities. It can be argued that the filmmakers, by the mere portrayal of the dark, invisible world of witchcraft, magic and occults gain power over that which they are representing. The portrayal of these images in *End of the Wicked* and other films of this genre lift a veil off the hidden spiritual and supernatural, cultic and magical world, thereby removing the fear of these activities upon themselves and their audiences. As Taussig properly argues,

> Yet the important point about what I call the magic of mimesis is, the same-namely that 'in some way or another' the making and the existence of the artefact that portrays something, gives one power over that which is portrayed. (13)

Taussig's concept of alterity, however, becomes handy in exploring the dichotomy of the images of witchcraft, magic and occults versus Christianity in evangelical and Christian genre of Nigerian films. The concept of alterity entails difference, "of being other" (129). In a way, the evangelical genre tends to portray magic, witchcraft and occults in alterity with Christianity. For instance, in *End of the Wicked,* Christianity is placed within a pure and positive space from which characters can find hope, comfort and salvation. Witchcraft and witchdoctors are placed within an evil and fetishistic space; they need to be deconstructed. Christianity is depicted as the acceptable religion whilst the other images of occult and to a lesser extent, African traditional religions in general, such as in *Ogbanje,* are devious and

unacceptable. The images of Christianity and its related themes are places at one extreme end of a continuum whilst the images of witchcraft and traditional religion are placed at the opposite end to place emphasis on difference, hence alterity. It is only in placing images of witchcraft and African traditional religions and to an extent Satanism as the other or the alter that Christianity takes superior moral position to criticise and expose the former as devious and wicked.

CHAPTER 5

OF THE RIVER GODDESS AND VANISHING OBJECTS: EXPLORING THE SPIRITUAL IN *CHILD OF PROMISE*

This chapter analyses the film C*hild of Promise* and the horror genre by deconstructing codes, sub text, signs and metaphors of the film. It further interrogates the depiction of the river goddess as placed within the Yoruba ontology in this film.

Child of Promise revolves around Azuka, a young orphaned woman. When Azuka's parents die, a distant uncle takes her to his home and village to be raised by her aunts. In her new home, Azuka is mistreated by her uncle's first wife. She is treated as a servant. Despite her uncle's effort to bring the two women together, the aunt still find faults with Azuka. However, Azuka finds hope again when she falls in love with Mkechi, the son of a very prominent member of the village. Azuka's love relationship does not please her aunt. The aunt, therefore, decides to frame Azuka for stealing yam. She takes Azuka to a garden and tells her to pick some yams for dinner. She leaves her there. Unknowingly, Azuka picks yams from this garden without realising that the garden is not her aunt's. Members of the village then accuse her of stealing and she is sentenced to be buried alive. With the help of her lover and uncle, Azuka survives the ordeal and it is her aunt who is killed by Azuka's uncle in anger.

At a later stage of the narrative, Azuka marries her lover. Another problem, however, emerges when her dead aunt's best friend Ijoma, who is also Azuka's sister in-law plans to avenge the death of her friend. The victim once again is Azuka. In an unfortunate turn of events, the sister in-law forces Azuka to go to Ezobue River to replace the water that Azuka

took from her pot. Ezobue River is sacred because the river goddess inhabits it. Nobody is allowed to go to this river. The consequences of going there are always death, hence the river is also called the river of death. With her innocence though, Azuka manages to fetch the water from the river of death despite the challenges that she meets along the way. She meets ghosts, gods and most importantly the river goddess herself. The goddess declares to her that she is a child of promise. When she returns to the village alive, the whole village is amazed. Her sister-in-law dies in shame from the wrath of the river goddess as a punishment for her lies.

It is important to note that this film deals with Yoruba cosmology. The narrative draws from local episteme in which places inhabited by gods and goddesses are to be treated with respect and awe. It also draws attention to the pantheon of deities of the Yoruba. Most importantly, however, this film is a narrative of hope. It is a narrative of an orphaned girl who is mistreated by some members of the community in which she lives, but at the end justice prevails.

This narrative is a celebration of Yoruba culture and beliefs. In this narrative, the traditional priest is not vilified neither is he demonised as is often the case with the Christian genre. In this film, the traditional priest occupies another space. He is the ultimate authority and link between the spiritual and the physical. His speeches throughout the narrative are metaphorical and philosophical, endowed in wisdom. He can communicate with the gods and the goddesses. In this space, he is the voice of the gods. In the midst of a crisis in the village, the priest assumes the role of mediator between the gods and the people. He goes to the river of death to offer sacrifices to the river goddess in order to appease her anger. In this narrative, therefore, the traditional priest is an emblem of wisdom, hope and authority. He is centrally located within the narrative even though he is not the protagonist.

It is important to note that *Child of Promise* is not a linear narrative. It is a circular narrative. The film begins with the ending and it is carried through flashbacks. In a way, the whole narrative is told through flashbacks with narration as a link to the past and the present. As the film begins, there is a wide shot of village members sitting around in the village square. Some are pacing up and down, others are murmuring among themselves but the general atmosphere of the opening sequence is that of anxiety and expectancy. As the narrative begins, therefore, the audience is drawn into this atmosphere of expectancy and anxiety. In watching the film, one is led to ask the question, why are the village members anxious? This opening sequence sets the tone and the pace of the whole film as it cuts to and from the village square sequence to flashbacks or to a parallel action of Azuka going to the river of death.

The editing technique employed in the first sequence of the film, that of juxtaposing long shots of the village square with close-up shots of the legs of a woman moving through a bushy path, creates a tense and dramatic atmosphere. At this point the audience does not know the woman moving through the bushy path and also the reason why the village members are anxious. The only thing that the audience knows at this moment is the fact that the two juxtaposed images must be related in a way heightening the audience expectations of the narrative. The audience expectations and the atmosphere that the film embraces is very vital for the depiction of the supernatural that occurs towards the end of the narrative. This expectation enhances the kind of reception that an audience can give towards the images of the supernatural. The film's depictions of images of the supernatural largely appear towards the end of the narrative even though reference is made to the spirits, gods and goddesses throughout the narrative. The last sequences are, therefore, going to be very crucial to the analysis of the depiction of the supernatural in this film.

Throughout the film, there is interplay of soundtrack music and silences to enhance dramatic tension. In the sequence that Ijoma, Azuka's sister-in-law forces Azuka to go to the river of death to draw water, there is no soundtrack music. The only sound that is heard is the dialogue between Azuka and her sister in-law. This sequence appears so natural and realistic, more like a documentary technique to film. This lack of music soundtrack in this sequence is very effective because it draws the viewer's attention to the conflict between the two women leading the audience to sympathise with Azuka. As she takes her pot to go to the river of death, therefore, the audience is already on her side. The most important role that this lack of music soundtrack plays is the reinforcing of the sounds that comes up in the subsequent sequences. The initial silence brings out the functional role that sound plays in the film. Thus, sound at this moment is not only used to create a mood or an atmosphere but to act as a horror motif for the many horrifying and supernatural occurrences that happen during Azuka's journey to the river of death. At this point of the narrative, the audience is already aware that the river of death is sacred and anyone who goes there dies. Azuka's journey to this river and the horror sound motifs, therefore, enlist a sense of fear in the audience in regards to what is going to happen to the protagonist.

As indicated earlier in this analysis, the narrative is told through flashbacks. Flashbacks are an important element in Nigerian video narrative. They are frequently used in video films of all genres to expose past occurrences. The way flashbacks are used in this film, however, is both excessive and interesting at times. A narrator (on camera) connects the present moment and the past through flashbacks. The film appears to be a mere narration, only spiced up with actual flashbacks. The film uses very obvious dissolves that are accompanied by a specific sound as transitions from the present moment to the past and vice versa. These transitions enhance a lack of linearity of the film. Because they are obvious and disturbing, they evoke a

disruptive, chaotic and anxious world of the characters in the film. The sense of chaos that is created by the transitions further reinforces the horror that the audience expects in Azuka's journey to the river.

In the analysis of *End of the Wicked,* it was observed that Nigerian films use dreams within the narrative as a link between the spiritual world and the physical world. In *Child of Promise* dreams are used within the narrative to foretell the future. Mkechi, Azuka's boyfriend, dreams that somebody is killing his girlfriend. At this time, Mkechi is living in his maternal village after his father, who was not pleased with his relationship with Azuka, banished him from his paternal village where Azuka also lives. He, therefore, does not know that the following day Azuka is going to be buried alive after being charged with theft. His dream presages the unfortunate events about to happen to his girlfriend. The audience can connect Mkechi's dream to Azuka's ordeal but to Mkechi himself it is just another bad dream that only becomes real when he is told that his girlfriend is about to be buried alive. The fact that the dream alone could not help Mkechi realise what was happening to his girlfriend raises the question as to how relevant the dream is to the construction of the narrative as a whole. Is it there just for the audience hence playing no role to the development of the narrative? This same question can be asked in relation to other narratives that employ the use of dreams, yet, they remain irrelevant to the owner of the dreams. In *End of the Wicked,* Chris does not decipher the meaning of his own dreams even though they are spiritually relevant to him. They remain un-interpreted to him till he dies; yet for the audience they are relevant. One, therefore, questions the statement that the films are making in regards to the dreams. Are they stating that even though dreams have relevance they are rarely interpreted? In one way or the other, by making the dreams irrelevant to the characters as such makes a subtle reading of the futility of the dreams in the narrative hence implicitly denying the African ontology that elevates dreams as being crucial. However, dreams and the horror genre intertwine in a way.

The mere fact of watching a restless and tossing body in bed and its nightmares thereof can be quite disturbing to some audiences thereby enhancing the horror effect of the film.

The horror effect is often achieved in most films when narratives go against natural laws at the same time drawing from unexplainable events. Lovecraft, referring to horror literature, observes,

> A true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject of that most terrible concept of the human brain- a malign and particular suspension or defeat of the fixed laws of nature which are our only safeguards against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft qtd. In. Writer's Encyclopaedia)

Though Lovecraft was asserting the above statement in reference to horror literature, it is also true in the horror film. Nigerian horror videos tend to draw heavily from unexpected events that occur against laws of nature. In *Child of Promise,* the last sequence portrays images of gods, spirits, goddesses, ghosts and even monsters with that of human beings. According to the materialist view of nature, human beings do not negotiate with spirits and gods. In *Child of Promise,* as it is in most of the horror and sometimes evangelical genres, the two are fused. In this narrative, Azuka negotiates with spirits, gods and monsters to give her passage to the river of death. By singing to them she gains access to the forbidden river. As asserted, therefore, the film goes against rules of nature to achieve its horror effect.

In going against the rules of nature, the film also enhances an element of surprise, which is very crucial to the horror narrative. In *Child of Promise,* this interplay between breaking rules of nature and the element of surprise is excessively employed. In the sequence that Azuka goes to the river of death, she first meets a few people who discourage her from going to the river. She, however, proceeds. As she starts to go into the interior of the bush that leads to the river, a large rock ball closes her path. In a moment, the audience is led to think that it is coincidence. As Azuka tries to pass by the sides of the rock, it rolls to close her path yet again, till the audience realises that this is not a matter of coincidence. However, this is out of the ordinary. Rocks do not have eyes, yet this rock follows her every direction till Azuka sings to gain passage. Again a law of nature is broken. This set the film's tone of dread of the unexpected occurrences; for in this film anything can be dangerous and horrific. As Azuka proceeds with the journey to the river, three spirits appear from nowhere. Again they stand in her way. In minutes, they vanish only to appear again behind her.

The Nigerian video films frequently make use of vanishing objects and persons. In this narrative, the spirits appear and vanish, the river goddess appears and vanishes in the water; her father-in-law's ghost appears and vanishes. Thus, the film employs special effects to make this aspect believable yet at the same time frightening. Frightening, because as asserted earlier, everything that does not fit within natural order can be threatening causing discomfort to audiences and at the same time achieving the horrifying effect of the film.

The fact that other superior forces (spiritual) will determine whether Azuka survives her journey to the river of death or not, strips away power from the protagonist and also other characters in the play. In a dialogue the priest indicates to Mkechi, who is now Azuka's husband that "you can't challenge the gods. Her [Azuka's] fate is in the hands of the gods." This alone reinforces the vulnerability of the protagonist and other supporting characters.

There is nothing that they can do but to wait. By placing narrative agency in outer spiritual forces rather than the characters themselves, the film enhances another aspect of the horror. The spirit world is the active agent and it controls all the occurrences, implying that if it decides that the protagonist must die, nothing will reverse that fate. Vulnerability of characters is very important in horror genres for it places them at the mercy of things and it is in this aspect that the film evokes fear in the audience.

Even though the camera is not artistically used to enhance the atmosphere in *Child of Promise*, there are a few moments that it does manage to be used in certain ways that contributes to the narrative. For instance, just before Azuka meets the ghost or the spirit of her late father-in-law, the camera roughly pans left and right to the tree creating a bizarre feeling that there is a certain presence within this tree that the audience should expect. When the father-in-law appears just at the branch of the tree, he is elevated and for Azuka to see him she has to look up. Thus, the father-in-law's shot is taken from a low angle whilst Azuka's is taken from a high angle suggesting that Azuka is at her point of vulnerability whilst the spirit of her father-in-law is at high level controlling the fate of Azuka. The film uses zoom-ins (extreme close up) of faces to show fear on Azuka's face, and sometimes innocence. Most importantly the extreme close up is used to incriminate, demonise and vilify Ijoma, Azuka's sister-in-law. However, in the river sequence, the film employs long shots that capture a large landscape at the same time diminishing the size of Azuka. These shots emphasise the fact that Azuka is all alone in a vast and dangerous environment. All these aspects of camera angle and camera movements reinforce the horrific element of the narrative. It can be suggested though, that the camera could have been used effectively.

Another interesting thing that this film depicts that is often demonised by the evangelical genre is the river goddess. In this film, even though she is shown in anger at times, especially

when the villagers are in disobedience, at the end of the narrative, she introduces herself to Azuka as a goddess of love. This is quite a positive representation. It is for reasons such as this that the analysis asserts that the film is a celebration of Yoruba culture. It does not vilify the goddess or the priest. In this film, they are both important to the lives of the characters. The ending does not nullify this assertion. As Ijoma dies, she dies as a consequence of her lies. The river goddess in this film is depicted as the protector of innocent victims, hence she calls Azuka a "child of promise".

The iconography of the river goddess in *Child of Promise* is of particular interest to the discussion. The river goddess, or *Mami Wata* as she is often called, "refers to an African water spirit whom Africans regards as foreign in origin" (Drewal 160). Her foreign origin explains the type of imagery and portrayal that is often found in films in general, and Yoruba films in particular. Within the Yoruba cosmology, *Mami Wata* is believed to be an emblem of beauty, associated with bright colours, long hair, jewels and wealth. As indicated earlier, she possesses human qualities such as anger, happiness, sadness, love, but in most cases she is known for her jealous nature. *Child of Promise's* depiction of her reflects and resonates with the Yoruba cosmology.

Child of Promise depicts the river goddess as exotic and beautiful. In the sequence that she emerges from her habitat, the water, to talk to Azuka, she is depicted as possessing an alluring beauty that is both exotic and foreign. She has long hair and she is dressed in bright red attire. The water around her glitters with bright colours to reinforce her beauty. Only the upper part of her body is visible as the rest is immersed in the water. The fact that the film shows only her upper part of the body reinforces the belief that *Mami Wata* or the river goddess is half-woman and half-fish. Drewal confirms by asserting,

> Since Africans tend to depict complete figures in their visual arts, the half figure rendering *Mami Wata* is taken to be significant by African viewers. […], devotees point out that *Mami Wata* in her mermaid manifestation is half woman, half fish; what is not shown becomes important. (171)

The depiction of *Mami Wata* in *Child of Promise,* that of her upper part of the body only, reinforces a sense of mystery around her. This mystery alone brings out sacredness of her persona as a deity. Being a goddess or a deity, she cannot reveal herself in totality to devotees and in this case to Azuka. She has to maintain her mysterious nature. This mysterious attribute of her nature contributes to the viewing of the horror narrative but, most importantly, resonates with the Yoruba and to a lesser extent the Igbo beliefs of the river goddess.

Drewal discusses how the mirror "has become central to *Mami Wata* belief and ritual practice" (162). The mirror in *Mami Wata* belief signifies several things. First, the surface of the mirror is similar to the surface of the water in its reflective nature. The mirror, therefore, connotes the "boundary between the cosmic realms of water and land, a symbol of the permeable threshold crossed by *Mami Wata* […] (162). In *Child of Promise,* the mirror as an icon is not present. However, the film plays on the mis-en-scene, that of the water from which the river goddess emerges. As the river goddess appears from the water, the reflective nature of water in the river is highlighted. The bright colour of her costuming is reflected in the water. As the mirror is a link between the spiritual and the physical in witchcraft practice, the reflective nature of the water becomes a link between the water (spiritual habitation of the river goddess) and the land (habitation of human beings). This observation is reinforced in *Child of Promise* by the mere fact that for human beings to talk and interact with the river goddess, they have to go to the river and offer their sacrifice in the water.

Mirrors also signify *Mami Wata's* "alluring beauty and vanity" (165). Drewal indicates that "mirrors figure prominently in devotees' communications with the spirit" (165). It is observed that the devotees use mirrors to call *Mami Wata* for rituals because she is attracted by them due to her vanity. This is featured in many Yoruba films but not in *Child of Promise*.

An obvious depiction of *Mami Wata* in Nigerian video films is her domination over water. As her name translates, she is the mother of water. Water or rivers are, therefore, an obvious element in narratives about *Mami Wata*. The river is portrayed as her home. She can abduct or seize human beings who trespasses this domain. This is what happens in the narrative of *Child of Promise*, when she kills some members of the village who went to her river.

In *Child of Promise*, the river goddess is portrayed as having well-rounded characteristics as she is often regarded in Yoruba cosmology. She possesses human qualities and also divine ones. Even though she is at the centre of the narrative, she is rarely seen in the film reinforcing a sense of mystery and horror.

The film, therefore, interplays sound, cinematography to a lesser extent and a narrative with many twists to achieve the horror effect at the same time celebrating and reinforcing the local episteme of Yoruba cosmology. In this narrative, the dichotomy of tradition and modernity is lacking. At the same time, the false binary that is often created in evangelical genres between Christianity as good and traditional religions or deities as evil is totally removed. In this narrative there is no Other or alterity which contributes to the positive narration and portrayal of the traditional deities, in this case, the river goddess.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Nigerian popular video films have proved to be a unique cultural aesthetic. Its approach to cinema has resulted in the emergence of an alternative cinema that is different from mainstream cinematic practices, yet at the same time influenced by the genres of the cinema it excludes and other indigenous arts such as oral literature and Yoruba Travelling Theatre. Its approach to themes and the films' narratives has opened up a vast field of alternative film analysis and interpretation. The objective of this research has been to explore the themes of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural through a semiotised reading of *End of the Wicked* and *Child of Promise*. Throughout the discussion, however, other films were often referred to avoid a minimalistic approach to analysis.

The first chapter introduced this research project by providing the aim, rationale and background of the Nigerian video film industry. It also discussed the broad production context of the industry by exploring genres, local language films, methods of production, exhibition and distribution. It further provided a historical overview of Nigerian aesthetic practices.

The second chapter of the research has interrogated the ideological and theoretical contexts of Nigerian film industry. It has argued that despite the fact that the research aims at doing a content and semiological analysis, a discussion of the political and ideological context is very important. A content analysis that is conducted without considering the social, economic and ideological contexts of the films is lacking because film is produced within these contexts. In this chapter, therefore, the Nigerian filmmaking practice was interrogated within the frameworks of Third Cinema, African Cinema and African popular Arts discourses. It has

been argued that Nigerian video filmmaking practice has positioned itself to be the first "First Cinema" for Africa through its motivation for profits and entertainment rather than art and political awareness as it is the case with African Cinema.

The chapter further applied theoretical paradigms in analysing the content, asserting that for Nollywood to achieve its popularity and success among African audiences, more so Nigerian audiences, it has to integrate themes and images that meet audiences' expectations and needs. More importantly, the industry uses themes and images of witchcraft to satisfy the audiences' curiosity about such occurrences, hence its success, and its First Cinema positioning within African context.

The third chapter has discussed themes of witchcraft, magic, the supernatural and religion from a broader perspective. Before undertaking this task, however, the research provided an overview of Nigerian belief systems in reference to culture and religion. This overview is important to this research because, as observed earlier, it is within these contexts that the narratives are produced.

The fourth chapter provides an in-depth analysis of *End of the Wicked*. It is observed that Nigerian video films are obsessed with themes of witchcraft, supernatural and magic. These themes, when transcribed into filmic codes, construct interesting and appealing narratives that capture audiences' imaginations and curiosity that resonate with their cultures. Despite the technical problems of the films, these themes, among others, are enough to draw audiences' attention, hence the success of Nollywood.

When themes of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural are constructed within the narrative of evangelical or Christian genres, there is a constant use of imagery that tends to demonise or

vilify traditional African religions, beliefs and icons. Thus, Taussig's concept of alterity helps to interpret these images. It should be observed that exploring and interrogating difference between traditional religions or beliefs and Christianity within the video films' imagery is not wrong or negative in itself. The problem, however, emerges when the films denounce and vilify anything that is traditional and displace them with Christianity which is perceived to be modern, civilised and better. In the evangelical genre, therefore, Christianity is depicted as morally superior regardless of how the narrative is told. This depiction of Christianity in the films results in the deconstruction of any religion or belief that stands in alterity to it. This can be problematic at times.

It has been demonstrated that the codes and metaphors in the evangelical video films are used in such a way that alterity is reinforced. For instance, the semiotics of space and time in *End of the Wicked* to explore the light/darkness code that is often embedded in these narratives. What is also important, however, is how *End of the Wicked* and other films of the same genre utilise certain codes, symbols and metaphors like special effects and sounds to achieve the horror effect that is often intended for audiences.

It very important to observe that textual analysis of the themes of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural as undertaken in this research is just one of the approaches of undertaking Nollywood discourse. As indicated earlier, this industry has opened up new approaches of interrogating and analysing cinema as a whole. As a matter of recommendation, further research into the industry is important. For instance, it would be interesting to take this research further by analysing audience reception of the video films, specifically those that deal with the themes under discussion. In chapter two, Haynes's observation that Nigerian video films do not answer to an American audience's cultural desire was noted. It would

therefore be interesting to interrogate the reasons as to why and how the video films exclude western or European audiences through their narrative.

Another interesting approach to Nollywood discourse would be to explore the politics of representation in the video films. This approach would explore both gender and racial representation. Thus, since Nollywood is relatively a new phenomenon, much research still needs to be done so as to provide more academic perspectives of the young industry. For it is in creating academic discourse that the industry may begin to reflect and strategise on ways of improving the already existing cultural phenomenon.

All in all, therefore, themes and images of witchcraft, magic, occults and the supernatural are prevalent in Nigerian popular video films. The iconographic and aesthetic approaches of these films are unique. Furthermore, these themes and images usually resonate with the cultural contexts in which these films are produced, attracting local audiences, hence achieving commercial viability and success.

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