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An Analysis of the Use of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) in Nollywood: The Examples of *Aníkúlápó* and *Lisabi*

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Abstract
This paper explore the application of Computer-Generated Imagery (CGI) in Nollywood through an analysis of Kunle Afolayan's *Aníkúlápó* (2022) and Niyi Akinmolayan's *Lisabi* (2024). It situates the discussion within the historical trajectory of Nigerian cinema, tracing its colonial origins, post-independence challenges, and the eventual rise of Nollywood as a global force. The study enaages the emergence of CGI as a transformative tool that enables filmmakers to create fantastical, historical, and epic narratives beyond the limits of practical effects. A comparative evaluation reveals that *Aníkúlápó* employs CGI with notable success, particularly in rendering mythical elements such as Akala, the mystical bird, and resurrection scenes that reinforce Yoruba cosmological beliefs. However, *Lisabi* demonstrates an ambitious but inconsistent use of CGI, especially in large-scale battle sequences, where technical flaws undermine narrative credibility. The findings suggest that while CGI enhances Nollywood's competitiveness and visual scope, its misapplication can compromise storytelling depth and cultural authenticity. The study concludes that the sustainable future of Nollywood lies in harmonizing technological advancement with indigenous storytelling. It recommends strategic collaborations with technological experts, increased investment in advanced cinematic equipment, and government as well as private sector support. By adopting these measures, Nollywood can modernize its narratives, achieve higher production quality, and strengthen its global recognition while preserving its cultural integrity.

Background of Film in Nigeria

Film was introduced in Nigeria during the colonial era, before independence. Nigeria Film Corporation confirmed this,

> Stating that film was brought to Nigeria in 1903, exactly eleven years before the official proclamation of the country called Nigeria, with a film show at Captain Glover Hall in Lagos. The first film shot in Nigeria was in Jos, Plateau State, then part of the Northern Protectorate. The film was titled *Palaver* (1).

Similarly, Innocent Chinyere Ohiri noted that film's first entry into Nigeria was through the efforts of business merchants, the church, and the colonial government, with the 1903 exhibition made possible by a Spanish firm, Balboa and Company, at the invitation of Herbert Macaulay (53). However, as Uchenna Onuzulike aver;

> Studies on the films available during this period indicate that "the contents of these films were largely documentary and focused on topics of education, health, agriculture, and industry, amongst others. The Nigerian natives were shown films utilizing travelling cinema vans because films were few and theatres did not exist in the remote areas (178).

During the period, Stephen Okpadah and Taiwo Afolabi explained that "businessmen traded in entertainment films while religious films were made by the missionaries. "The initial film distributors were mainly Lebanese and Syrians who brought in films from European distribution houses with a preference for those in London, knowing that Nigeria was a British colony" (19). As cinema culture grew, European merchants and foreign nationals, particularly Lebanese and Syrians, established commercial cinema houses in Lagos, including Rex Cinema, Regale Cinema, and Royal Cinema, which primarily screened

imported Western films. The audience in the early years consisted mainly of foreigners and Nigerian elites, as colonial authorities restricted attendance and some content to avoid politically sensitive material.

Explaining the cinematic operations in colonial Lagos, Olubomelu Oladipo citing Gloria Ernest Samuel and Divine Sheriff Uchenna, explained that;

> Cinema houses were established in Lagos with the express permission of the colonial government from 1937. One of the earliest cinema operators in Lagos was the West African Pictures Company owned by Mr. S. Khalil, a member of the Syrian Community in Lagos. The company was granted the right to use Glover Hall Lagos, including its Tennis Court Gardens and bar for three nights a week for cinematographic shows. Later, the West African Pictures Company established Rex Cinema in Ebute Metta, Regal Cinema and Royal Cinema, Lagos in late 1930s and early 1940s (172).

Furthermore, around 1940s after the commencement of Lagos Nigeria cinema, National Open University of Nigeria, as cited in Samuel and Uchenna, posits that, "an indigenous film unit called Federal Film Unit was established to replace the Colonial Film Unit (CFU). However, because it was still under the administration of the colonial government, it did little in terms of energizing local content" (173).

The Cinematographic Law of Nigeria was enacted in 1948, concerning the licensing of cinema premises, moral protection of the public, and film censorship. The law also helped the growth of film production in Nigeria, unlike in the early years when many of the films shown were produced overseas.

Film in the Post-Colonial Era

Explaining the state of film immediately after independence, Augustine-Ufua Enahora stated that "the country inherited the colonial structure of the film industry and, despite its political independence in 1960, the system has not changed. Nigeria is a cinematographic province of India and America, while its colonial masters are the Indians and Lebanese" (100). The first few years of a newly independent country is generally viewed as the formative period and nothing significant happened in terms of cinema or film development as the country is still in its formative era. The 1964 general election was marred by electoral crisis was alleged to be neither free nor fair. This was followed by chains of reactions starting with the first military coup on 15th January, 1966, and a counter coup on 29th July, 1966, which swept Aguiyi Ironsi from power and installed Yakubu Gowon. According to Samuel and Uchenna,

> Cinema could be said to have been in limbo throughout these turbulent periods. Immediately after the war, Cinema activities experienced resurgence and began to receive attention of both the government and individuals. In 1972, the first law on government protection for Nigerian cinema was enacted. Known as Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree No. 4 of 23rd February 1972, also popularly known as the Indigenization Decree, the law stipulates that cinemas and other places of entertainment were reserved for Nigerians and a certain percentage of the income from

gates should be remitted to the government. The law enabled and energized indigenous film practitioners and resulted in the first film shot by a Nigerian production company, Calpenny Nigeria limited here in Nigeria (174).

The first set of films were *Bound of Lagos*, *Bull Frog in the Sun*, *Thundergod*, *Golden Women*, till 1975 when the first feature film recorded in the Nigerian language (Igbo language), *Amadi* which was produced by Afro-Cult Foundation Limited. It was in recognition of the potential of film as a tool for national development that the Federal Government in 1979, established the Nigerian Film Corporation. According to Ohiri,

> in 1982 following the Enabling Act, the Nigerian Film Corporation was established by the President Shehu Shagari administration. Under the Shagari administration, the National Film Distribution Company (NFDC) was also established and equipped to take over the film distribution from American Motion Picture Export Company (AMPEC) (56).

In 1980s, immediately after the establishment of Nigerian Film Corporation, the economy was adversely affected because of falling oil prices and austerity measures challenges, which made film production with celluloid very expensive. However, the Military regimes that succeded Shehu Shagari reduced funding and support for the arts, propelling filmmakers to become more independent and entrepreneurial, this act also lead to the rise of Nollywood in Nigeria. Onuzulike added that;

> The Nollywood emerged as a result of several factors, one being economy. The cost of video technology, coupled with greater awareness and demand for home entertainment, led to the rise of video film producers. In addition, the military government and the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) further affected the economy, resulting in reduced funding for celluloid productions (178).

Chukwuemeka Ojukwu and P.E Ezenandu coined "Nollywood following the style of Hollywood (referring to the American film industry) and Bollywood (referring to the Indian film industry). Nollywood is the generic name for the Nigerian film industry" (21-22).

A breakthrough came with the 1992 release of *Living in Bondage,* made on a low budget using a hand-held video camera and distributed on VHS tapes. According to Oyewole Sandra and Olajide Oyewole,

> The direct-to-video (VHS, VCD and DVD) distribution system, which is a hallmark of Nollywood, was triggered in 1992 with the film, *Living in Bondage*, the first commercially successful movie shot straight-to-video. It heralded a new era of Nigerian filmmaking (2).

Its huge success showed that movies could be produced easily using cheap equipment for a mass market, sparking a boom in home video production and creating the Nollywood phenomenon.

This era did not start initially as Nollywood, but just a film industry operating in the trend of a new technology. Citing Ola Balogun in Gloria and Uchenna, he sees "the concept of Nollywood as a derogation of the Nigerian film industry, which reflects a low-cost approach to film-making that is accustomed to cutting corners and economizing on quality and content" (175). Alawode and Fatonji state that,

> Nollywood was given impetus in 1992 when businessman Kenneth Nnebue wanted to sell a large shipment of videocassettes from Taiwan and decided they would sell faster if they had something on them. The production of *Living in Bondage* thus gave birth to what became the second largest industry in Nigeria after agriculture (62).

Furthermore, Helena Barnard and Toumi Krista state that, Other filmmakers soon followed Nnebue s footsteps and over the past years, Nollywood has grown to become the third most prolific film industry after Hollywood and Bollywood in terms of number of titles released annually (19). Nollywood is getting cosmopolitanism, international collaboration and acceptance as Alessandro Jedlowski reveals that:

> Three films in particular can be seen as the avant-garde of the new wave: Jeta Amata''s The Amazing Grace in 2006, Kunle Afolayan''s Irapada in 2007, and Stephanie Okereke''s Through the Glass in 2007. These films represent three different levels at which processes of transnationalization are transforming the video industry: modes of production, audiences, and settings (37).

It is apparent that cinema culture in which some producers participate, involves premiering video films to recoup their investment before releasing the motion pictures to distributors. However, the use of Computer-Generated Imagdry (CGI) in Nollywood in 2020 arose primarily from the need to enhance Nigerian films to compete globally. Nigeria Filmmakers employed CGI to create visually stunning effects, especially for epic or fictional genres, which traditional filming methods could not easily achieve.

Overview and Emergence of Computer-Generated Imagery

According to Quartz reported that, the use of Computer-Generated Images (CGI) and animation in Nollywood is traceable to specific pioneering films and projects, *Lady Buckit* and *The Motley Mopsters* (LBMM), released in December 2020 (np). These two movies are recognized as Nigeria`s first feature-length animated films, marking a major milestone for the industry and the use of CGI in Nigeria cinema. Furthermore, CGI functions as a digital visual effects tool that allow filmmakers to create still or animated images because it enables (i) Creation of fantastical worlds, creatures and characters. (ii) Realistic simulations of environments and physical phenomena. (iii) Enhancement of live action footage and Expansion of storytelling possibilities beyond physical and practical constraints. There are quite a number of Nigerian films that incorporated the use of CGI, such as *Lady Buckit*, the *Motley Mopsters, Iwaju, Jagun Jagun* and *The Village Wizard*.

Computer-generated imagery (CGI) is increasingly being used in Nollywood films to enhance visual storytelling and production quality, allowing the creation of fantastical scenes and the depiction of impossible events to film realistically. While CGI has improved Nollywood's global competitiveness, it also presents challenges like the potential overshadowing of narrative depth and cultural authenticity if overused. According to Uchechukwu Chimezie Ajiwe and Stella Uchenna Nwofor,

> The application of CGI in creating iconographic characters that are easily understood when viewing animated films. Just as Nollywood narratives are constructs of its socio-cultural ideologies, similarly, animated narratives are being explored in promoting the divers' rich cultural values of the Nigerian people (2).

The emergence of CGI is breaking grounds in relative realities in Nollywood movies both in promoting cultures and depiction of sophisticated environments that might be difficult to project in film. Au Kristin posit that,

> With the development of computer graphics, animations have become more realistic, thus making it easier for audiences to relate to storylines and empathize with characters. In the past, cartoons did not require a realistic element allowed greater flexibility to creative and artistic portrayals of objects, animals, and people. Arguably now, with higher quality computer-generated images (CGI), animations could now reach new heights in the portrayal of realism using 3D techniques (9).

The emergence of CGI and its application to film has drastically evolved the display of a new technological era in filmmaking and serves as a realistic nexus between storyline and the audience, hence drawing the audience close to the characters. Furthermore, the use of CGI creates sensual phenomenon visual attractions, which the fusion of applicable CGI in filmmaking narrative enhances the dramatic tension and temporarily helps the audience to escape it.

Synopsis of *Anikulpo*

Aníkúlápó (2022) is a Nigerian epic film directed and produced by Kunle Afolayan and KAP Production. The film is a one-hour, eleven-minute classic, set in the past in Oyo and Ojumo. It features stereotypical characters and chronologically revolves around the fate of Saro (Kunle Remi) and Arolake (Bimbo Ademoye). The film begins with the arrival of Saro, a stranger and traditional textile weaver who (Saro) wore the "aso-oke" loom to Oyo. Similarly, Arolake appears within an embellished palace as a young queen who, despite disinterest in marrying the king, is favoured and authorized to spend her nights with the king. That automatically forces her senior queens to see her as a serious rival, hence, they hate, abuse and constantly ridicule her in envy and displeasure for being the king's favourite queen. The plot sequentially develops, full of intrigues and conflicts of interest as Arolake and Saro secretly indulge in an illicit relationship.

Soon, the king gets wind of Arolake and Saro's illicit affair and their plan to elope. He orders Saro's immediate death as

a penalty for his errant act. Saro is mysteriously resurrected by Akala, the mythical bird and is assisted by Arolake to gain spiritual power to resurrect the dead through a stolen magic gourd that enables him to become Aníkúlápó (one that holds death in his purse). Saro, now popular in his new village-Ojumo, begins to exhibit excess pride and to lust after other women. He betrays Arolake by impregnating and marrying her maid because she is barren. His hubris begins to make him make inordinate demands on the villagers before he can raise the dead. Saro's demand to be married to the princess as a price to resurrect the king's heir angers Arolake and she weakens his source of power and thereafter, deserts him.

The themes in *Anikulapo* include cultural belief, hubris, greed, religion, envy, love, and betrayal among others. The film contains imageries that are techno-scientifically embellished as auteur, mis-en-scene, lighting, colour and algorithmic video editing effects. These precisely include imagery and symbols such as 'Akala the mythical bird', 'the magic gourd', idols totems, relics, pictures, props, costume and artifact which is used to define the film`s contents, structure, locales, attitudes of the characters, culture, belief and reasons behind their acts.

Use of Computer-Generated Imagery in *Anikulapo*

Aníkúlápó opens with an exterior long shot that gradually establishes a forest in a village. A dead man and an ancient, powerful black bird that hovers over and briefly stands next to the corpse are highlighted by the camera angle, mise-en-scène, audio, lighting, and algorithmic editing effects. Shortly after that scene, an off-screen voice recalls an ancient Yoruba belief in which the dead were never buried but dumped in the evil forest. It tells how the great black bird, Akala, resurrects the dead if it occurs untimely. The film makes perfect use of 'the 5Cs of Cinematography' (Camera angle, Continuity, Cutting, Close-ups, and Composition) and other film elements such as, volume technology, spectacles, audio, and light effects to achieve its motif.

Given the evidence of computer-generated images (CGI) in *Aníkúlápó*, as seen in the appearance, disappearance, and resurrection of the dead by Akala, the mythical black bird in *Aníkúlápó*. When Saro uses the Aníkúlápó egg to bring the dead back to life, CGI effects show glowing light and ethereal energy surrounding the revived characters, visually representing the magical power of the egg. Aníkúlápó' egg itself is represented with detailed CGI glow and texture, highlighting its significance as a powerful mystical object.
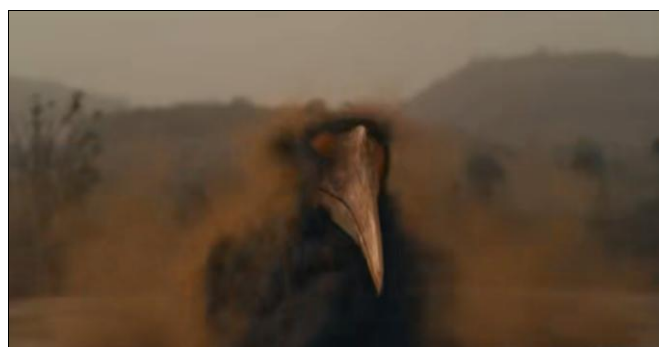
Given instances from the resurrection scenes, the process through which Saro resurrects the dead is visually dramatized with special effects that enhance the magical realism, the use of light glows, energy waves, whereby dramatizing the idea of controlling life and death. The Akala Bird`s return transfer of power, the bird appears in an ominous storm like atmosphere, accompanied by whirling winds and glowing red eyes, the sky darkens unnaturally, and CGI winds toss leaves and sand around.

Synopsis of the Movie *Lisabi*

Lisabi is a 2024 Nigerian historical epic movie, directed by Niyi Akinmolayan, AND produced by Lateef Adedimeji set in 18th-century southwestern Nigeria during the oppressive reign of the Oyo Empire. The movie starred Lateef Adedimeji as *Lisabi* Agbongbo-Akala, Mr Macaroni as Osokenu, Ibrahim Chatta as Sangodeyi and Odunlade Adekola as Alaafin of Oyo. The film is inspired by the true story of Lisabi Agbongbo-Akala and the Egba people's rebellion against Oyo rule. It was shot in Abeokuta and surrounding areas for authenticity.

The story unfolds in Egba land, where the Alaafin of Oyo and his brutal tribute collectors, led by Sangodeyi, oppress the people through excessive tribute demands, violence, and abuse. Sangodeyi rapes Abebi, the bride-to-be of the farmer Osokenu, and unable to bear the humiliation, she takes her own life. Osokenu, seeking revenge, kills several tribute collectors but is ultimately killed himself. His close friend Lisabi, deeply affected by his death, becomes determined to free his people. Lisabi organizes the farmers into the Aaro society, a communal work group that secretly plans rebellion. Through strategic leadership and unity, Lisabi plans and leads the Egba people in an uprising, culminating in a dramatic battle that secures their independence from the Oyo Empire.

Use of Computer-Generated Imagery in *Lisabi*,

In *Lisabi,* the CGI effects diminish from the storytelling. The place of CGI is ambitious, enhance to actualize large-scale battles, magical elements features, and historical settings that would have been impossible to achieve, thus expanding the film's visual scope and supporting the epic narrative. However, the quality of the CGI in the movie is inconsistent, especially in key action sequences, where it sometimes stands out rather than blending seamlessly with live-action footage.

For instance, in the uprising scenes, A group of warriors engages in battle with supernatural energy power, slowed motion and magical weapons but unfortunately, the energy blasts and slow-motion action are not fluid, with awkward pacing and frame glitches and the camera angle does not align well with the CGI overlays, so arrows or fireballs fly at strange angles. According to Somi Busola:

> The film triumphed in delivering a narrative steeped in cultural authenticity, commendable performances, and striking cinematography; it falters due to uneven pacing, heavy reliance on disappointing CGI, and lack of emotional resonance in pivotal moments (np).

For instance, in sequence ten the most noticeable inconsistencies occur during the large-scale battles in the film's final sequence. The heavy reliance on CGI for crowd scenes, magical effects, and supernatural elements appear disproportionate and out of place by depicting actors' choppy movement, misaligned overlays, for example the scenario happened in the war scene which results in diminished epic scale thereby affecting the realism built up in earlier parts of the movie. Furthermore, the sequence involving the use of jùjú (charm) and spirituality are marked by the incorporation of magic, charms (jùjú) and spiritual displays using CGI which is underwhelming and visually distracting, failing to match the film's otherwise authentic production design and the excessive use of slow-motion combined with CGI during fight sequences further highlights the artificiality of the effects, disrupting pacing and immersion. For instance, in one sequence Osokenu, is shown as a farmer who is lazy, but shortly after that, he is portrayed as a gallant fighter who defeats multiple enemies using CGI to exaggerate his abilities, which strains believability and draws attention to the visual effects rather than the narrative.

The Future of Nollywood and Computer-Generated Imagery

Today, Nollywood is a $6.4 billion industry, with global presence and acclaimed for its dynamic storytelling enactment and cultural richness. While there are challenges to overcome, the industry's future looks bright, with increasing investment and a growing audience base worldwide. Oluseun Olorunjueda, Oluseye Abiodun Babatunde, and Stephen Fatonji;

As technology continues to advance, filmmakers in Nigeria have embraced technology in some major aspects of film production, and these aspects of production are usually technical in nature. There have been major improvements from the point where filmmakers in Nigeria embraced sophisticated cameras that are designed to give a cinematic look, Television and cinema screen in Nigeria change its outlook, and audiences in Nigeria love the look and feel of those movies has they watch them (19).

However, the use of sophisticated cameras for good cinematic production on cinema screen in Nigeria is the current business of the period for Nigeria filmmakers, actors, directors and producers. Nigeria filmmakers need to shift from the cultural pattern of reflecting a rich encompasses traditional and modern Nigerian life in movie production and employ high technological equipment in filmmaking. For instance, Cameron James in his movie *Avatar: The way of Water* maximizes the use of high technological equipment such as Swing Camera, pioneering 3D tech oby. He also utilizes CGI technology and Simulcam system during the making of the film. According to Skill Lync report of January, 19th, 2023, detailed explanation was made about the technological advances and equipment used in the film;

1. Pioneering 3D technology
Avatar: *Way of the Water,* used a new filming technology known as the Deep X. It was invented by Pawel Achtel and it helped Cameron to film 3D images underwater. This technology significantly reduced the distortion caused by particles in the water and water movement. The Deep X used two UW-Nikkor submersible lenses from Nikon that are perpendicular to each other. These created a 3D image with each camera corresponding to each human eye, giving the movie an unmatched depth perception.

2. Computer Generated Imagery Technology and the Simulcam System-
One of the most important effects in the production of *Avatar: Way of Water* movie series, is the portrayal of fantastical land of Pandora and its flora and fauna. To accurately represent the movement of these creatures with realistic fidelity, Cameron had to rely on computer-generated Imagery technology (np).
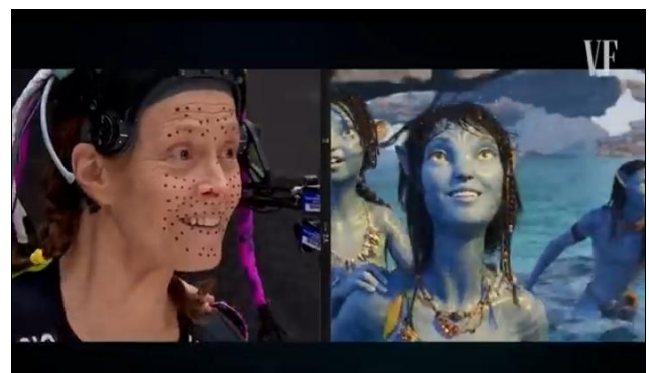
In light of the scenarios above, many Nigerian filmmakers need to transition to using high technological equipment to complement their creative storyline, directorial concepts and production style. However, invented machines like Virtual

Camera System, 3D Fusion Camera System, can be arranged to reduce human activities in filmmaking, especially in actualizing critical scenarios like Live-action 3D footage and the use of two UW-Nikkors for scenes underwater. All these can be actualized if Nigerian filmmakers can consult and collaborate with technological experts in filmmaking. According to Skill Lync;

> Today, movies are a technical battlefield that requires engineers trained in specific skill sets that can help convert the vision of dreamers like James Cameron into reality. Movies today generate vast amounts of data that need to be transported from the camera to the studios, where artists work their magic adding CGI elements to the story. These require data scientists and engineers working on 5G networks to provide reliable transmission for studios (np).

This collaboration can be deduced from Cameron's production pattern. Despite the fact that he is a scientist, yet he partners with other experts such as Alexey Stomakhin, Joel Wretborn, Kevin Blom, Wētā Digital, Wētā FX, and various academic institutions in pursuit of excellence. Nollywood filmmakers should recognize that cooperating with varied technological experts in filmmaking will enable Nigeria's Nollywood to transcend national boundaries and achieve global recognition, endorsement, and acclaim through the integration of CGI in movie creation. Nigerian filmmakers and directors can partner with the government and international organizations for funding, which can enable Nigerian films compete for international recognitions and awards.

Conclusion

This study analyses the use Computer-Generated Imagery in Nigerian Nollywood using *Anikulapo* and *Lisabi*. The utilization of technological developments such as CGI enhances filmmakers` output for exclusive cinematic presentation, economic growth, international acclaim, and technological advancements. However, as technologies continue to revolutionize, they offer exciting opportunities to enhance creativity, streamline production, and engage audiences in innovative ways. This study, therefore recommends that Nigerian Nollywood film producers and directors should collaborate with skilled and technologically acclaimed film makers to effectively modernize local concepts for the worldwide stage and seek financing from the government and reputable private organizations where necessary.

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