

# RANDOM LIGHTING AND VISUAL NARRATIVE IN NOLLYWOOD FILMS

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## ABSTRACT

*Lighting is a key element for creating images in video film productions. Illuminations from lighting help to record images on film. In modern narrative films, lighting plays ornamental role of shaping images. The problem of this study is the persistent use of random lighting as a means of image making in Nollywood films. The study aims at awakening consciousness about viable lighting system, which is apposite with narrative films. The objectives of the study include examining the effect of random lighting approach in the development of visual narrative productions in Nollywood films. Data for the study was collected using key-interviews of selected Nollywood Videographers. The study also made use of data from pre-recorded lighting productions of the Ugezu's The Strikers and the Nonso Okonkwo's ABACHA(The Reign of Terror). This was supplemented by the data from direct observations. Findings of the study reveal that most lighting in Nollywood films are designed and implemented by videographers. This has been the bane of random lighting recipe in Nollywood films. Further discoveries indicate that random lighting produces skewed images, which lacks requisite details for visual storytelling in films. The study thus argues that for Nollywood film industry to attain sustainable development in visual narrative forms, it must adopt workable lighting system that is compatible with narrative film format. The study then concludes and makes recommendations on the way forward.*

**Keywords:** Videographer, Random lighting, Visual Narrative, Nollywood Film, Skewed Images.

## 1. Introduction

Whether it is theatre or film, audience perceives a performance messages through the two senses; the sense of hearing and the sense of seeing. The two design forms used in film productions are the aural and the visual design. In films, Design production helps to facilitate message delivery. The major reason adduced for the use of aural design production in films is to facilitate the viewers' sense of hearing. Visual design on the other hand, is meant to enable viewers perceive performances through the sense of seeing. In this sense, visual design "supports the spoken words...of the dramatic form" (Brockett and Ball, 2004, p. 4). The significance of visual design in film communication makes some scholars to regard that the film's main language is visual rather than verbal (Ben de Leeuw, 1999). Visual design is considered as a process involving the creation of things according to lay down plans. It is a workable term that consists of projecting images in narrative films. When we use the term narrative, we are talking about an account of a series of related incidences or experiences, which may appear as fictional or nonfictional. Narrative incidences are usually presented in communication art through a sequence of written or spoken words, still or moving images. It can even be a combination of the two (Vocabulary.com/dictionary/narrative). When used in film, visual narrative can be considered as a visual medium for storytelling. Its accomplishment can be enhanced through the elements of still photograph, colours, images, symbols, lights etcetera. Amongst all this, images are remarkably important in filmmaking. This is because they serve as visual design element in film productions. The image functions as a platform for encoding visual messages in film. Thus with an image, the filmmaker can illustrate complex thoughts and emotions without using much dialogue. Since image represents an external form of a

person or object, its creation is usually done to depict the thing it tends to portray. Thus a workable image is created through the combination and proper use of what David Cheshire (1990, p.21) refers to as four basic elements that are “vital in the making of an image of a film”. These are:

*Composition: this is what is chosen to be in the shot and how they are arranged in the frame*

*Editing: this is both a creative and technical part of the post-production process of filmmaking. It is referred to as the placement of shot in relation to others*

*Lens: this refers to a piece of glass or other transparent material with curved sides for concentrating or dispersing light rays. It may be used singly, as in a magnifying glass or with other lenses, as in a telescope. In films, lens represents the choice of appropriate lens for the shot*

*Lighting: film lighting is a complex art. It involves manipulation of light at three stages in film making. Stage one is with the light instrument during shooting at the location. Stage two is with the use of the camera to control the amount of lights that fall on the image-plane. Stage three happens at the control room during editing. It is important to note that editing lighting control mechanism may not arise if lighting is properly carried out at the other two stages.*

Lighting is the most important element used for creating images. This is because the appearance of any image in film is mostly determined by the lighting approach used in creating the image. Even other elements for image making can function effectively only when activated by lighting. This is why when Gerald Millerson (1991) was speaking about the influence of lighting in image creation, he acknowledges that shot composition, camera lens and editing has its place in image making but went further to state clearly that it is only by effective lighting that an image can be given “dimension – depth, solidity, texture and form” (p.91). Thus, Herbert Zettl’s (2007) description of film lighting as an art used for creating illumination and to control attached and cast shadows is very apt for this study. This is because it is only by proper control of light that the lighting designer can configure believable images, which Oshionebo (2012) believes can assist spectator’s perception of the performance” (p. 140) ideas. The role of lighting in structuring images and enhancing visual communication of filmic central ideas seems not to have been fully understood and appreciated by Nollywood filmmakers due to the present lighting production structure in the industry. Nollywood is a popular name for the Nigeria video film industry, which came into being in the early 90s due to the collapse of the cinema industry in the country. Today, Nollywood has blossomed to the extent of attracting global attention. Recently, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) claims that Nollywood is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest film industry in the world, with India’s Bollywood being the 1<sup>st</sup> and the USA’s Hollywood, the 3<sup>rd</sup>. However, Scholars have argued that the Nollywood’s lofty position in international rankings was based on production output and not in terms of quality. Femi Shaka (2014, p. 3) acknowledges that “of course, we know that in terms of quality, Nollywood still has a long way to go....” Black Mambe’s rating of Nollywood films below acceptable standard is another issue to contend with. His observations indicate that the film’s poor quality image relates to errors in visual design productions. He argues that images in Nollywood films “are compressed onto tapes and lack any details” (nairaland.com). When an image lacks details, it denies viewers the opportunity to read meanings from the image onscreen. Random as a concept implies anything that is made, done or happens without any definite plan, method, aim, pattern or conscious decision (<http://www.longman.com/dictionaries>). Random lighting is thus construed as a lighting approach that is without specific plan and purpose. There is a need to rethink lighting in Nollywood films in a direction that for instance, can guarantee cinematic image quality. Questions then arise: What factor (s) is responsible for the persistent use of random lighting production approach in Nollywood films? In what ways do skewed images affect visual narrative technique of Nollywood films? Film as used in the context of this study implies the “Nollywood model of video film improvisation that amplifies the drama of everyday life in Africa” (White, 2014, p. 141).

### Lighting and Visual Narrative in Film Productions

Lighting is the most important element in cinematography. It is the task to which a cinematographer gives his primary attention. He studies the characteristics of his film stock so that he may predict what effect it will have in translating his scene onto the screen. He then manipulates the lights accordingly. Filters are an aid in modifying that translation. But it is lighting that shapes the reality in front of the lens, giving it depth or flatness, excitement or boredom, reality or artificiality. Cinematography attempts to create and sustain a mood, captured on the screen. In this respect lighting is at the heart of cinematography (Malkiewicz, 1973).

A photographic image is thus created by capturing various amounts of lights reflected from the various parts of a scene. This implies that the way in which an image is portrayed on screen depends largely on the quality and distribution of light. Good lighting contributes to the significant roles of film in the lives of the people. It was David White who explains the major ways in which film affects the people. According to him, this includes the power of the film to share new ideas and to teach lessons about the past or future ([study.com/academy/lesson/narrative – film – introduction – history.html](http://study.com/academy/lesson/narrative-film-introduction-history.html)). This lesson is usually imparted through the unique language of film, which Ben de Leeuw (2004) affirms it to be distinctively visual rather than verbal. Thus, visual language involves the use of signs, codes, symbols, images etc. These nonverbal elements provide viewers “with clues about the meaning and purpose...” (Parker, et al, 2009. p.4) of a film performance. Hyginus Ekwuazi in Anyanwu (2013) alludes that the reason why audience put more interest on film’s visual narrative is because of its potentials to appeal to the sense data. In this sense, visual narrative posits authenticity and reliability. Charles Nnolim (2010) explains that narrative can be a presentation of a sequence of written or spoken words, still or moving images or a combination of the two. Ovundahunwo (2014 p.5) agrees with this position but hastily added that “those events may be arranged chronologically or non-chronologically and may be factual, fictional or a blend of both”. The narrative style of films is within the discretion of the storyteller. He may choose oral narrative style or visual narrative style. Thus, using visual narrative style implies that the filmmaker will make maximum application of signs, symbols, images etc. to tell his/her stories. This entails that the visual icons must be properly structured. The structuring format will enable viewers to derive meanings from the image. Robert Kolker (2006) sees image as an indispensable element for visual storytelling in films. His illustrative explanation on the differences between images and words provides an insight on what an image truly represents in films. Kolker said that an image is unlike words, which interpret or mediate experience. For him, image is something that appears to be present and immediate. It strives to deliver the thing itself to our eyes and by so doing, can trigger emotional responses of the viewers. Thus creating convincing images in film will require in-depth knowledge of lighting and design. Robert Kolker (2006) alludes to this when he said that image creation/structuring “depend upon some kind of manipulation of the image during the picture-making process” (p. 21). Lighting manipulates film images in different ways. The three basic ones include, firstly, when lighting is used to brighten or darken an image for a particular purpose. This may be to grant or deny viewers access to actions, costumes, and sceneries on frame. As John Jackman (2010) argues that without lighting all what the filmmaker struggles for is to achieve a black picture. Lighting also affects the image through the aperture device. Aperture is used to regulate the amount of lights that enter the film. This is to checkmate the exposure rate of the image. Lastly, lighting manipulates the image through modeling approach. Image modeling lighting utilizes control method approach to structure film images. Image modeling lighting has not been very popular with Nollywood filmmakers. Most Nigeria filmmakers often think about filmmaking in terms of the type of camera used in shooting the film than they think about the lighting for the production. This category of filmmakers tends to rely mostly on Bruce Mamer’s (1996) postulations about film lighting. Bruce Mamer said that film lighting is basically the art of raising “the level of illumination for the film to be properly exposed” (p. 20). This entails the use of lens aperture to regulate the lights that enter into the camera mostly to prevent the image from being either underexposed or over exposed. In this

sense, film lighting is all about stark wash bright lights and a piece of regulatory device like aperture to checkmate the exposure rate. This is disturbing because there seem not to be any consideration about the nature of lights that enter the camera, which the aperture regulates. This cannot be ignored because what the aperture regulates is illuminations by the lighting. In other words, if poor illumination is created by lighting, it is this that the camera will capture, regulate and transmit. It is for this reason that Chris Weaver's argument that poor lighting in films is due to filmmakers' reckless attitude towards lighting, becomes sensible. Weaver claims that some filmmakers who jettison reasonable ideas for good lighting in films are the same who will in turn expect images of cinematic qualities:

*I believe most independent filmmakers are aiming to create images of cinematic quality, that they can look at and think 'phwoar' "that looks like a movie". It is unfortunate [...] that on an independent level, many seem to ignore lighting and instead favour which camera they are using or what lenses they are shooting on ([www.freespiritfilm.co.uk](http://www.freespiritfilm.co.uk))*

Weaver said that even with a Panavision Para flex, it is possible that one will produce images that are going to look boring and flat if the lighting for the scene is not well lit. Some filmmakers realize the importance of lighting after they have spent much money purchasing latest and greatest filming equipment, "only to discover later down the line that that shiny new camera is not going to make their film look any more cinematic" ([www.freespiritfilm.co.uk](http://www.freespiritfilm.co.uk)). Quality image creation therefore rests upon good lighting production. The lighting designer can achieve this through controlling the appearance of the subject on frame (Millerson, 1991). This is usually done to enable the designer encode filmic ideas on the images for visual storytelling. Thus, it is expected that lighting designer must possess basic creative and technical skills for him to achieve this successfully. This study avers that the preponderance of visual glitches in most Nollywood films is possible because of the use of inexperience lighting designers in most of those films. This claim can be validated in the analysis of the lighting of the selected cases of this study.

### **Random Lighting Production in Nollywood films**

Just as camera is a vital tool for film productions, realization of high quality images in films will inevitably suffer great setback if the lighting production is randomly planned and implemented. Something is considered as random if it lacks definite order or plan for implementation. The Webster dictionary describes random as an "action that happens without method, pattern or conscious decision" (Webster dictionary.com). Random action therefore is an arbitrarily and purposeless actions performed without consciousness. Thus, random lighting is construed as a form of lighting that is short of the indices, necessary for effective visual storytelling in films. John Jackman (2010) speaks more on the imperfections of random lighting. This is obtained in his description of random lighting as a structure less lighting pattern that produces skewed images. A skewed image as he further noted, is an image that provides fewer clues for interpretation of a scene. This situation can lead to misjudgment of what viewers are seeing on screen. Gerald Millerson (1991) warned about the colossal consequences of casual lighting production in films. He said that random lighting can obscure important details and deny viewers access to vital information. He went on to mention other problems that can arise with incorrect lighting treatment in film productions. This includes:

*Distracting picture blemishes, such as lens flares can develop*

*Strong specula burned – out highlights reflecting from shiny surfaces may distract the eye*

*A person's shadow falling onto a map may prevent our reading information there.*

*Someone may be describing delicate carving...which is virtually invisible on camera due to flat lighting.*

*We may be unable to see details of an oil painting, due to light glare on its surface.*

*People may appear unattractive, haggard, ageing – even ill – if inappropriately lit.*

Lighting in most Nollywood films portrays some of the aforementioned problems. Nollywood as a concept was conceived in the early 90s after the first indigenous home movie was produced in Nigeria. The birth of the Nigeria indigenous entertainment industry was as a result of the collapse of the celluloid film in the country. Nollywood film industry therefore provided an alternative platform for the exhibition of films, which treated issues bothering on social, economic and political problems of the country. Charles Okwuowulu (2014) affirms that films have always responded to the circumstances and situations in an environment. Citing Femi Shaka, Okwuowulu states that films replicate the heartbeat of a nation. The film's major concern in the society therefore is to persuade the people for a positive change. The question is: to what extent has Nollywood films achieved this fabulous aim? It is important to note at this point that the Nollywood industry treats topical issues of social relevance. For example, themes on bad leadership, corruption, urban and rural violence, prostitution, cultism, witchcraft, magic deception and betrayal, fraud and gangster etc have all been explored in the Nigeria entertainment space. Political themes for instance, have been explored in films like the Teco Benson's *False Alarm*, Tunde Kelani's *Saworoide* (1999) and *Agogo Eewo* (2002), Nonso Okonkwo's *ABACHA (The reign of terror)*, Fred Amata's *The King Maker* (2002) and Isola Durojaiye's *Asiri Gomina Wa (The Secret of Governors)* (2007). Themes that replete with insecurity in Nigeria include Zack Orji's *Suicide Bombers* (2001), Ikenna Eniekwe's *Liquid Black Gold* (2009), Nwankwo Agbo's *Subsidy Cabal* (2003). Films with themes on Fraud and gangster include Ugezu's *The Strikers* (2000). *Glamour Girls* is the precursor of themes on prostitution in Nigeria video film industry etc. These themes have aptly described the true life situation in Nigeria at a time. But the major concern is that those issues, which the film has preached against, have subsisted unabated in the Nigerian society. The unwary may ask: is it that the film has lost its old-aged influence in the society or can it be said that Nollywood's mode of communication is defective? This will be determined later in this study.

### **Synopsis of the Strikers 1 & 2**

The film, *The Strikers* treats the issue of fraud and gangsters. This crime became prevalent in Nigeria as a result of the misuse of the nation's resources (meant for the wellbeing of the Nigerian people) by the minority political elites. Because there were slim chances to earn a living through a genuine means at this time, majority of Nigerian youths devised crook means to earn a living in order to overcome the menace of hardship occasioned by bad leadership in the country. Having discovered lately that robbery and kidnapping are no longer flourishing as before, Sir Zee (Clems Ohameze), Babylon (Kenneth Okonkwo), Baron (Gentle Jacks) and Humphrey (Tammy Opusunju) now resort to internet fraud scam to make ends meet. With the presence of Helen (Mercy Johnson), a proficient banker who was abducted and latercoax to resign from the banking job in order to join the gang, these mafias triumph economically by forging vital documents and cheques, and use this to defraud money from peoples' bank account. They also make money through political killings since they considered politicians as the major cause of the problems in the society.

A twist in the narrative came when Babylon's plans to marry Amanda, Sir Zee's cousin, meets fierce opposition from Sir Zee. Sir Zee's opposition to this is to prevent his family members from knowing his real means of livelihood. Because of this, he facilitated a marriage plan between Amanda and Mr. Chukwuma, a proficient bank manager. Babylon sees this as sabotage and thus plans to take a revenge fight against Sir Zee. This plot was perfected with Baron teaming up with Babylon, after having been convinced that Sir Zee was among the mafias who massacred the six seminarians in which his (Baron) brother was killed. Thereafter, Babylon and Baron engaged other mafias and then set out for Sir Zee. Thus, the murder of Sir Zee at the madam 'up and down' joint exposes the hidden evils of the mafias.

### **Synopsis of ABACHA 1, 2, 3, & 4**

To discuss this film, it is important to provide brief information about the situation in Nigeria that informed the production of this film. *ABACHA* was a reminiscence of the Gen. Sani Abacha's led administration in Nigeria. This period witnessed military supremacy in the country. It was a time soldiers were dreaded in Nigeria than ever before. They were seen as gods who have the power of life and death. So they had no value for human life and can thus rift off the life at the slightest provocation without any fear of any kind. All this happened because the leadership at the top was also morally porous. Prostitution also prevailed in the land because girls saw this as the option for survival, since soldiers who had the economic powers could afford to lavish money on them (girls) in hotel rooms.

*ABACHA* replicates this entire abhorrent scenario. In the film, Zuka (Sam Dede), a captain in the army was revealed in the opening shot fighting in a dream where he is trying to shoot down an enemy's military jet. Waking up from the dream, Zuka goes out to inspect activities in his hotel. He also uses the hotel as a hideout where he breeds bad boys that carryout heinous crimes for him. Zuka is a soldier that is known for limitless quest for money. This manifests often in most of his actions. In one occasion, Zuka shot the manager and the account clerk of his hotel for misuse of N5000 and for falsifying financial account of the hotel respectively. On getting information that Mr. Pious (Gana – Gana) was paid N1, million by the government to execute some projects, Zuka sent one of his boys, named Rabu (Osaze Okunzowa) to intercept him (Mr. Pious) and collect the money. But on discovering that the Police investigation team, led by Inspector James (Virus) is trialing the way about of Rabu for killing Mr. Pious and making away with the N1, million in his briefcase, Zuka instructed Ekene, one of his boys, to eliminate Rabu and seal up the matter. Unfortunately, the man who Ekene used in carrying out this deal was eventually apprehended by the Police investigation team after having succeeded in killing Rabu in the hotel. When tortured by the Police, this culprit revealed how everything happened and in the process, indicted Mr. Ekene, who was later arrested and taken to the Police station for further investigation.

The researchers adopt selective analysis approach to buttress their point of view regarding random lighting production in the selected cases of this study. In the opening scene of the *Strikers*, we witness a long shot that establishes Helen (Mercy Johnson) and her younger sister working along the street when suddenly a four runner Jeep cross their way. Two hefty men came out from the car, forced Helen into the jeep and drove off. In a follow up shot, Helen is seen in the midst of Babylon, Baron and Humphrey who now persuades her to resign from the bank and join them in the internet fraud business. We learnt from Babylon's report to Sir Zee that the reason why Helen should join the group is for the group to make use of her banking experience to advance their plans.



**Plate 1: the abducted Helen in the hands of Mafias**

Two categories of lighting were used in the incidents described above. The exterior lighting, witnessed at the abduction of Helen on the street and an interior lighting. The primary source of illumination for exterior lighting is the natural sunlight. The light source provided visual clarity for the scene. The interior lighting approach was adopted in the enclosure where Helen was held captive by the mafias.

Helen's membership with the group has helped to boost the financial state of the gang. She begins to forge cheques and other financial documents with which the gang uses to defraud millions of naira from peoples' account. As the business proves rewarding, the gang disengages from other crimes. It was at this time that Chief Okeke, a party chieftain, invites Sir Zee for a political assassination. Chief Okeke wants to assassinate his party chairman; Mr. Achike for refusing to divert some money from the party's treasury to his (Chief Okeke) private account as an appreciation for making him (Achike) the Chairman of the party:



**Plate 2: Mr. Achike    Plate 3: Chief Okeke    Plate 4: Okeke engaging Sir Zee& others**

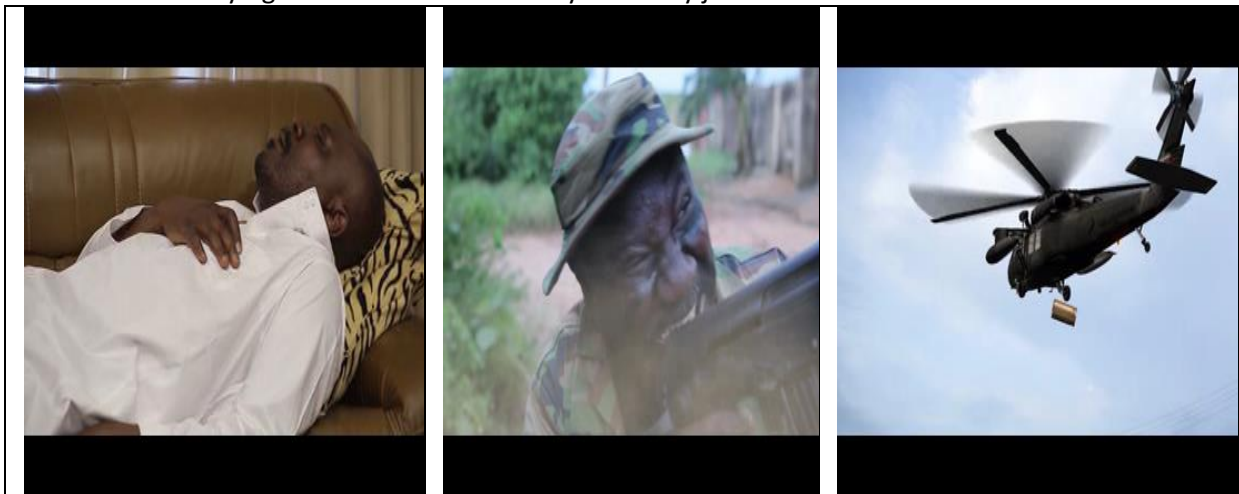
Sir Zee rejected the offer on the basis that their differences can be settled without bloodshed. Interior and exterior lighting approaches were used in the lighting design for the two scenes. In plate 2, Mr. Achike rages angrily at Chief Okeke for requesting that party's money should be paid to his account. Chief Okeke as seen in Plate 3 is infuriated, ended his discussions and walked away from Mr. Achike because he refused to take his instructions. These actions took place outdoors. Thus the sunlight provided illuminations for the production of the scene. The gorgeous costume worn by Chief Okeke is an indication of his rate of affluence, acquired through extortion of public fund. Plate 4 reveals Sir Zee, Babylon and Chief Okeke in a discussion in Chief Okeke's sitting room. This is an interior setting. The scene is faintly illuminated with infiltrating lights from windows and other openings in the house. The penetrated illuminations serve as the main source of lights for the scene. As Babylon amasses wealth through the cybercrime business, he begins to use the money to entice Amanda and thereafter made a proposal to her. Despite Sir Zee's opposition to Babylon's marriage plans with Amanda, Babylon went ahead to organize an engagement ceremony with her. He plans to have this in a secluded area in order to keep it away from Sir Zee.



**Plate 5: Amanda is in a garden waiting for Babylon**

In plate 5, Amanda is seen in a garden waiting patiently for Babylon. As an outdoor scene, the actions are recorded using illuminations from the sunlight. Most times, viewers are let into understanding innermost feelings of performers through their facial appearances as well as the entire roundup of their bodies. The same is applied to the reading of Amanda's inner state of mind in this scene particularly with reference to what her feelings are about her intending engagement ceremony with Babylon.

In the film, *ABACHA*, Zuka is regarded as an iniquitous Captain in the Army. The opening shot reveals him in a dream trying to shoot down an enemy's military jet:



**Plates 6, 7& 8: Cross sections of Zuka in a dream trying to shoot down an enemy's jet**

Zuka runs a hotel business in town. He also uses the hotel as a hideout place for training bad boys who he uses for heinous crimes in the society. When Mr. Pious' long awaited government contract of N1, million was paid, Zuka receives the information from Martha(Pious' girlfriend),and sends Rabu to go after Pious in order to collect the money from him. As Inspector James begins investigations to trial the way about of Rabu for killing Pious and making away with the money in his briefcase, Zuka ordered Ekene to kill Rabu so as to close the matter. But the man Ekene used in killing Rabu was arrested by the Police. When tortured at the station, he revealed how everything happened.





**Plate 9 & 10: Cross section of Mr. Pious and Martha in a hotel room**

Plat 9 shows Martha and Pious in a hotel room before Pious receives a call that the long awaited N1, million for the government contracts has been approved. In Plat 10, we see Martha ruminating after Pious had left the hotel room for the contracts money. Interior lighting method was adopted for the scenes. Artificial lighting setup was incorporated to complement infiltrated illuminations that entered the hotel room through openings. The angle at which the light throw was taken is an important factor in image modeling lighting. This relates to the height of the light source. Lighting an actor from an appropriate angle can enhance proper modeling and as well gives objects and figures natural appearance.

## 2. Methodology

In this study, the researchers employed qualitative research method. Sources of data for the study were through key-interviews of selected Nollywood videographers. Data was also collected through pre-recorded lighting production of the Ugezu's the *Strikers* and the Nonso Okonkwo's *ABACHA*. The researchers' knowledge about lighting design in film productions was also a source of data for the study. Other available sources of data for analysis included relevant opinions of lighting specialists on the subject matter.

### Analyzing the Impact of Random lighting in the performances of *Strikers* and *ABACHA*

A closer look at the lighting productions of this study will indicate that there is lack of ingenuity in the handling of lighting production of the films. The illumination form that is used to structure the images suggests little or no creative input of the lighting designer. The result of this is the obvious blemish images that are approximately in all the scenes of the film. The problem here is that most important details, which would provide viewers with needed clues to interpret the scene with meanings, were bluntly obscured by the flaws on the images. It was also observed that the angle at which most lights of the scenes were taken was not considered in relation with the effect they will create on the subject. This entire situation creates abhorrent lighting condition that deviates completely from lighting patterns of modern narrative films, which the production itself tends to portray. It is a reminiscence of first generation television lighting where the lighting director's concern is to produce wash lights for the camera's functionality.

It was Michael Gillette (2003) who spoke extensively about the lighting of the early television and film. He informed that lighting director at the dawn of television and motion film format was more of engineering than design position. He said that during this time, "base lighting was the prevalent method of lighting the film" (p.298). This is because the primary concern of lighting video at this time was to "get enough light on the scene to allow the camera, which needed a lot of light and had very narrow latitude, to properly record the image" (p. 298). This pattern of lighting became obsolete in about 1903 with the efforts of George Meliers in developing cinematic technology. This paved the way for narratives as a style of filmmaking ([www.britannica.com](http://www.britannica.com)).

Following this and many other scholarly innovations, which tend to support narrative film theory, film lighting progressively advanced to reflect the new trends in filmmaking. This is not only in lighting pattern but also in the lighting personnel. The lighting director, who initially acted on engineering capacity, now becomes a trained lighting designer. Richard Pilbrow in *Duro Oni* (2003) observes rightly that “lighting design is an amalgam of science, technology and art”. This means that contemporary film lighting instruments will require an “operator with imaginative and creative knowledge to put them into artistic use” (p. 75). Unfortunately, most filmmakers in Nollywood sustain particular notion that engaging trained lighting designer in Nollywood films is to incur unnecessary expenses. For them, lighting is what anybody can do. However, the detriment of such reasoning is the apparent lighting anomalies that are prevalent in most Nollywood films, including the paradigmatic case of this study. Like other Nollywood films, the films understudy are narrative films. To narrate a story visually means to tell a story through the use of images. This makes the role of lighting significantly important. The lighting designer needs to know much about lighting principles for him to design light in narrative film credibly. The lighting we talk about here is not only the ability to create illuminations to record images but also the capability to use lighting as a modeling tool. Unfortunately, this did not happen in the productions in review. What we noticed instead was alighting that utilized random approach, which grossly undermines modeling potentials. This is unacceptable because according to Graham Roberts and Heather Wallis (2001, p. 35) “the way in which an image is lit is central to its impact” in visual storytelling. In Plates 11 and 12 below, certain lighting defects, which tend to support the above claim, took place. In Plate 11, we have the picture of Chief Okeke, an influential Politician, who out of anger, walks away from Mr. Achike, the Chairman of his party for refusing to act according to his demand. Plate 12 shows the picture of Amanda in a garden where she is waiting for Babylon:



**Plate 11: Chief Okeke walking out from Achike****Plate 12: Amanda in a garden**

The actions of these scenes took place in an exterior environment. Chief Okeke as seen in Plate 11, is a wealthy politician, whose affluence is buttressed in this film by his gorgeous attire. Similarly, Plate 12 showcases Amanda where she is happily waiting for Babylon in a garden for their engagement ceremony. It can be observed that in both scenes, there is technical problem in the Visual Media Message (VMM). This problem arises from the lighting of the scenes. Actions of these scenes took place in an outdoor environment and thus sunlight was used as the main source of illumination for the scenes. The message of the scene is clear. It buttresses Chief Okeke as a wealthy politician. This was achieved through the elegant costume he wears. Graham Roberts and Heather Wallis (2001) comment about the semiotic function of costume in a performance and posit that it is “an instant indicator of social class, cultural background and of character traits” (6). People make

instant judgments by observing dress. Filmmakers can push viewers into instant decisions by the choices of how they dress their characters. Sophisticated costume separates a character from the mass of poor characters and defines his class and status. The costume that Chief Okeke wears in this performance is indicative of his social class, which depicts him as a wealthy politician. This is a place where majority of the populace languishes in penury. This is the message of the scene. Ideally, image modeling lighting should have been the appropriate lighting method for this scene. The method would enable the designer to model the image, using intercepting modeling devices to control the highlight that streams from the sunlight to the subject on frame. The importance of this is to ensure that the image is well structured so that the encoded messages on it can easily be extracted by the viewers. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Rather what we noticed was the use of casual lighting approach. Being that casual lighting method focuses more on generating illuminations for the camera to record images on film, the highlight of the sun, which streamed onto Chief Okeke's elegant costume was not controlled. As a result of this, the beauty of the costume was washed, distorted and rendered unattractive by the highlight of the sun. For this reason, the intended Visual Media Message (VMM) of the scene was lost to the viewers due to poor lighting approach. Similarly, Amanda as seen in plate 12 is in a garden waiting for Babylon for a planned engagement. Usually, facial expression is an important part of acting. Much screen time is spent focusing on the faces of actors. It is often said that eyes are the mirrors of the soul. The audience observes these faces closely because of the natural tendency to follow eye movement (Robert and Wallis, 2001). Amada's face in the above picture was bleached by the sun rays. This happened because the intensity of light on the scene was higher than the required illumination to expose the frame. Like the previous cases, there was no modeling plans put in place to regulate the hash rays of the light that whitens the face of Amanda. The reason for this is that the present lighting operators in Nollywood films seem to have limited knowledge about modeling lighting design practice. The random lighting method, which is the one that they are much familiar with lack what it takes to deal with the problem of image-rays in films, which often happen due to bad lighting practice. It was therefore as a result of the random lighting method deployed for the garden scene in the study that gave rise to the bleach spots, witnessed on Amanda's face. These visual anomalies prevented Visual Media Message (VMM) of the scene from being conveyed to the viewers. This is because the light glares on the face of Amanda and other parts of her body hindered the viewers from reading details of the encoded messages on the image. Gerald Millerson (1991) rightly observes that distracting picture blemishes, such as lens flares can lead viewers to misjudge what they are seeing on screen.

There are other discernable lighting errors in the production. There is a noticeable flaw in the angle at which most lights of the scenes were taken. This is clearly evident at the scene where Martha was ruminating after Mr. Pious has left the hotel room for the government's contract money:



**Plate 13: Showing Martha ruminating after Pious had left the hotel room**

In the image in plate 13 above, there is conspicuous halo effect on the head, face and shoulders of Martha. The defect on the visual image results from wrong placement of light angle. In most lighting design production, the designer's bit is usually to imitate nature in lighting the actor. Natural lighting usually descends on people from an overhead direction. A general convention in lighting design is that light should fall on an actor from the angle of 45 degrees to imitate light from the sun. Light at a 45-degree angle enhances visibility and appears natural. Regrettably, this lighting convention was not adhered to in the lighting of this scene. This is because the source of illuminations for the actions of the scene was taken from 90 degrees instead of the usual known 45 degree-angle. The 90 degree-angle, sometimes called Top light is usually placed right above the subject. The effect as we have seen in the above picture is that 90 degree-angle casts shadows on the actor's face and the head. These shadows are unnatural and can prove difficult to get rid of. It also squashes rather than edge the actor (Giannetti, 1993). Ideally, if image modeling lighting were to be used, the emphasis would be to make Martha's face look beautiful. The reason is that the designer would attempt to reflect the state of happiness she encounters about the huge amount of money her boyfriend is about to collect from the government. He would make viewers to see this in her facial appearance. But because the production relied solely on random lighting production method, the situation was different because instead of an alluring face, what we witnessed was a face fractured by halo effects due to wrong choice of light angle.

### **Analyzing Responses from Interviews with Respondents**

The interview was targeted at Videographers in Nollywood film industry. Therefore, Charles Okwuowulu and Vining Ogu were selected and interviewed by the researchers. The reason for the choice of these videographers was based on their verse knowledge on the subject of discussion in this paper. The interview was meant to ascertain opinions of the videographers regarding visual narrative production in Nollywood film industry and how lighting contributes to this.

When asked who a videographer is in film palace, the interviewee (Vining Ogu in particular) explained that a videographer is the artist who uses the video camera to tell the story of a production in visual terms. In a follow up question about the role (s) of a videographer, the answer received showed that the videographer uses the camera to interpret the director's concept of the production. Just unlike the actor that uses verbal means to interpret the production concept, the videographer utilizes the camera medium to transpose the production concept into a picture format. The question if the videographer is different from a lighting director in film terminology was answered in affirmative by Charles Okwuowulu. When probed further on how the videographer and the LD differ in their duties, the response from Okwuowulu indicated that the two artists have

different areas of specialty. He noted that the videographer handles the camera and determines the shots; the LD controls everything about lighting in a film production. He however stated that the two have need of each other in order to function well. According to him, the videographer needs lights so as to record images appropriately with the camera. On the other hand, the LD needs the camera to transmit the lights he has created to the viewers. In a follow up question about who implements the visual concept of a production, the interviewee (Vining Ogu) said that the videographer and the LD collaborate to achieve this in a performance. According to him, the videographer creates the image that represents the concept pictorially; the LD uses the light to shape the image to appear attractive and also provides the atmospheric ambiance of the scene. When asked the specific role (s) of the LD in a film production, Okwuowulu explained that the LD uses the light to tell a story through expressive lighting. He further noted that lighting is what makes a good image. Citing his personal experience, Okwuowulu stated that when work with a known low quality camera but with good lighting, quality image output is always obtained. But the reverse is the case when he has good camera but poor lighting. When asked if trained LD feature often in Nollywood film production. The response received was emphatic NO. In a follow up question on the reason for noninvolvement of trained LD in most Nollywood film production. Part of the reasons provided by Vining was that the filmmakers in the industry do not see lighting as an important aspect of the business. They believe that since what is required of lighting is a bright environment to see actions, therefore, anybody can do the lighting to achieve this. Another reason has to do with low budget of most of the films, which the producers believe cannot afford 'luxury' spending on lighting. In the question about who lights the film in the absence of the LD. The answer received was that the videographer takes the charge. Vining elaborated further on this that in all the films he has produced in Nollywood, which range between 50 – 60 movies, that no trained lighting designer was used in any of those films. According to him, he lit some of those films while others were lit by any available person that was found around the shooting area who the director approached to help us 'light' the show. Okwuowulu who said to have produced about 35 Nollywood films as at the time of this interview, claimed that he used trained lighting director in only one of those films. When asked about the likely challenges they have been encountering in lighting films since most videographers in Nollywood films are not trained lighting designers. Vining's response to this was that his major challenges in lighting films is to get good pictures with the light. Okwuowulu on his own part, explained that his main challenges include fixing and rigging the lights; using the available light to achieve expressive lighting amongst others. He said that when in a location, he sometimes gets over this by adopting trial and error approach until he gets to near what he wants.

From the above analysis, there is clear indication that the manner in which lighting is currently being used in Nollywood film productions grossly affects the visual narrative production capabilities.

### **3. Conclusion**

This essay discusses one of the recurrent issues that cause visual narrative anomalies in Nollywood films. It observes that the manner in which lighting is designed and used in Nollywood films contributes to visual narrative production. The type of lighting personnel employs by the filmmakers plays significant role in determining the film's image quality. The study discovered that most visual anomalies in Nollywood films are produced due to the use of random lighting technique as a means of image structuring in films. This happens because some Nollywood filmmakers, who believe that lighting is an art for everybody, prefer using non-trained lighting designers in lighting films. Some others who, out of low budget profile, think that engaging trained lighting designers is incurring unnecessary expenses also choose to patronize non-trained lighting designers. The study observes therefore that visual narrative forms can be improved in Nollywood films by encouraging the adoption of image modeling lighting technique, which is compatible with narrative film format.

Michael Gillette (2003) informs that in film production, the cinematographer is responsible for creating and implementing lighting design as well as all aspects of camera operation. He noted

also that the “gaffer rigs and run the lighting fixtures under the aesthetic direction of the cinematographer” (p. 273). In another instance, Gillette speaks about lighting in video production and said that there is marked distinction between the lighting director and the videographer. According to him, in video production, “the lighting director creates the lighting and the videographer runs the camera” (p. 298). What we understand from the above analysis is that whether it is in film or in video production, lighting director is different from the man who handles the camera. Based on this, the study recommends that to ensure sustainable development of visual narrative production in Nollywood films, trained lighting designers should be incorporated into Nollywood film productions. In situations where low budget profile becomes an issue, it is recommended that the videographer who doubles as the lighting operator should be made to obtain trainings in the areas of lighting and design. This will make him to combine the two responsibilities effectively well and by so doing, ensures that lighting method, which is apposite to narrative film format is applied in Nollywood film productions.

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