

Ugezu J Ugezu: A Social Agent for Emancipation

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Auteur theory centres on the argument that a film is a personal creative vision of the director. An auteur is a filmmaker whose individual style and complete control over all the elements of film production give a film its personal and unique style. It is a reflection of the director's individuality, vision, creative ingenuity, technique and innovations which run across a director's films, equating him to a literary author. The poor quality of most Nollywood films, call for concern, this can be attributed to the level of control the directors apply while dealing with the influence of the Executive Producers on the production process whose ambition is to maximize profit not minding the quality of production. The trust of this study is to analyze the various prevailing style and narrative technique employed by Ugezu J. Ugezu in his selected films with the aim to determine his auteurial imprints. It is anchored on the following theoretical framework: Auteur Theory, Formalist Film Theory and Theory of Narrativity. The research design adopted in this study is the record keeping qualitative research. Findings indicate that Ugezu is an Igbo Metaphysical auteur director who expresses the African culture (Igbo worldview) in his own obstinate way.

Introduction

The conventional test of an auteur is that a pattern emerges when all of the director's works are viewed together or are considered in relation to each other. The consistency of an auteurial signature across a director's films establishes a recognizable form which can be termed the directors auteurial features. One could distinguish filmmakers by motifs as well as narrative pattern. Sarris opined that to classify a filmmaker as an auteur he would have to satisfy the following criterion: over a group of films, the director must exhibit certain recurrent characteristics of style, which serve as his signature, presented as three concentric circles: the outer circle as technique, the middle circle as personal style and the inner circle is interior meaning (cited in Okwuosa, 2012). Ruth Doughty and Christine Etherington Wrights model of identifying an auteur director equally aligns with the above

argument. In order to assess Ugezu J. Ugezu's auteurial distinction and highlight his stylistic innovations as outlined in the above mentioned models, this study examined three films directed by J. Ugezu, namely *Brave Maiden* (2017) *Land of Love* (2019) and *Power of the Gods* (2018). It also observes any of his films that will strengthen this discourse in making a case for him as an auteur director.

Analysis of Ugezu J. Ugezu's Auteurial Persona

The role of the director in a film production cannot be overstated. According to Corrigan and White (2009, p.546), the director is the film's principal creative presence, the primary manager of human and material resources in the production process and the one who is solely responsible for superintending over virtually all the work of making a movie. Adesanya, (cited in Ihentuge, 2007, p. 2) further agrees that the director is responsible for all the creative factors that transform a storyline into a motion picture. A film director has distinctive filmmaking style that differs from other directors, similar to an author's distinctive writing style. The differences between the directors style becomes visible through analysis of his films. The auteur theory which constitutes the thrust of this study is apparently one of the most significant film theories which give credence to the director by asserting him as the only one who possesses the creative vision of defining a film. It was pioneered by members of *Cahire du cinema*, Truffaut in his 1954 essay entitled "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema" mention la polique de auteur, meaning the author's policy. This was later mistranslated by Andrew Sarris as auteur theory in his 1962 essay entitled "Notes on Auteur Theory" which is where the theory originated from. His model of auteur theory delineates the auteur director through the imperatives of "technical competence, personal style and interior meaning". According to Saris view, a films quality, style and narration should have some relationship with the way a director thinks and feels. He stated three central premises of auteur theory as the following:

First is the technical competence of the director as a criterion of value: This implies the ability of the director to organize or implement his vision. It requires technical competence which according to him is the technical ability to organize a film with some degree of clarity and coherence. Second is the distinguished personality of the director as a criterion of value: He explains that over a group of films, a director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style as his signature which must run across.

Since 2000, Ugezu J. Ugezu have written and directed several films in Nollywood, one will not fail to notice his profound diversity of inspirations in his works. As a film director Ugezu has gained a reputation for his distinctive narrative style of upholding the African culture and religious belief system through a skilful, astonishing, and breathe taking exposition of the Igbo worldview which the Europeans disintegrated in their bid to

colonize Africa. His films portray intricate metaphysical thematic which he uses to solve problems for individuals and the society at large, and the application of location, setting and costume to depict the true African society (Igbo Culture).

He has written and directed several films in Nollywood. One will not fail to notice the perceptive uniformity in his creativity. He is well known for his advanced ideas and his ability to unravel the truth in every situation. This ability can be identified in the following films directed by the cineaste. His detective and crime films such as *Against the Law* (2018), *Coal Kingdom* (2018), *Staff of Vengeance* (2017) and *Brave Mdaiden* (2017) can attest to this. In *Against the Law*, the two police inspectors acted by Van Vika and Ugezu J. Ugezu try to unravel the hidden truth about the death of Chief Vincent who is murdered by his wife and subsequently covers up her tracks with the help of the city's Mayor acted by Olu Jacob. She accuses and detains her step son of threatening to kill her when he confronts her about his father's death. Two detective Police Officers investigates the matter not minding the threats they receive from the Mayor of the city. In the course of their investigations, they unravel the real truth about Chief's death and equally discover a hidden truth about The Mayor's past which eventually reduces him from being the Mayor of the city to a common prisoner. In *Coal City* (2018), Ugezu is able to unravel the true personality of Collect who skims her way into the palace as Prince Okechukwu's wife with the assistance of the Mayor also referred to as the Mafia of the City. The Mayor's ultimate aim is to take over the kingdom but first he needs to acquire enough wealth before taking action. He uses Collect as a pawn to siphon the kingdoms treasury. Her mission in the palace is successful until one of the chiefs and a member, Board of Directors of the Coal Company intervenes and privately investigates her. His revelation saves the Kingdom of an intending doom. This role is acted by Ugezu himself. Alfred Hitchcock's films are recognizable not only for their story but also for his unique stylistic elements and standardized production method (Carringer, 2001). In the same manner, Ugezu's films are identifiable for their fascinating storylines, film setting and use of appropriate costume. One of his strengths lies in his ability to harness all his crew members as he stated in SONFIS WASSAP page that he has managed to build a team where all the Heads of Departments understand the importance of getting most things if not everything right. This is in agreement with Sellor's assertion that a film's crew creates a collective intention where each individual joins the group with the same goal in mind just like in a sports team (2007). The auteur critics also emphasize performances over acting ability, noting the director's likeness to a psychological therapist who is able to tease out the performances like confessions in group therapy. He is the conductor that approves the artistry of all the separate pieces involved in the production (Grant 2013, p.191).

Bordwell succinctly put that,

“The consistency of an auteurial signature across a director’s works constitutes his trademark. The signature depends relatively upon identifiable recurring devices across his films. One could distinguish filmmakers by motifs and by camera technique (Truffaut’s pan-and-zoom, Ophüls’s sinuous tracks, Chabrol’s high angles, Antonioni’s long shots). The trademark signature can depend upon narrational qualities as well ...The authorial trademark requires that the viewer see each film as fitting into a body of work”. (2005, p.180)

Ugezu is a Nollywood auteur who has built his own visual and narrative distinct features. Spoto states that one of Hitchcock’s screenwriters Angus phail created the term Mac Guffins which stands for a detail or an object that is a desire and motivates the action of the characters within the story (p. 5). Consequently, Ugezu exhibited this style in *land of love* (2019). For instance Adanna’s love can be referred to as Mac Guffins Adanna is loved by Atuanya, Egbeigwe, the Prince also known as Ibesim and his mother the Queen. This same love is the centre of all the conflicts in the narrative as Atuanya’s and Adanna’s fathers in the persons of Ichie Molukwu and Ichie Enemuó are not ready to see them unite as husband and wife under any circumstance. On the other hand, the three young men are constantly struggling for her love. An element of Mac Guffins can also be identified in the *Power of the Gods* (2018). The desire for Adadima to have a child for Chinualumogu motivated all the actions in the film. While the Love for Prince Abuonye and Akpugo can be spotted as Mac Guffins in *Brave Maiden* (2017) The iconic symbol of Ugezu think, Edith and Direct which constantly feature in the credit of his films can be identified as a motif and also an indication that he is in control of all the elements of his film production. It is a well-known fact that he writes some of his films, works with his editors to ensure that his films represent a true interpretation of his intents and projections. His films are highly acclaimed for their cinematic qualities and have proved popular with viewers. This is demonstrated as he won the Multi choice most popular viewership award. Precisely, his films are notable for their characteristic style, which arguably manifests all the qualities Bordwell listed, a consistency of narration, motifs, technique and style. Ugezu is a Nollywood auteur who uses his films to expose the African (Igbo) tradition/culture and belief system which the colonial masters tactically and carefully destroyed. This can be deduced from Lord Macaulay’s address to the British Parliament on 2nd February, 1835, which states thus: “I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I don’t think we will ever conquer this country, unless we break the very back bone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage. Therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education

system, her culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nations.”

Ugezu is one director that calls his viewer’s attention to the aspect of the true African (Igbo) culture and traditional belief system which the colonialists made us believe is evil. His films reveal the traditional belief in our ancestors and the power of the diviners who use metaphysical powers to communicate with the spirits and relate to mere mortals. This can be seen in the constant use of the following characters in his films: Ezemuo (Chief Priest) Dibia (the Diviner or seer) and Dibia Mgorogwu (herbalist). He uses the character of Ezemuo and Dibia to unravel mysteries which eventually lead to proffering solutions for problems facing individuals and the community (society at large). He applies the use of herbs by Dibia Mgborogwu to heal ailments, including strange ones. He employs the Igbo traditional belief and culture as practiced by our forefathers to solve problems in the society, an aspect of the African culture which is going to extinction. This is at variance with the popular mode of narrative in Nollywood where objects, images and persons that represent the traditional African religion and culture are used to denote evil and cause problems for individuals and the society at large. These conflicts are always resolved with the appearance of a cross, a pastor or a catholic priest, which are symbols of modernity. The above assertion is an indication that the Europeans actually succeeded in their plan to impose their culture and religion on Africans.

Analysis of Ugezu’s Auteurial Treatment of Themes

Theme of Love amidst Pain: This theme was played out in various forms across his films, such as the following:

Land of Love (2019)

Atuanya and Adannaya’s ardent love for each other motivated them to withstand the pressure from their fathers. Even when Adanna gets blind as a result of the biting she received from her father, they still stuck to each other. Due to the strength of their love, the gods sent them help in the persons of Mkpuru Mmiri the river goddess and Ibesim who guided them until her sight was restored.

The Power of the Gods (2018)

Adadimma and Chinualomogu’s love for each other encouraged them to withstand all the troubles and insults they encountered as a result of not having a child until God blessed them. For instance, Adadimma endured all the insults and humiliations she received from her mother in-law and her co-wife and Chinualomogu also tolerated all the insults meted on him by his kin’s men especially his cousin who openly asked him to allow him to

impregnate his wife for him since is very obvious that he is not man enough to perform the task.

Theme of Romance & Domestic Violence

Land of Love (2019), Atuanya and Adannaya receive blows from their fathers at different points as they refuse to leave each other, even when Adannaya's father strikes her with his walking stick and she becomes blind. They still stick together until God intervenes not mind the enmity between their fathers. Their love for each other encourages them to withstand all the harsh treatment they received from their fathers.

The Power of the God's (2018) Adadimma tolerated abuses from Chinualumogu's mother and his second wife patiently until God blessed her with children and turned her story around. The love she shares with Chinualumogu motivates her to endure all pains. Adannaya and Atuanya exhibited brevity in their dealings with their fathers. They did not allow their threats to influence the strong feelings they have for each other, rather they seemed to yet more attracted to each other as their parents intensify their threats.

Theme of Destiny Influence of God upon Our Life

In *Land of Love* (2019), Chinualomogu and Adadimma his wife were childless for a long time. His mother and kinsmen married another wife for him. At the appointed time when he has learnt the lessons God wanted him to learn, according to the spirit of his dead father. God blessed them with children and the second wife married for him by his mother ran away as she was trying to harm Adadimma.

Theme of Brevity and Self-discipline

Brave Maiden (2017), Akpugo refused to give up her love for Prince Abuonye against all odds. She fought with the seductive water spirit sent to destroy the Prince and won the battle in the end. Prince Abuonye and Prince Mbeledede displayed some level of self-discipline as they refused to have carnal knowledge of the seductive water spirit sent by Nukwuwanyi to destroy them. This act saved them and their kingdom. This can also be identified in *Land of Love* (2019).

An Analysis of the Narrative Style of Ugezu J. Ugezu

Ugezu has worked virtually in all dominant movie genres in Nollywood, ranging from epic, action movies, ritual circle to mystery films. *Land of Love* (2019), a film directed by Ugezu, J. Ugezu, starring Ken Erics, Chacha Eke, Geraldine Ekeoch, among others. It is an epic film, an intriguing love story of two lovers whose fathers did not allow them to marry each other because of an ugly event that transpired between them in the past.. Ugezu exhibits his auterial characteristic in various ways. The film's settings is located in a typical

African village setting. The auteur explores the natural and serene vegetation typical in the Eastern part of Nigeria to come out with this master piece. A major feature in his characterization is the character of Chief Priest (Ezemuo), Seer or Diviner (Eze Dibia) and Harbalist (Eze mgborowu). He uses them to solve problems and brings resolution to his films. In some cases, he employs the use of one of such characters to heighten conflict in his films and uses another of such characters to bring about resolution in his films. Similarly, in *Land of Love* (2019) he uses the Seer (Ezediabia) in the person of Iche Akubuiké acted by Ugezu himself to unravel certain mysteries to the people. This can be identified in different scenes in the film. For instance, Ichie Akubuiké is consulted by Iche Molukwu, Iche Enemuó, Atuanya, Ifeádigo and his friend Nwaude at various points to either inquire for their future or to demystify their challenges. He equally employs the character of the Chief Priest in the person of Ezealusi (the Priest of ibada) as a mediator between the people and the gods and the character of Mmilima (The Priestess of Owumilli) to facilitate the healing of Adanna's blindness.

The auteur uses elements in traditional Africa society to create tension, solve problems, and bring resolution in his film.



Plate 1 : A long shot of a scene in *Brave Maiden* (2017), where the chief Priest is instructing the three Princes on what to do with the spirit maidens



Plate 2: A long shot of a scene in *Land of Love* (2018): where Ibezim and the Prince are consulting the seer Ichie Akabuike as they strive to secure their future.

The auteur applies some technicalities in his shot relations in the scene where Atuanya and Adanna are expressing their love for each other while Atuanya carries the log of firewood tied with a piece of Adanna's clothing. Ugezu employs the use of camera movement to fascinate the viewers and also achieve the essence of the film. Another great moment in the film is how the auteur leads the viewers into the minds of Iche Molukwu, Iche Enemuo and Atuanya's mother, to reveal the flash back scenes.

The auteur uses elements that are inherent in the traditional African society to achieve the essence of the narrative. The maidens are seen dancing Egwu Oganigwe, which according to them is a means of appealing to the gods who gratifies them with wealth and fertility. He also applies the use of the full moon which is an important element in the tradition of the Igbos. As the full moon appears, Iche Molukwu, is struck dead as he refuses to forgive and allow the children to marry each other. While on the other hand, the appearance of the full moon restores Adanna's sight immediately her father forgives them and allows them to marry. Consequently, the auteur exhibits his auteorial feature in *Brave Maiden* (2017) in the flowing ways. The three Princes of Omabala Kingdom pay a visit to Onigbomgbo, the Chief Priest, to perform the rights which will automatically lead them to marrying their betrothed maidens which they love so much. Typical of his narrative, he uses the action of

the Chief Priest to create conflict in the film and also employs the wisdom and revelation from another diviner (seer) to solve the conflict and through it achieves resolution in the film. This is at variance with the typical Nollywood narrative pattern where African traditional elements are used to cause problems and heighten conflict while the appearance of a catholic priest, pastor or a cross brings resolution. The auteur exhibits his flair for artistic ingenuity and strong technical abilities in his films. These can be identified in the antiques of his shouting, directing, editing and overall coordination.

Analysis of Ugezu J. Ugezu's Auteurial Motifs

His auteurial motifs are as follows:

- i. Ideological search to unravel the truth of every situation.
- ii. Use of the metaphysical powers of the Diviners, Herbalist, and Chief Priests to resolve conflicts and solve individual and communal problems.
- iii. His distinctive poetic aesthetic.
- iv. Application of element of love in his narrative
- v. Recurring style in the application of location, setting, costume and make – up.

Ugezu calls his viewer's attention to the aspect of the true African (Igbo) culture and traditional belief system which the colonialists made us believe is evil. His films reveal the traditional belief in our ancestors and the power of the diviners who use metaphysical powers to communicate with the spirits and relate to mere mortals. This can be seen in the constant use of the following characters in his films: Ezemuo (Chief Priest) Dibia (the Diviner or seer) and Dibia Mgorogwu (herbalist) in unravelling mysteries, leading them to solve problems facing individuals and the community (society at large). The use of herbs by Dibia Mgorogwu to heal ailments, including strange ones, exposes the Igbo traditional belief and culture as practiced by our forefathers to solve problems in the society, an aspect of the African culture which is going to extinction.

This is at variance with the popular mode of narrative in Nollywood where objects, images and persons that represent the traditional African religion and culture are used to denote evil and cause problems for individuals and the society at large. These conflicts are always resolved with the appearance of a cross, a pastor or a Catholic Priest which represent modernity, but the auteur represents this differently. The above assertion is an indication that the Europeans actually succeeded in imposing their culture and religion on Africans.

Ugezu's aesthetic serves as a critical survey for the ideological perspective which many Africans accept as the literal truth, considering the perception of the core African values and culture he exhibit across his films. His films draw on key features of African (Igbo) philosophy, engaging Igbo cultural myths to realize a specific filmic aesthetic. This style

attempts to provoke in viewer instinctive questioning that spurs ideas, emotions, and filmic conventions leading to a resolution.

Conclusion

The recurring elements of style and content applied by Ugezu earned him the title of an African (Igbo) metaphysical ideological auteur, this corresponds with Andrew Sarris' view on the three concentric premises of auteur theory. The above claim also identifies with Ruth Doughty and Christine Etherington Wrights model of identifying an auteur director.

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Filmiography

Title:	<i>Brave Maiden</i> (2017)
Screen Play	Vera C. Uzokwe
D. O. P	Darlington Ogbodo Kelechi
Producer:	Kelvin Anaekwe
	Ifeoma Anaekwe
Director:	Ugezu J. Ugezu

Starring: Zubby Michael, Destiny Etico, Nkechi Nnaji, Chinyere Uba,
Diamond Okechukwu, Amaechi Anakwe, Betty Bello

Company: Ic Mak-vee Prod. Ltd

Title: *Land of Love* (2019)

Screen Play Ugezu J. Ugezu

D. O. P Chinaedu Ibe

Producer: Chukwuemeka Chiemerie

Director: Ugezu J. Ugezu

Starring: Ken Erics, Chacha Eke, Nnkechi Nnaji

Company Ic Mak-vee Prod. Ltd

Title: *The Power of the Gods* (2018)

Screen Play Ugezu J. Ugezu

D. O. P Darlington K. Ogbodo

Producer: Chinze Henry Izuchukwu

Director: Ugezu J. Ugezu

Starring: Dianond Okechukwu Destiny Etico, Nkechi Nnaji Ngozi Egeonu, Uju Okolie.

Company: Ic Mak-vee Prod. Ltd