Depiction of Banditry in the Political Sphere of Northern Nigeria; An Analysis of Ebony Life Studios Television Series *War, Wrath and Revenge*

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Abstract

A significant function of the mass media is surveillance of society and rendering assistance to Government in providing societal orderliness. Film is a branch of mass media with an advantage due to its audio-visual nature, predominant entertainment function, and provision of getaway from the hardships of daily life for viewers. Although the entertainment function of film overrides any other role it may perform in society, it is nevertheless one of the most subliminal yet potent means of setting agendas on issues, orientating society, and influencing public perception of gender, groups, events, and even nations. *War: Wrath and Revenge* is a Television Drama Series produced by Ebonylife Studios and directed by Dimbo Atiya which premiered on the Netflix streaming platform on the 28th of December 2023. The series is set in contemporary Northern Nigeria with sub-themes of Crime, Love, Betrayal and Insecurity, specifically Banditry infused into the major theme of Politics. Northern Nigeria has challenging development indices with banditry being the most recent of them. The political environment is key to the development or underdevelopmentof any society, especially one battling insecurity. This paper uses the term 'Political Sphere' to describe the arena of intense political activity between influencial political actors, interests and supporters that are features of the political environment of Northern Nigeria. The study is a Structural Analysis and adopts Auteur and Structuralist film theories to analyse the depiction of banditry in *War: Wrath and Revenge* within the Political Sphere of Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Banditry, Depiction, Development, Northern Nigeria, Political Sphere, Representation

Background

Northern Nigeria is composed of nineteen out of the Thirty-Six states of the country including the FCT that is geographically positioned within it, occupying744,249^2 (71%) out of the923,768 km^2 of the country's landmass which is mostly arable land suitable for farming and rearing livestock (StatiSense, 2024). Regretably, the region has the 65% poverty rate (nigerianstat.gov.ng),more than 10.5 million out-of formal school children (unicef.org), amidst a highest birth rate in the country (dhsprogram.com). These statistics emphasize the urgent need for urgent development interventions. Any form of development needs a peaceful environment to thrive and for its impact to be adequately felt making security central to the development of any society. "Nigeria as a country is facing intense

conflicts characterized by violent extremism and insurgency arising from the sense of helplessness, hopelessness, injustice and inequity that pervasive corruption and bad governance promote" (Tahir and Bernard, 2021, Pp.1). Over the past two decades, this multi-dimensional insecurity has become more prevalent with the northern side of the country being most affected (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

These security concerns range from Terrorism, Banditry, and recently Kidnapping that have succeeded in crippling a region already challenged by a high poverty rate, non-enrolment of millions of children into formal education, lack of infrastructure, and population explosion without the corresponding development reforms. Emanating from a few states, certain communities, and specific forms, the security pandemic has gradually spread to encompass most parts of Northern Nigeria in differing dimensions (Gaberial & Joseph, 2016; Ojo et al., 2023). The meaningful existence of the region is continuously being threatened by constant armed attacks, killings of citizens, abduction, and rape of young people and women, and the inability to farm or rear livestock. The resultant effect is so many deserted communities and millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) all over the north and even in neighbouring countries (Ojo et al., 2023). There is an urgent need for all stakeholders to come together and provide multidisciplinary, multi-sectoral, multidimensional, and collaborative interventions to stifle this destructive wildfire that presents a bleak future for northern Nigeria.

Surveillance in physical, technological, or textual forms reduces crime because human beings are more prone to committing negative actions away from the public gaze. Security agencies mount sentinels, install surveillance cameras, and patrol areas as a means of curbing crime. The mass media, though not a law enforcement agency, functions as a surveillance force for societal orderliness and can utilise this function to kickstart conversation, draw attention to issues of concern, and instigate positive action (McQuail, 2010). Since its invention, the persuasive and influencing role of the mass media has never been an issue of contention; the argument among scholars has always been about the extent of this impact (Baran & Davis, 2011). Film is a branch of mass media with an advantage over other traditional mass media due to its audio-visuality and the entertainment function which provides a getaway from the hardships of daily life. Film is also one of the most subliminal yet potent means of setting agendas on issues, societal reorientation, and influencing the perception of gender, groups, events, and even nations (McQuail, 2010).

Insecurity is facilitated by people and groups that engage in it mostly for selfish reasons such as political, religious, ethnic, or financial gain. Insecurity actors may also harness it as a last resort to getting their voices heard while others may support it out of ignorance or even nonchalance (Ojo et al., 2023). Society sometimes protects criminals and abet their activities by refusing to provide information because of shared relationships. Communication, if properly harnessed, can kickstart the process of countering the challenge by directing public discourse on the factors behind the menace, influencing attitudinal change and instigating positive action from both citizens and the government.

Statement of the Problem

Nations of the world are competing to achieve food sufficiency, have technological supremacy, adequately manage population explosion, utilise the population to spiral economies, arrive at set visions and possess global influence. Nigeria, as the most prominent black nation in the world with a projected population of over 200 million, has found itself in a dicey situation unable to adequately partake in the global competition due to perennial insecurity amongst other challenges. Northern Nigeria is composed of nineteen out of the Thirty-Six states of the country includingthe FCT that is geographically positioned within it, occupying 744,249^2 (71%) out of the 923,768 km^2 of the country's landmass which is mostly arable land suitable for farming and rearing livestock (StatiSense, 2024). Regretably, the region has 65% poverty rate (nigerianstat.gov.ng), more than 10.5 million out-of formal school children (unicef.org), amidst the highest birth rate in the country (dhsprogram.com) and of recent perennial insecurity in various dimensions.These statistics emphasize the urgent need for urgent and strategic development intervention by an intentional government. Northern Nigeria is also renowned for having a versatile political environment full of influential political actors and politically conscious and participatory citizens which this paper refers to as the 'Political Sphere' and defines as an arena of intense political activity (Bruhns & Duran, 2009). What role does the Political Sphere play in the economic and social spheres of the region, and how can it be positioned to mitigate the present security challenges? Therefore, the study is aimed to analyze the Depiction of Banditry in the Political Sphere of Northern Nigeria in the Television Series*War; Wrath and Revenge* using the Auteur and Structuralist Film Theories.

Theoretical Framework

Films can be analyzed as cultural texts that give insight into society by reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms, values, and ideologies and to understand the

significance of film in society, the historical, social, and political contexts in which films are produced and consumed must be understood Metz describes the cinema as an 'imaginary signified' that may not accurately represent people, groups or issues (Baran & Davis, 2011; Branco. 2022; McQuail, 2010).

This study is anchored on the Structuralism and Auteur Film theories. Structuralism has its roots in the works of notable anthropologist Claud Levi-Strauss, who argued that all cultures have underlying systems of meaning in their structure, which can only be analyzed through a deeper study of the branches of this structure, such as rituals, myths, and symbols. Earliest film scholars, Christian Metz and Roland Barthes expanded the arguments of Levi-Strauss to apply to film studies and establish that film is more than just a mere source of entertainment. The theory postulates that film is not linear and neither is it a mere source of entertainment but a versatile media of expression embedded with so many salient messages, codes, conventions, hidden structures, principles, and events that govern many aspects of our lives (Aumont & Marie, 1998). Structuralism seeks to decode the codes and conventions that shape the film experience; examine how mis-e-scene and other small details contribute to the whole message in the film; unravel the structures used to send messages to the audience; and uncover underlying structures that guide human thought and culture (Branco, 2022; Rushton & Bettinson, 2000). Structuralism further argues that films are constructed according to underlying structures and codes that govern their meaning and interpretation and that a careful analysis of the relationships between different elements of a film, such as narrative, imagery, and sound, to uncover the hidden meanings embedded within is needed in film analysis (Baran & Davis, 2011; Branco. 2022; McQuail, 2010).

The Auteur theory proposes that a film director is the most important creative factor behind a film. French film theorists, Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc argue that a film director brings his imagination to reality by bringing together the cast and crew, who will combine the visual, audio, graphic, and editing elements and the entire mise-en-scene to bring forth a meaningful story. Later scholars such as Jean Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut further contributed to the arguments of Bazin and Astruc, and American film critic Andrew George Sarris coined the term 'Auteur Theory' in "Notes on the Auteur Theory" (1962). Sarris identifies the three premises of the theory as the technical competency of Auteur, what he calls the signature style which reveals the significant style of the director and third, the interior meaning of the Auteur which is the director's personality

and attitude toward life which manifests through his work (Jill, 2003; Sarris, 2004; Wollen, 1972).

Therefore, the Auteur and Structuralist Film theories serve as a good foundation for this paper, because the two theories together seek to unearth the salient messages, codes, conventions, hidden structures, principles and the role of the director in the political, social and cultural contexts behind the production of*War; Wrath and Revenge*.

Literature Review

Film, Representation and the Depiction of Banditry

Film is audio-visual storytelling and documentation of people, issues, events, cultures, groups, and societies. Films replicate the sensation of life; evoke emotions and can turn any person, thing, place and event into a story (Jerslev, 2002). Film involves the expression of illusion, a resemblance, of a symbolic system, and how all of these are projected in a story is known as Representation which is a major area of discourse in media studies because of its influence on meaning-making and propagation of ideas (May, 2018). People seem to see quite literally, the world through the camera, and Representation matters so the whole story can be told (O'Pray, 2004). In the global 21st century of content overload, "our visual culture can play a crucial role in the way we understand the world" (Khosroshahi, 2019). There is global attention on issues of inclusivity where every race, language, religion and identity demands a fair and accurate representation. The importance of seeing a reflection of ourselves in the media is more pressing on the media and film by extension (Wash, 2019). Therefore, film can challenge or reinforce existing perceptions, stereotypes, knowledge and understanding of people and events.

"Theories of representation argue that media products are not faithful or accurate reflections of reality because producers will always have to make important decisions about how the text is constructed". The theories further argue that subjectivity and bias are always laced with the entire media production process in various stages and forms. The manner in which people, places, ideas, issues and events are presented to the audience is shaped by the storyline, camera angles, editing process, narrative structure, montage and music that accompanies the video (Branco, 2022).

"Cinema, together with television, has proven to be perhaps the most extensive, popular, and powerful medium in the representation of crime" (Spina, 2017:

Pp.1). Criminologists such as Spina argue that the representation of crime, law, justice, and punishment in films becomes culture, acquires meaning, and interprets reality to the audience.

During the Golden Age of American cinema (1920-1960), the film industry had an intimate connection with the emotions of American people and the nation's consciousness (Bergman, 1971). The portrayal of crime in Hollywood evolved in stages. The first stage was the romanticization of crime during the prohibition because although the criminals get killed in the end, they enjoy a life of opulent wealth first, which suggests that crime pays because everyone is ultimately going to die (Woodiwiss, 1990). In 1933, there were 9.7 murders for every 100,000 Americans, and the statistics doubled in two decades (Pitney, 1998, Pp. 47). Crime-filled entertainment, and the soaring crime rate ignited the period of strong effect studies by Sociologists and media scholars who theorised the role of the mass media, especially film, on criminal behaviour. The film industries toned down the portrayal of organised crime, also showing the influence of their actions on society, depicting them as immigrants and "un-American" and in what Schlesinger refers to as a third stage, the film industry evolved to the portrayal of crime from the law enforcement perspective.

The Nigerian film industry (Nollywood) is the third largest in the world in terms of production size and has made its way into most Nigerian homes and is criticised for its common storylines which promote the get-rich-soon syndrome, opulence, fraud, prostitution and ritual killings while undermining patriotism and national interest. Although, the industry has become more professional, as evident in the improved quality of production and storyline, Nigeria is currently battling a high rate of unemployment, a large number of fraudulent young men (*Yahoo Boys*), a rise in ritual killings among teenage boys and young adults, prostitution and hook-up culture among young girls and it is difficult to disassociate these challenges from what young people have grown up seeing on screen (Mohammed, 2016). It is evident that the film industry can be used as a national treasure to brand a nation and assist attitudinal change or as a recruitment ground for crime. Banditry, Terrorism and Insurgency are the most recent challenges bedevilling the nation and how they are depicted matters, because film when properly harnessed, becomes a sensitization platform, a means of social surveillance and a moral tool for influencing public attitude and behaviour change by presenting viewers with characters, choices and consequences that mimic their experiences and which they may not have previously considered (Branco, 2022).

History and Factors behind Banditry

The term Bandit originates from the Italian word 'bandito', meaning a banned person, and was used as far back as 1885 in reference to members of organized outlaws that dominated mountainous towns of Italy, Sicily, Spain, Greece, Iran, and Turkey". A bandit is, therefore, an outlaw who uses threats or violence to engage in robbery, rape, kidnappings, murder and general breakdown of law and order. Bandits may be groups of young men, landless peasants, military deserters or rebels that oppose an existing system of governance.

Banditry is a flexible term which describes organized crime and may refer to gangsterism, insurgency, terrorism, piracy, rebellion, robbery and any other criminal activity. Renowned Marxist Historian and scholar Eric Hobsbawm states that bandity can be Epidemic banditry which occurs in society during periods of extreme social transformation, natural challenges, policy shifts and social change, or Endemic banditry that is persistent and becomes a permanent feature of the social structure. Hobsbawm's main interest is what he calls social banditry, which mostly occurs and implants in close-knit societies with traditional feudal structures and strengthened in times of economic pressure and social transformation. (Hobswawm, 1972, Pp. 22). He also sees it as a phenomenon that mostly occurs in the face of oppression, exploitation by bad leadership and the emergence of capitalism (Hobswawm, 1972: Pp. 20). Social bandits are peasant outlaws who remain within the society and may be regarded as heroes, champions, or even freedom fighters or seekers of justice for the mostly rural society that ends up aiding and abetting their actions because they consider them an extension of the society. Hobsbawm gives one major differentiating factor between social bandits and other types of bandits which is a lack of association and preying on the peasant class.

Social banditry is a widespread phenomenon in many societies throughout recorded history. All forms of social banditry still exist, as evidenced by existing organized crime syndicates all over the world. In Asia, there is documentary evidence of banditry in China, Chile, the Northeast Region of Brazil and India. Between 1368 and 1644 in Ming, China, banditry referred to as Dao or Qiangdao, was defined by the Ming government as "'robbery by force' and was punishable by death." The origin of *Dao* was recurrent famine and subsequent hardship in a predominantly agrarian fourteenth-century China that posed the difficult decision between starvation and crime for peasants. The second factor was poorly supervised soldiers with access to arms who became highwaymen, robbing travellers and villagers and the third was the inability of the government to punish

bandits because some of the chief outlaws lived very openly flamboyant and influential lives (Tong, 1995). By 1930, there were more than twenty million bandits in Ming, China, and capital punishment had to be enforced as a deterrent. Dacoity (Hindi for banditry) existed in India, especially in the rural areas, as a form of resistance to the legal system. Dacoits pillaged and ruled over communities, in addition to engaging in all sorts of crime (Dmella, 2018).

In Europe, banditry is documented in several countries. In the Roman Empire, the Bagaudae were bandits that operated around the Pyrenes. The Abrek were Russian guerilla raiders in the North Caucasus, the Betyárs in the Kingdom of Hungary, and Ottoman fighters in Greece, Cyprus, and Croatia. Most notable in Europe are the Brigands of Sicily and Southern Italy. Pope Sixtus V had about 5,000 bandits executed during the five years before his death, yet there were reportedly 27,000 throughout Central Italy when he died in 1590. Banditry or brigandry, while existing in Italy since pre-historic times, became particularly widespread in Southern Italy following the Unification of Italy in the 1860s and continued into the 1870s, with brigands such as Giuseppe Musolino and Francesco Paolo Varsallona forming gangs at the turn of the 20th century. Salvatore Giuliano and Gaspare Pisciotta formed a brigand group in Sicily in the 1940s and were regarded as folk heroes. Sardinia has a long history of banditry, with the bandit and kidnapping group, *anonimasarda* being the most recent manifestation of this phenomenon. In Nazi-occupied Europe from 1939 to 1945, the German doctrine of *Bandenbekämpfung* ("bandit fighting") portrayed opponents of the Greater Germanic Reich as 'bandits', a term which defined them as dangerous criminals undeserving of any human treatment. (Westermann, 2005).

In North America, banditry is mostly documented as cattle and horse raiding, dating back to when pioneer Americans settled down. As the country expanded from the east to the west coast, crime syndicates existed in the 'New World'. The most notable period of the rise of organised crime, such as Gangsterism, Bank Robbery and Kidnapping, was the 1920s and was worsened by the Great Depression of the 1930s. Notable criminals were gansters and bank robber, John Dillinger, bank robber and murderer George Nelson (Baby Face), ganster and kidnapper, Machine Gun Kelly, bank robber Pretty Boy Floyd and Ma Barker (mother of many criminals), among others. Gangsters or mobsters belonged to organized crime rings, and many of these criminal gangs were protected by urban politicians and police. The 'Italian Mafia' or 'The Family' as it called itself, was

the largest outlaw gang which saturated the security, government and operated blatantly.

In 1942, the *Normandie,* a captured French ship was allegedly sabotaged and sunk by arson in the Port of New York. The US government passed it off as an accident, but a mafia boss, Albert Anastasia, claimed responsibility. The United States government reportedly had to partner with the mafia and a Jewish organised crime syndicate in what was codenamed *Operation Underworld* from 1942 to 1945 to secure the U.S. shores. Luciano, another mafia boss who had earlier been convicted in 1936 for running a prostitution cartel, agreed to cooperate with authorities in hopes of considering a reduction of his sentence. Though there is no documented proof of this collaboration, Luciano was moved to a more convenient and comfortable open prison in Great Meadows in May 1942 and by 1946, after serving nine years, his sentence was commuted and he was deported to Italy and died in Naples in 1962. The challenges the US faced with organised crime in the early part of the 20th Century led to the evolution and strengthening of the United States security network into the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) led by John Edgar Hoover from 1935-1972 who built it into a modern crime-fighting force (Campbel, 1977; Lupo, 2009; Newark, 2007).

Banditry in Latin America during the 19th and 20th centuries was a political rebellion in some instances and an economic alternative in instances of limited opportunity, which involved attacks on both people and property. In countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Mexico, Cuba, Columbia and Peru outlaws were considered heroes of the masses who were out to defy the rich members of the society, oppressing the poor. Most of the banditry which occurred in 19th-century South America was due to a lack of legitimate means among the rural poor. In most scenarios, most bandits also claim community interest to confer legitimacy to their criminal actions masking personal interests such as thirst for power, relevance and wealth. Sometimes, bandits received more support from local elites and other times from peasants, depending on which grounds they claim to commit their offences (Baker, 2015).

Banditry in pre-colonial Africa has existed in forms of resistance to leadership, robbers that waylay travellers and social miscreants, but there are not many documented episodes of banditry in the pre-colonial era. This may be based on the fact that many of the actions regarded as criminal in contemporary times such as smuggling, tax evasion, arms trafficking, human trafficking and illegal migration were common and socially acceptable in the pre-colonial era. Therefore, most

documented literature on organised crime in African societies can be traced to the post-colonial era that brought massive social transformation. Before the coming of the Europeans, most of Africa already had an established system of government and was home to notable civilisations such as the Kanem-Borno Empire, the Mali Empire, the Bini Empire. These African systems had existing social, educational, political and economic systems which were eroded by colonial imperialism. Colonialisation introduced new occupations, system of education, a centralised system of tax collection, abandonment of traditional occupations, high inflation, insufficient wage system, urbanisation, free movement among countries which led to identity crises among African people, communities and nations. After the emergence of self-rule in Africa, more challenges emerged, such as increased migration, movement of firearms, poor leadership decisions and policies and, most of all, systemic corruption.This sudden social transformation gave rise to many forms of crimes and in contemporary Africa, drug trafficking, money laundering, arms manufacturing and trafficking, human trafficking, advance fee fraud (*419*), armed robbery, oil bunkering, piracy, counterfeit food and drug manufacturing, organ harvesting, smuggling and, of recent terrorism, militancy, kidnapping and insurgency are the many forms of organised crime (Alemika, 2013; Burton, 2004).

Bandity in North-West Nigeria

Northern Nigeria used to be a peaceful region with a common conservative culture that promoted scorn for crime and illegal wealth acquisition. The predominantly agrarian society was engaged in farming and other indigenous occupations passed down through generations and was renowned for its sense of dignity and pride in contentment. Although there was a low level of western education, most inhabitants were literate in Arabic and Islamic knowledge and had a working political system.

The 21st century came with massive social transformation, and northern Nigeria was not unaffected. The inability of the region to adequately evolve and prepare for this social change has resulted in the complete collapse of its old system and has left it staggering under so many contemporary challenges. The north is ravaged by uncontrolled levels of organised crime that have spiralled out of control and resulted in major displacement of farming and herding communities. The emergence of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the North East has led to the death of hundreds of thousands and displacement of millions of people across hundreds of communities in the region. Climate change and tampering of grazing routes have forced more herdsmen to the North-Central region, instigating

persistent crises between farmers and herders with different cultural backgrounds in the last few decades. The most recent is the eruption of violence in the North-West, which started as petty cattle theft in the early 21st century in emerging ranches which seemed like a monopolistic resistance by the fulani herders towards people they are encroaching into their indigenous profession. The cattle theft gradually cascaded onto the fulani herders and so many herdsmen lost their cattle to the rustlers and were left jobless, without asset, uneducated and unskilled (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). These aggrieved and unemployed herdsmen became easy recruits for organised crime syndicates starting off as rural miscreants, these armed groups have become gradually sophisticated, taking over whole communities, killing and abducting villagers, travellers and even school children in their hundreds. Massive proliferation of communication devices, hard drugs and sophisticated arms continues to fuel armed banditry across the region including but not limited to unchecked migration of foreign bandits, indigene-settler disputes, farmer-herder crises, exploitative interest in natural resources, political interests, bad leadership decisions on citizen welfare, inability to meet up with development goals, too many out-of-school children, poor investment in northern communities, unemployment, a poor reward system for hard work, poor education system, poor planning ahead of societal transformation such as the inability to settle herdsmen into modern ranching, wealth gratification in the society, bad leadership and injustice among others.

There is no generally agreed data on bandits, however, Ojo, Oyewole and Aina (2023) give an estimated no of 30,000 bandits across 120 bandit camps possessing more than 60,000 AK47 guns. The different groups come out to operate and then go back into the various large forests scattered across northern Nigeria specifically Sambisa, Kunduna, Balmo, Kagoro, Subusdu, Falgore, Kuyanbana, Kamuku, Ruma, Kabakawa, Idu/GwaGwa forests which they have turned into bandit settlements to shelter from the Nigerian military (Ladan, 2015). Between 2018 and 2020, armed banditry has caused at least 4,900 deaths, thousands of kidnapping cases for ransomand generated millions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the North (Ojo et al., 2023, Pp.2). Although bandits are predominantly portrayed as herdsmen, there is a clear involvement of anonymous sponsors from other ethnic groups, beneficiaries, informants, suppliers and professionals such as medical, financial and security personnel facilitating and abetting their operations (Tahir & Bernard, 2021; Gaberial & Joseph, 2016; Ojo et al., 2023).

The Series *War*: *Wrath and Revenge*

War: Wrath and Revenge is a 213-minute, Six-Episode Television Drama Series that premiered on Netflix on the 28th of December 2023. The series is a sequel to the previously aired sixteen-episode *Sons of the Caliphate* that ran on Netflix for two seasons and is set in contemporary Hausa Northern Nigeria with a major theme of politics laced with sub-themes of love, crime, betrayal and insecurity, specifically banditry.

The storyline revolves around the lives of three prominent families of Kowa, namely, the Bula, Loko and Kowa Royal families and the main protagonist of the story, a young woman called Binta. Khalifa Maiyaki (current Emir of Kowa), Diko Loko (General Loko's son and fugitive) and Nuhu Bula (son of the influencial Bula family and current Gubernatorial Aspirant of Kowa) were once the best of friends, shared many escapades and even killed a man in a hit and run accident many years ago. The man was Binta's father and even though she is now married to Nuhu Bula, she seeks revenge and casts her wrath on the trio whenever it favours her. The friends have fallen apart due to political and economic interests and even fight each other in the power play that is the political environment of Kowa.

Governor Sanusi is the incumbent Governor who will stop at nothing to return to his seat and corner the jewel rich deposits of Nanji village for himself even if it means using bandits to repeatedly kill the citizens and disperse them from the village. Nuhu contests for Governor of Kowa and seems genuinely interested in the development of the state but ironically Khalifa shuns Nuhu's aspirations and chooses to work for Sanusi's return because of the economic benefit he will get. Binta Bula and Buba Koda who is Khalifa's uncle connive to crash the private jet he hires from Kama Aviation. Although the CEO of Kama Aviation is Binta's friend and Buba's girlfriend, she is unaware that the plane crash is not an accident. Hamza Maiyaki is Sanusi's choice for Emir after Khalifa dies in the plane crash and although Buba Koda is eligible, he expresses his disinterest in theEmirship.

After the assassination of Khalifa, Sanusi loses the support of the emirate and Nuhu's popularity soars and in desperation he (Sanusi) orders the bandits to kill Nuhu by bombing the venue of the fundraiser but the assasination attempt is thwarted by the Police led by ASP Miriam Katung, an upright police officer, who is attached to Bula as his personal security. When the assasination attempt fails, Sanusi requests Sambisa, the bandit leader to seek out Diko Loko out from hiding as the last resort to get Nuhu out of the political race. Diko strikes a deal with the

Governor for 15% of the jewels in Nanji and proceeds to blackmails the Bula with proof of Binta's attempt on his life. As a result, the Bula's face a trying time coupled with the death of Buba's mistress Amal, who he accidentally kills and Nuhu makes up his mind to withdraw from the race. However, Binta does not give up and finds out Diko is married to and even has a baby with Nafisa who is his former stepmother and her former partner in crime and proceeds to kidnap her and the baby. Binta requests all incriminating proof from Diko in exchange for his family and a hopeless Diko had to return to his father, seeks his help and the police gets involved.

ASP Katung who learns of Nafisa's kidnap attempts to save her but Nafisa is shot and killed in the process. The exchange mission between Diko and Binta turns out to be bloody when Diko learns of Nafisa's death, Binta is taken into custody by the Police while Diko escapes. Although the Police has tangible proof of their engagement in crime, a single call from the Presidency has all charges withdrawn and even an apology for inconveniences caused. General Loko later poisons and kills Governor Sanusi with a kolanut to protect Diko.

After the airline crash, Kama Aviation faces loss of credibility and pressure from the royal family which forces Alicia Kama to employ the services of Boston Bobby Brown, an internationally renowned aviation investigator to unearth the cause of the plane crash that killed the Emir. Bobby discovers the involvement of Buba Koda, a senior member of the Royal family and her boyfriend. Alicia confronts Buba and discover the real Buba who confesses his crimes and even a ducts her to a house where Sadiya the orphan from Nanji and her mother are also kept because of their knowledge of the mine site. Buba sends Sambisa who now works for him to kill Bobby but is overpowered and forced to make a confession which Bobby records and invites ASP Katung to the scene. They use a captured Sambisa to lead them to rescue Alicia, Sadiya and her mother and Sambisa gets killed.The Police arrest ASP Katung for her unofficial involvement in security issues and Buba plans to silently asassinate her.

Nuhu is winning the election and victory seems certain but Alicia, ASP and Bobby release Sambisa's confession and the secret of Nanji's jewel deposits to the media and Nuhu Bula confirms as true. ASP Katung is released and immediately takes in Nuhu and Binta Bula for questioning. The series conclude with a scene where General Loko goes to visit Binta in the interrogation room and offers her a kolanutlike he did to the late Governor Sanusi, which she accepts leaving viewers in suspense.

Methodology

This study is a structural analysis of the television series, *War, Wrath and Revenge* using the Auteur and Structuralist film theories as a guide to unravel the underlying structures and codes embedded in the series with special focus on the depiction of bandtry within the political sphere of Northern Nigeria. It involves a careful analysis of the relationships between different elements of the film to unearth the salient messages, codes, conventions, hidden structures, principles, events and how mis-e-scene and other small details contribute to the whole message in the film; unravel the structures used to send messages to the audience; the role of the director in achieving this as well as the political, social and cultural contexts behind the production and consumption of *War; Wrath and Revenge*.

This paper uses the thematic approach adopting binary oppositions, codes and conventions, cultural references, banditry and the political sphere, and Auteurismas, the six themes that guide the analysis. The study uses narrative analysis with references from the scenes and dialogues where necessary, accompanied by the interpretation. The limitation for all qualitative researches not exempting this study is scholar bias. However, this study will attempt to back every finding and discussion with peer reviewed literature related to the variables under study.

The Analysis

Binary Oppositions

The most glaring Binary Opposition in *War: Wrath and Revenge* is Good vs Evil. Earlier, in *Sons of the Caliphate,* Binta and Governor Sanusi are portrayed as evil people from the beginning of the drama. There was therefore no confusion about their expected role in the series, but only on how it will play out. However, the audience was taken through a roller coaster of seeing clear evil plans while seemingly good people such as Khalifa Maiyaki and Buba Koda later onturned into villians.

Another noticeable contrast in the series is the categorisation of the Good and Evil. All of the indigenous political class, with the exception of Nuhu Bula, who expresses good conscience even in the midst of the power tussle, are evil. They (Khalifa Maiyaki, Governor Sanusi, Buba Koda, Alhaji Loko, Diko Loko and Hamza Maiyaki are portrayed as sons of the soil, i.e., Hausa, Muslim, influential but evil while ASP Katung, Alicia, Boston Bobby Brown, are ironically portrayed as the good, law-abiding, non-indigenes of Kowa, non-Hausa and non-Muslim.

Another binary opposition in the series is the characterisation and classification of gender roles. Women (Binta Bula, ASP Katung and Alicia) take centre stage, with the men playing supporting roles; Nuhu plays a supporting role to Binta, Inspector Rabo to ASP Katung and Boston Bobby Brown to Alicia. The female characters are portrayed as both Good and Evil, Feminine as well as Formidable which is a departure from the commonly assigned female roles in films, especially one set in Northern Nigeria which is a region with a more conservative social system.

Wealth vs Poverty between the political class and citizens is another contrast in the series. The villagers (citizens) have poor infrastructure, poor educational system, no security and limited means of livelihood while the political class swim in opulence. Episode 1 (Scenes 1 and 3) and Episode 4 (Scene 7) shows Nanji village, the jewel-rich land of contention lacking basic infrastructure and the people engaged in illegal mining hoping to get a jewel which they can sell to have a better life. The conversation between Sadiya and her father in Episode 1 Scene 6 shows that he only wanted to sell the stone and fulfil his dream of seeing his daughter become a nurse. The main streets of Kowa town are visible with untarred roads, poor means of transportation, and so many petty traders hawking in unfavourable conditions portraying the poor side of the society and yet, so much opulence is seen in the lives of the political class; the luxurious Government Houses and Palaces. In Episode 1 (Scene 3), the array of food before the Governor, the beautiful brocade robes of the men, the flamboyant clothes Binta wears and the big, luxurious black SUVs used throughout the film were all display of opulence and luxury in a land of so much poverty.

Another contrast is Power vs Helplessness. Those with power will always have a way out of challenges. The political class have access to state sponsored security in their homes and wherever they go, while the poor citizens going about their daily activities are killed and chased out of their homes. In Episode 4, Scene 8, we see Nafisa pleading with Binta not to harm her and the baby, pleading that the past is the past (making reference to Binta's helplessness when the wealthy and young Khalifa, Diko and Nuhu killed her father in a hit and run accident). Binta responds “Men like him make women like me. They thought they were rich and could get away with anything”. This statement shows that Binta sought wealth and power due to the helplessness she once felt as a poor person. In Episode 1, Scene 6, a man recklessly reverses his car and hits the parked car of ASP Katung in Mufti. The misuse of power by a stronger male towards a perceived weaker female is evident with the use of derogatory words like *Karuwa* (Prostitute) and *Yar'iska* (uncouth). The Police officer on duty who suddenly appears also misuses

power by not seeking details but shouting, “Madam, you must cooperate”. The moment ASP Katung pulls out her identity card, introduces herself and directs at the Police officer to arrest the man, there is an immediate power shift with the Police officer immediately moved to obey the superior power, while the earlier arrogant offender immediately falls to his knees, pleading for mercy.

Codes and Conventions

Codes and Conventions in Structuralism are technical and linguistic tools that suggest meaning in media texts. When applied to film studies, they may refer to setting, camera angles, acting, editing, sound, visual composition, mise-en-scene, storyline, graphics, character construction, props, and more.

The opening sequence of *War: Wrath and Revenge* is captivating. The graphics used include a chess board, antique teapots and ornaments, intricate carvings of a vintage car, flowers, a pistol, a picture of royal furniture, heavy drapes and an opulent medieval Ottoman palace and the sound ofa classic Ottoman/oriental composition. The only modern items in the graphics are superimposed pictures of a pistol and an aeroplane. Everything in the opening sequence is in gold, black, silver and a little white, including the title of the film in opulent calligraphic font in the same colours. All of the above signify power, royalty and wealth, the golden pistol may depict violence and the power tussle in the series, while the gold colour signifies the involvement of powerful people in the violence.

The settings portray an urban town and a village. In scene 1 of episode 1, the outskirts of Nanji is clearly northern Nigeria due to the vast plain grassland and plateaus. Sadiya’s home is also a typical northern village with mud huts and tatched roofs. The opening shot of Kowa town shows the Abuja central mosque connoting Islam. scene 6 of episode 1, where ASP Katung has an infraction with a rude motorist, is a typical northern Nigeria town setting with women dressed in veils and Ankara wrappers and men in kaftans. However, nothing in the architecture and decor of the big mansions connotes northern Nigeria. Only the presence of horses which gives an indication of royalty in the series, which are seen in the Polo Club and in front of the palace but the palace of the Emir of Kowa is just another culturally unspecific modern mansion. The mis-e-en scene in the series was primarily wealth and power, as in the opening sequence: big mansions, exotic furniture, good food, expensive clothes, and luxurious vehicles. The showing of a mosque and women in hijab all portray Islam.

Throughout the series, giving of bribes and other corrupt practices are evident, with bags of Nigerian Naira and the American Dollar exchanging hands. The ghana-must-go bag that Governor Sanusi gave to Hamza Maiyaki was the Nigerian official colour of green, as it was also one of the bags given to Amal. This is a possible coincidence or a purposive represention of corruption as a national challenge. Suspense is used in the entire story with the characters being portayed in in a different light and then later undergoing a personality change.

Cultural References

Films are cultural texts that give insight into society by reflecting and reinforcing cultural norms, values, and ideologies. *War: Wrath and Revenge* is set in Northern Nigeria and revolves around many of the issues that affect the region. The characters have northern names; Kutigi, Loko, Diko, and Maiyaki are common names of the North-central region.The attire was predominantly northern; the men were always dressed in Kaftans or Babanrigas, with the embroidered cap used by northern men. However, the cap worn by the man in the mines is the black and white striped woven material of the North Central region.

In the series, only English and Hausa Languages are spoken, depicting a predominantly Hausa society. In Episode 1, the musician at Alicia and Buba's date (Musa Jikan Musa) sang and wore full Hausa native clothes. There is also the use of Hausa proverbs, which connotes an Indigenous Hausa person and deep knowledge of the language. Nuhu opens his campaign event with a Hausa proverb, *Kowa yarainatsayuwarwata, saiyahauyagyara* and Binta also uses another popular proverb *ayikarejinibirijini.*

A mosque is also repeatedly shown, and many of the key actors make Arabic statements that show they are Muslims. Many of the women in the series, even Sadiya (the little girl whose father is killed in the mines) and her mother, are seen wearing Hijab, while the non-Muslims in the series are portrayed as non-Indigenes of Kowa.The showing of a mosque and women in hijab all portray Islam, while certain habits, such as drinking of alcohol, are contrary to the depiction of a notable Muslim home.

Kowa has an emirate system which is a northern feature, as it is the sound of the Algaita commonly played at the palace. The polo club is also a pastime of northern elites, especially those associated with royalty, Buba Koda is repeatedly shown at the polo fields. The bandits are shown swinging sticks and wearing the Arabian *Kaffayeh* (head covering), a feature of fulani nomads, However, Sambisa,

the name of the bandit leader, associates him with northeast Nigeria, allowing the viewers to arrive at a conclusion.

Banditry and the Northern Political Sphere

The portrayal of the Northern Nigerian political sphere in *War: Wrath and Revenge* is an arena where the gladiators' (leaders) groups fight and regroup for political interests, buttressing the popular saying that there are neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies in politics. Emir Khalifa, Diko Loko and Nuhu Bula were best friends in their youth, but as they grew up, interests drifted them to opposite sides of the power play. In Scene 3 of Episode 1, Binta laments the collaboration of Khalifa and Sanusi, *As usual, Khalifa is at every corner, yana la latamanaaikibaya son mu Sanusiyake so, and you are so relaxed about it. You know what I think, we should play dirty, ayiKarejinibirijini.* Nuhu affirms that *Sarki Khalifa is the most powerful man in Kowa, yes he was once my friend, but there is nothing we can do about it.* Binta Bula acts on her threat of playing dirty by *bringing the fucking plane down.* In Scene 14 of episode 5, Buba briefs Alicia of the collaboration between him and Binta, *What is done is done, there is no one to go to, no one's hands are clean my dear, not even your close friend, Binta.... how do you think I found out about Khalifas travel plans? Yes! It was your friend Binta.* When Alicia attempts to escape and Sambisa stops her, Buba also informs her of his new collaboration with Sambisa: *He used to work with Governor Sanusi but now works for me. He even tried to kill me on Governor Sanusi's order, but this is what happens when you find common ground with others, as I am hoping you and I will.*

The film also implies the immense powers that leaders have, unchallenged and determining all other appointments. In scene 12 of episode 5, Binta comforts a dejected Nuhu: *The real power will lie in your hands, in your hands alone.* This power is showcased in Khalifa's influence on who is voted as governor and Governor Sanusi's role in the emergence of a new emir.

The motivation behind the tussle for power is clearly economic gain. Nuhu Bula describes Buba Koda as *one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Kowa and a prominent member of the royal family*. Nuhu tells him of Sadiya, the little girl in Nanji and the precious stone to invoke compassion, not knowing he was fuelling the greed of a man hungry for more wealth at the expense of the impoverished. In Scene 2 of episode 5, Alicia also defines Buba as *a man with no conscience who will tear down anyhing and anyone on his path because he is afraid of not having enough for himself one day.* Alicia also decries the fact that

The Life of this little girl (Sadiya) *and mother shattered forever because some people want to keep everything to themselves (*scene 14, episode 8). In Scene 4 of Episode 6, Buba also explains to Nuhu how the wealth in Nanji will make them very rich and their friends in Abuja, happy. In Scene 2 of episode 2, Nafisa Loko sees Diko with a bag of money but still expresses her desire for *real money, real power* irrespective of how it is gotten. In Scene 3 of episode 1, Binta views the killing at Nanji village as an opportunity at publicity and Nuhu responds *of course, just like a vulture benefitting from the misery of others.* ASP Katung also makes the same comparison of politicians to vultures, *I thought you were someone who wanted to lead not because of what he can get, but because of what he can give but sadly you have turned out to be like all the other vultures* (episode 5, Scene 7).

The leaders, as portrayed in the series, are worse than a vulture that scavenges on corpses beacuse they facilitate and direct the killings of innocent citizens, therefore festering banditry and funding it to be bigger than the state. The incumbent Governor is shown to have a relationship with Bandits, whom he repeatedly orders to unleash carnage on the innocent citizens of Kowa. When Sambisa points out it is time to give an eviction notice to the villagers, the Governor responds: *Eviction order will be given only after I am re-elected. All I need is for you to continue with the killings and chaos, and eventually, the village will clear out, and I will claim the land as planned.* This is a clear expression of total support for bandits to continue pillaging communities as long as the interest of the leaders are met.When Sanusi asked bandits to attack Nanji for a second time, his Personal Assistant points out that the attacks were too close together and may spike public outcry, Sanusi responds that *I didn't become the Governor of Kowa to give a shit about what people think or say about me,* then he personally calls Sambisa and barks, *Do it!* Scene 12 shows how the bandits grow bigger than the state when the person who takes money to Sambisa from Sanusi asks him *Bazakakirgaba*? (won't you confirm the amount) and Sambisa responds with *aiidanbaicikaba (*if it's is incomplete) *the Governor will hear from me.*

War: Wrath and Revenge also shows that corruption cuts across all cadres and levels of government; the Traditional leaders, The Executives, the Security personnel, and worse, they have their *friends in very high places from the Presidency in Abuja* who see the entire society and its common resources as a source of funding, their indulgence while the citizens who lose their lives, source of livelihood and dignity are regarded as *Collateral Damage.* Binta briefs Nuhu about the *friends in very high places who will go to great lenghts to protect their*

investments, while Buba also tells Binta in Scene 18, Episode 6, *It looks like your husband is yet to come to the party. I cannot over stress the importance of him cooperating with our friends in high places.*This subjective friendship ensures the continious subjugation of citizens and protection for the exploiters. When ASP Katung gets Binta and Nuhu in for questioning, the Commisioner of Police hinself directs their release and explains that, *The order came from the Presidency…it could be anyone from there and these are instructions we cannot defy. Something is at play here but we will all do well to look the other way…my hands are tied.* Again in Scene 9 of episode 6, dejected ASP Katung explains that *There is little any of us can do to bring them to justice, they are far too protected.* Bobby thinks going to the press with Sambisa's confession can bring change and she describes the Nigerian justice system perfectly, *It may stir up some scandal, it will end up on social media, do its rounds and then fizzle down* which emphasizes the unfairness of the Nigerian justice system to the poor and ordinary citizens.

Auteurism in War: Wrath and Revenge

Theories of representation argue that media products are not faithful or accurate reflections of reality because subjectivity and bias are always laced with the entire media production process in various stages and forms. A significant form of this bias is the subjectivity of the director, which may be conscious due to ideological desires or subconscious due to perceptions, experiences, personal beliefs and convictions that shape meaning-making of people, societies, events and issues. Buttressing this subjectivity of the film director, are the arguments of the Auteur film theory that considers the director as a major creative force and the author of the film. Representation theories further argue that the manner in which people, places, ideas, issues and events are presented to the audience is shaped by the storyline, camera angles, editing process, narrative structure, montage and music that accompanies the video and which the director is the major determinant of all of them (Branco, 2022).

War: Wrath and Revenge was directed by Dimbo Atiya, a renowned professional who is a native of Nassarawa State located in the North Central region of Nigeria. The series is set in Hausa Muslim Northern Nigeria and revolves around security and leadership issues affecting the region. Evidence of the North Central culture has earlier been identified in the structural analysis above; the characters' names, the woven white and black cap worn by Sadiya's father and the geographical terrain.

A noticeable contrast pointed out by this analysis is the categorisation of Good vs Evil where all of the political class, with the exception of Nuhu Bula are Hausa, Muslim and evil (Khalifa Maiyaki, Governor Sanusi, Buba Koda, Alhaji Loko, Diko Loko, Hamza Miyaki and even Buba Koda), while ASP Katung, Alicia, Boston Bobby Brown are ironically law-abiding, non-indigenes of Kowa, non-Hausa and non-Muslim. This may be a coincidence or a subconsciously manifestation of the Director's personality and attitude toward life leading to a biased representation that is capable of creating an unfair perception among viewers.

Throughout the series, many of the characters, such as Musa Jikan Musa, Hamza, and Sadiya, are portrayed as Hausa people but are unable to deliver convincing Hausa dialogues, which has always been a challenge in portraying the north in content produced by southern Nigerian production companies. In episode 2, Alicia tells Binta that Islam allows Nuhu four wives which proves that Nuhu is Muslim, yet we see him repeatedly taking alcohol and engaging in premarital affairs. The Lokos are also clearly adherents of Islam, yet Nafisa sleeps around with Diko while married to his father and later marries him. It is against the Hausa culture and prohibited in Islam for a son to marry a father's wife, especially for a socially influencial family. Amal is also said to be from a prominent family and yet has an affair with Nuhu and even gets pregnant. These are wrong portrayal of the northern culture, and the occurrence of some of them, such as Nafisa marrying Diko, is an impossible occurrence in any Hausa society. The paper argues that either insufficient research, underestimating the power of negative portrayals or subjectivity are responsible for these wrong depictions by the Auteur, which may be perceived as misrepresentation and offensive by indigenous Hausa viewers and create a wrong impression of Hausa society to global audience.

Summary of Findings

The portrayal of the Northern Nigerian political sphere in *War: Wrath and Revenge* is that of an arena where the elites aggressively gather, compete, form and break alliances for purely political and economic interests. There is a wanton display of power, insincerity and engagement in sinister activities, even at the cost of the lives of the citizens. Banditry is depicted from a single lens as a purely instigated means of pillaging state resources and an ever-existing feature of leadership used as a means of securing and holding on to control. The series does not explore the origins or any of the other factors behind banditry but portrays the role of corruption in fuelling it, which cuts across all cadres and levels of

government: the Traditional leaders, The Executive, the Security personnal and worse, the *friends in very high places* at the highest level of government.

The Auteur's influence is also visible as a distinct style that sways away from the norm, with female characters cast into major roles and men playing supporting roles. *War: Wrath and Revenge* depicts the Hausa Muslim North as a region of immense moral decay, insincerity and poor character. This paper believes that varying attributes of citizens of the region should have been captured without swaying away from the major theme of the series. The portrayal of good and evil in the film should have been fairly distributed between both the Hausa Muslim characters and the non-indigenous characters such as Miriam Katung, Alicia and Boston, who ironically were the only good guys cast in the series whose characteristics resonate with that of the Auteur. Despite the existence of a royal family, the rich cultural heritage of the system was completely edged out by the evil of power play. This paper points out the unfairness of this projection as there is no population with a totality of good or evil, and this is one of the shortcomings of Auteurism, which allows bias to overcome objectivity.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that promoting the discourse on the menace of insecurity in Northern Nigeria and the quality of leadership in *War: Wrath and Revenge* is a timely and developmental endeavour which has brought to light some of the issues sorrounding banditry in northern Nigeria. The film relates the role and influence of leadership in the festering of banditry, but does not explore other factors behind the menace. The depiction of the northern society in the series is condemning with majority of the characters presented as morally bankrupt and the failure to aknowledge the sound values and rich cultural heritage the north is known for. The settings of the series and the skewed representation indicate either the concious influence of the Auteur or a disregard for balance in representation. This paper notes that the mass media is more than 'just' entertainment because it usually conveys the first impressions of a person, group, society, or issue, and that is why there must be fairness in how depictions are made. The essence of representation is for people and societies to see a reflection of their lives, resonate with their challenges and participate in promoting positive actions. Negative representation and misrepresentation alienate the group while also promoting a negative perception of the message, hence countering the desired objective of the media to sensitise, set the agenda and influence public opinion. Fair representation can only be achieved through research, accurate depiction of a

people, groups and issues, which can only be possible when personal biases are not allowed to over power objectivity.

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