

# **An Assessment of the Image of the Nigerian Police in *Bloody Night and Open Truth.***

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By

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## **Abstract**

This article is an inferential analysis of the *Bloody Night and Open Truth*: a Nollywood movie series that reflects the rot in Nigerian Police. The objective of this paper is to identify the image problems of the Nigerian Police as reflected by the Nollywood movie series. The study adopts a content analysis approach. Acts of bribery, false allegations, extra-judicial killings, torture and attempts to suppress justice are all exposed as perpetrated by the senior and junior officers of the Nigerian police. Apart from the majority of corrupt officers; there are some non-corrupt Nigerian police officers who are emblems of justice and truth as shown in the behaviour of some characters in the movie. Their desire for truth represents a new and positive image of the Nigerian police. The study concludes that there is hope for a committed and rebranded Nigerian Police if the Nigerian Government should do the needful. The study recommends an improvement in wages, sustained retraining and punishment of police officers found wanting.

**Key Words: Film, Image, Nigerian Police, Nollywood**

## **Introduction**

On the 17th of September, 2014, an officer of the Nigerian Police shot a tricycle rider, Mr Idongesit Ekpo in Lagos and his wife was killed by strayed bullets in the event. Many others have been killed and labeled as armed robbers in Nigeria. In most cases the police call it accidental discharge. Nollywood movie series such as *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth* have been produced along the lines of nefarious acts of the Nigerian Police. Nollywood film viewers only sympathize with the victims but do not know whether the victims get justice or not.

The UN General Assembly, in 1998, defined torture as an aggravated and deliberate form of cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment. It is generally an aggregate form of inhuman treatment. Section 34(1) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that: "... *no person shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment*". "Extra-judicial" means happening out of court; out of the jurisdiction of the proper court. It is an act of killing not sanctioned by a court of competent jurisdiction in the process of criminal trial. Amnesty International reports that between 2003 and 2008 a total of 3014 "armed robbers" were killed by the Nigerian Police without trial Amnesty International (22).

It is in the light of the foregoing that Ikenna Aniekwe directed the movies *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth* as series, produced by Charles Offor, featuring famous star actors like Sam Dede, Mercy Johnson, Artus Frank and Joyce Kalu in Nigeria. Once again, film is justified as a tool for reflecting social behaviour, but most importantly as a tool that can redeem the overall image of an institution.

The focus of this study is on the negative image projected about the behaviour of the Nigerian Police. Sam Dede plays the lead role in the movie series *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth*. This paper emphasizes specifically, Sam Dede's professional role in depicting the reality of the mess that has dented the image of the Nigerian police. Sam Dede's role has contributed immensely to the achievement of the movie's objective; to show case the ills associated with the Nigerian Police and to correct the wrong perceptions and impressions surrounding the Police which offers a ray of hope for the Force. The movie series acknowledge the mess before vindicating the Nigerian Police.

### **The Image of the Nigerian Police**

The image of the Nigerian police has been very negatively associated with bribery, corruption and extrajudicial killings. Nigerians on the streets of major cities in the country dislike and distrust the Nigerian police so much because of the experiences that most of them have had. Such negative image of the Nigerian police is a sharp contrast of what it used to be and why the force was originally instituted.

Okonkwo recounts the institution and pride of the Nigerian police thus:

After political independence of Nigeria, in the 1960, the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) started as a humble, honest and concerted institution. This can be explicitly acknowledged when they were deployed in 1963, as part of a U.N. Mission to the Zaire to monitor and keep peace. They were highly respected and trusted by the people of Zaire because of their exhibition of professionalism, dedication and honesty. What a remarkable mission! (2003:1).

However, the image of the Nigerian police force began to plummet, precisely, between the 1980's and the 1990's, and worse at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The deteriorating image of the Nigerian police is attributed to the poor and distasteful equipment of the service men, their poor training that assumes a kind of fire brigade

approach and the increasing plague of bribery and corruption which has eaten deep into the soul of the institution.

Worst still, the Nigerian police, due to their corrupt nature, are accused of aiding and abating crime in the society; crimes such as hiring guns to criminals, and hired assassins and covering crime for a return. Sadly, the rate of crime in the Nigerian police begins with those at the top (from where they maltreat those in the lower cadre). It is even a nightmare for the retired policemen to successfully secure their retirement benefits in a short while owing to these corrupt practices. It is no more news to hear about policemen gruesomely murdering innocent civilians just because of N20 or N50. The performance monitoring group of the Nigerian police certainly has failed to live up to her billings.

### **A Review of *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth***

The movie *Open Truth* is a continuation of *Bloody Night*. Both movies are produced as Nollywood movies in Nigeria by Charles Offor and directed by Ikenna Aniekwe in English. The movies, produced in 2013, have a total estimated duration of 320 minutes. The movies are marketed and distributed by Trust in God Films Production Ltd, Shop G2797, Electro-Mart, Onitsha and 14, Zebroz Plaza, Alaba International Market, Ojo, Lagos, as well as 1, Milverton Avenue, Aba, all in Nigeria.

The movie *Bloody Night* is a story of a young lady, Gift (Mercy Johnson), whose fiancée was wrongly shot by the SARS police patrol, who acted on alarmed information from Dr Baron Okon; a man who was robbed, the same night, of about 300,000 US Dollars. The police get involved in an extra judicial killing of Gift's fiancée on the eve of the couple's wedding but in error of identity and choose not to go back on the truth. Gift is bent on getting justice as she undergoes the psychological

trauma of losing her husband-to-be especially at such a time. What gets worse on her nerves is the police insistence that Fimber (her fiancée) was labeled as an armed robber, wrongly accused as being in possession of a gun and shooting at the police in the attempt to resist arrest. The police complicate the matter by forcefully compelling Dr Baron Okon to write a statement in support of the claims that Fimber and his gang were spotted as the real robbers who robbed him and his wife. Under duress, and the bid to cover an earlier crime which he killed a girl friend who took in for him and whom the police had covered up, Dr Baron Okon succumbed to writing the false statement under duress. Gift's parents were convinced beyond doubt that their son-in-law to be was an armed robber. They discouraged Gift to take her hands off the case but she would maintain her grounds that the man she was betrothed to was an innocent banker. She could not get justice. Not even from the Human Right Commission, not from the lawyer and not even with the intervention of the Roman Catholic Priest.

As the story proceeds in the 'Open Truth', Gift's ordeals aggravate, even as Fimber's uncle almost believes the police cooked story. Fimber's mother believes that her son is innocent. The cry of a mother who lost an only son could not even move Dr and Mrs Okon to confess as witnesses that Fimber was not the robber who attacked them. Series of police dirty deals are exposed in the movie but at last, the truth was revealed when the ASP (Sam Dede) and his boys' acts could not get their superiors' nod. They were sentenced after the court judgement, an indication that the Nigerian Police is not as rotten as the public thinks.

### **Filmic Images of Rot and Remedies in the Nigerian Police**

The image of any organization is the impression that stake holders bear in their minds to determine the level of how much they can transact with the institution. Many

corporate organizations like banks and insurance companies have undertaken corporate advertising which Belch and Belch define as an art designed to promote the firm overall, by enhancing its image assuming a position on a social issue or a cause, or seeking direct involvement in something (589). One of the major objectives of corporate advertising is to correct and ease the public's uncertainty about the reputation of an organization. Belch and Belch identify image advertising as a type of corporate advertising intended to create a position for the company or organization and to create goodwill both internally and externally for the company (600).

In *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth*, film has been attempted as a tool for correcting the negative image of the Nigerian police to a reasonable extent even though the police rot was significantly exposed almost at the expense of revamping the image of the Nigerian Police. In the movie series, Sam Dede is an emblem of rot in the Nigerian Police Force. The symbolic role is a semiotic attestation that corrupt practices actually exist in the police institution in Nigeria. The discourse at this point is in line with the basic persuasive communication theory as postulated by Calhoun and Acocella, a theory which posits that the recipient's view-point must be acknowledged first before the communicator (encoder) puts first his argument (220).

*Conspiracy and Cover-up*: First, Sam Dede (The Assistant Superintendent of Police [ASP]) in the *Bloody Night* is the mastermind of the SARS police cover up of the killing of Fimber, the Banker. He suppresses the truth even after the witness account reveals that Fimber was not the armed robber. Gift, Fimber's fiancée had attested to the truth and Dr Baron Okon who was robbed also maintained at least before the police Assistant Superintendent that Fimber was not the armed robber who

attacked his home. Sam Dede's role was that of a cover up agent as commonly noticed among the Nigerian police.

*Torture and Extra-Judicial Killing:* Secondly, Fimber's friend who had accompanied the victim on a shopping that night of bloody shooting was brutally intimidated. He was first locked up and then forced to document a false statement in a favour of the police shooting. Guess who is at the forefront? Sam Dede the ASP. Infact, in the attempt to resist the writing of that false statement, Sam Dede plays the traitor by shooting Fimber's friend and showing the real stuff that the Nigerian police are made of.

*Brainwashing:* Thirdly, Sam Dede's role of brain washing Prof, Gifts father and convincing him that his would-be son-in-law (Fimber) is actually not the saint he knows, but an armed robber who possesses arms and who shot at the police in an attempt to resist or flee arrest is clearly played. Prof is easily convinced especially with the available evidence as framed by the ASP. This is a true reflection of the Nigerian police lifestyle. Even though the role of the police in serving the public is acknowledged in different quarters, Alimaka describes the unfortunate acts of the Nigerian police as an embodiment of ironies where the police are instrument of oppression and exploitation (6).

*Corruption:* In the fourth instance, Sam Dede arrested a notorious criminal who robbed a bank of a sum of 75 Million Naira and seized 4.5 Million Naira and subsequently killed the criminal in custody. This act reflects corruption in the Nigerian police. A further revelation from the armed robber that the 75 million naira stolen was shared among top shots including those in the police force is a clear reflection that within the security system, no one can be trusted clean. Sam Dede calls

the seized money ‘exhibit’, a normal term for property seized and not intended to be accounted for.

*Remedy through Corporate imaging: The Open Truth*, which is the continuation of the *Bloody Night*, is an attempt to reveal the true essence of the Nigerian police, as the name *Open Truth* suggests. In reality, the climax of the movie is a plan to rebrand the image of the Nigerian police. According to Martin, the Police work involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities; officers are expected to prevent crime, protect life and property, enforce the laws, maintain peace and public order and provide wide range of services to citizen (6).

Sam Dede reveals in a discourse that the Nigerian police find it difficult to achieve the very objectives for which the police was established in Nigeria due to “lack of motivation and promotion”, a desire he said he had not achieved in ‘the past 10 years’. The commissioner of police reveals that the rot in the Police Force strives due to “lack of technical supervision and monitoring of the activities of the Junior Police Officers”. The arrest of Sam Dede and his corrupt group of police officers, their conviction and sentencing to imprisonment, the revisiting of the murder case and sudden confidence in complainants is Nollywood’s call for the need to reposition the Nigerian Police.

## **Conclusion**

Aniekwe’s *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth* present the rot in the Nigerian Police Force, how the police use their position as an arm of law enforcement to frustrated justice and scarcely how the leadership of the Nigerian Police Force is not in support of the attitudes that tarnish its image. These movie series constitute an exposition of



the silent truths about the Nigerian Police. The movie series also attempt an image remedy process at the last scenes.

From analysis of the film's discourse, findings reveal that there is lack of oversight supervision by the leadership of the Nigerian Police; which explains why the rot had perpetuated in the Force. Findings also reveal that cases of corruption are commonly associated with the Nigerian Police because of poor staff remuneration, delay in promotion and non provision of working tools. The cover-ups by some police officers are done out of the fear of been sacked. The Police brainwash their victims in order to prevent them (the victims) from perceiving the Force negatively. Findings also show that some victims are partners in crime with the police; paying some police officials in order to escape justice.

This study concludes that the rot of corruption, bribery and conspiracy to commit crime has existed in the Nigerian Police Force as reflected in the Nollywood series: *Bloody Night* and *Open Truth* for more than two decades. The reflection of justice at the end of the movie is an indication that there is hope for a revamped image of the Nigerian Police if the leadership of the force will enforce strict supervision of the acts of their subordinates. This study therefore recommends the Police leadership's oversight supervision of Police officers at all level, the Federal Government's improvement of the Police's welfare packages and remuneration, sustained psychologically based and periodic retraining of the police personnel and the punishment for members of the force who are deliberately committed to perpetrating corrupt practices.

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