

A PSYCHOANALYTIC EXPLORATION OF FEAR AND HIDDEN MESSAGES IN SELECT NOLLYWOOD HORROR FILMS.

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Abstract

Nollywood horror films use fear as a canvas to explore complex themes like tradition, modernity, and spirituality, revealing societal taboos and cultural anxieties. By applying Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, this study analyses how fear is constructed psychologically and culturally in two films: *The Origin: Madam Koi Koi* (2023) and *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* (2019). Through qualitative research, this study examines the imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure of these films to uncover hidden messages. The goal is to understand how Nollywood horror films reflect the collective unconscious mind and influence human thoughts, emotions, and behaviours. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to understanding the media-psychology-culture nexus and recommends awareness of the unconscious themes and symbolism in Nollywood horror films.

Introduction

Film is a carrier of culture through which people are educated and entertained. A film is a form of storytelling that is perceived through series of pictures and videos that are recorded, edited and put together. Film or movies are literary and cultural works that are copyrighted and protected, moreover film is also a communication medium that has images sound and colours according to Severn's, film is the art of stimulating experience to communicate ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty or atmosphere by recording or programming moving images along with other sensory stimulations. Film is the most modern literature of this century. No doubt that the film is a kind of literature that is so attractive to the public.

The history of film began in the early years, 1830 to 1910 which was the late 19th century with the invention of motion picture cameras and the development of early film technologies. One of the earliest recorded instances of film comes from the Lumiere brothers

in France, who in 1895 come out publicly screened short films using their cinematograph, edifies that could record, develop, and project motion pictures. Simultaneously Thomas Edison and his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dixon were developing the kinetoscope in the United States, which allowed individual viewers to watch short films through a peephole viewer.

Film which is the focus of this study is a major agent of mass media others include radio television prints and various social network, film is also an essential aspect of mass communication and the mass media command therefore communication is integral to the maintenance and coherence of any gathering of people or society that wants to make progress. Communication is defined by R. Verderber and K. Verderber as the “process of creating and sharing meaning in formal communication, group interactions or public speaking” (Verderber and Verderber, 6). Among the mass media of communication television is seen as the most influential. Highlighting on the important role of television in society, a week in its October 2006 issue, in an article entitled “TV the subtle instructor” submits that “television captures the lives of people in both tragedy and triumph. It entertains, instructs and even inspires”.

Nearly all families in Nigeria have television sets and TV viewing in the country, though there is hardly any statistics to show the amount of time the average Nigerian spends watching TV, we can glean this from the report of an article in the *Awake* issue earlier cited. According to the report titled “TV: a thief of time?”:

The time that many people devote to television is astonishing. Recently, a global study showed that on about, people watch TV for just over three hours each day. North Americans watch four and a half hours daily, while the Japanese top the list at five hours per day (3-4)

Films are the avenue for portraying social reality. This is based on their audio-visual functions as well as their influential power to make an impact on the viewer. This was succinctly captured by Gerbner (1980) cited in Griffin (1991, 301) when he stated inter alia:

TV power comes from the symbolic content of the real-life drama shown hour after hour, week after week. At its root, television is “story” and a society’s stories give a coherent picture of what exists, what is important, what is related to what and what is right (301).

Until the early 90s foreign films or movies dominated the local scene. This changed with the production of the home video *Living in Bondage* in 1992 by Kenneth Nnebue; Nollywood the Nigerian home video industry, has its history in development. These Nollywood movies, as they are called today fed its audience with a steady dose of violence. Quite marked was its dramatization of human ritual killings which transports poor characters to states of untold riches. *Living in Bondage* the first film to give local productions the break gave birth to Nollywood. The first two sequels which were done in the Igbo language in 1992 and 1993 respectively were wildly watched both within and outside Nigeria despite the language barrier, and were subject of various debates as it is usually attributed to the reason many Nollywood movies that followed after it were focused on spirituality, money making and the Igbo culture. It was written by Kenneth Nnebue and Okechukwu Ogunjiofor (who also doubles as the producer) and was directed by Chris Obi.

Living in Bondage: Breaking Free which is one of the case study was the 3rd sequel to the highly acclaimed movie and is undoubtedly one of Nigerians finest moving living up to expectations and the hype the movie was able to bring back some of the veteran actors that starred in the original two, like Kenneth Okonkwo, Kanayo O. Kanayo and Bob Manuel as well as break the language barrier which was a constraint in the first two sequels. *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* was produced by Charles Okpaleke and directed by veteran actor Ramsey Noah and was released November 2019 and has so far geared up 168.7 million naira in Box office and by May 2020 it was admitted to Netflix. The *Breaking Free* sequel follows the story of Andy Okeke's son, Nnamdi a child he had with Ego before her untimely death. According to the Sequel which was well synchronized with *The Original* two, Andy's son Nnamdi falls into the same trap as his father despite several warnings from his family who related his character to that of his father Andy. Often described as one who does "Pass himself" in Nigeria English, Nnamdi who is very ambitious and career driven quits his job in his well-paying advertising company JJW despite waiting five years after graduation to get it and starts his own which he calls 'infinite ideas'. He later gets acquainted with the family of Chief Omego despite warning from his family. ObinnaOmego (Chief Omego's son introduces Nnamdi to Richard Williams who takes Nnamdi under his influence giving him a very big push in his business. As time goes on, Nnamdi who is now engulfed in the enigma of wealth accepts Williams' offer to join the satanic brotherhood, 'The Six', a cult led by Richard Williams himself, thereby walking the same path as his father Andy.

The Origin: Madam Koi Koi which is another case study is in Nigerian and African urban legend who haunts dormitories, hallways and toilets in boarding schools at night, while in day schools she hunts toilets and students who come to school too early or leave who leads. She is often depicted wearing a pair of red heels or wearing a single heel she is one of the most popular boarding school ghosts in Nigeria. Most Nigerians who attended boarding school in the 90s could not sleep at night sometimes due to the tales whispered in their ear. Unlike moral driven stories like the tortoise and the hare, these folklores were more sinister, focusing on scary creatures like the Push baby, Madam Koi Koi and Mr. cabin.

The plot is seen where a young woman and her daughter, Amanda in the year 1991 is driven into Malomo a small town. Amanda argues with her mother against attending a boarding house. Despite her constant refusal, she quickly settles in finding comfort in the hands of her new friend and bunk mates. During the first assembly, her new best friend wants her to avoid a group of boys known for treating ladies harshly. The rest of the films first half shows Amanda having several visions where she sees the creature emerging from shadows and killing the people around her. Towards the end of Part 1, we know how the beast came to be she was raped to death by some men in the village. Part 2 provides more context yeah, the security gates man of the school and son of an ex herbalist Baba Fawole, narrated the story of the monster's origin. Alongside two detectives Baba Fawole set out to find a solution to banish the monster from the town.

Theoretical Framework

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis is a theory of personality and a method of therapy that emphasizes the unconscious mind and its influence on behaviour. Freud believed that the mind is divided into three parts: the id, the ego, and the superego. The id is the primitive, instinctual part of the mind that seeks immediate gratification. The ego is the rational part of the mind that mediates between the id and the superego. The superego is the moral part of the mind that internalizes societal rules and values. According to Freud, early childhood experiences can have a lasting impact on personality development. These experiences can

lead to the formation of unconscious conflicts that can manifest in various psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, and phobias. Psychoanalysis aims to bring these unconscious conflicts to the surface through techniques such as free association and dream analysis.

Freud developed psychoanalysis in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His work was influenced by the ideas of Josef Breuer, a physician who used hypnosis to treat patients with hysterical symptoms. Freud expanded on Breuer's work and developed the technique of free association, which involves patients saying whatever comes to mind without censorship. Psychoanalysis quickly gained popularity and became a dominant force in psychology. However, it also faced criticism from other psychologists who argued that Freud's theories were too speculative and lacked empirical support. Nevertheless, psychoanalysis has had a significant impact on psychology and continues to be used today.

Psychoanalysis has been used to analyse horror movies and understand their appeal to audiences. Horror movies often explore themes of fear, anxiety, and the unconscious mind, which are central to Freudian theory. For example, the monster in a horror movie can be seen as a manifestation of the id, representing repressed desires and fears. Additionally, horror movies can be seen as a way for audiences to confront their own fears and anxieties in a safe and controlled environment. By watching a horror movie, viewers can experience a cathartic release of emotions that might otherwise be repressed.

Unmasking Fear: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Nollywood Horror Films

Psychoanalysis is both a set of theories of the structure and working of the mind and the psychotherapeutic method based on Freud's theory of the mind. Those who believe that the psychoanalytic understanding of human nature and the mind are broadly correct will also likely believe that they are essential aspect of film that cannot be adequately under sold without it. In recent years, Nollywood has seen a new wave of filmmakers pushing the boundaries of storytelling by incorporating deeper psychological elements into their films. Among these trail blazers are Ramsey Noah with his directorial debut "*Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*" and Jay Franklyn Jituboh who directed "*The Origin: Madam Koi-Koi*".

Ramsey Noah being one of a kind in the Nigerian film industry has carved a niche for himself as a prolific auteur director and outstanding film actor, while Jay Franklyn Jituboh is a Nigerian filmmaker and Author who has a passion for art, technology and storytelling.

In "*Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*"(2019), Noah continued the legacy of the 1992 classic, focusing on greed, power, and the supernatural. The main character gets drawn into wall of occultism and world at the cost of his humanity. The film is not just about the lure of fast success but also a cycle spiritual journey when Nnamdi battles his inner demons, highlighting the consequences of ambition driven by desperation. Noah's film showcases how the actions of the lead characters are influenced by psychological and spiritual elements, pushing them into darker paths.

Similarly, "*The Origin: Madam Koi Koi*." taps into the deeply rooted fears embedded in Nigerian urban folklore. The movie centres on the traumatic backstory of the ghostly figure, Madam Koi Koi and explore how unresolved psychological trauma can lead to fearsome behaviour. Madam Koi Koi's terror is not only a supernatural one but also a reflection of her internalised pain and desire for vengeance, effectively portraying how psychotic tendencies can emerge from untreated emotional wounds. In all these, the actions of the major characters in the film are mostly motivated by some psycho elements. Noah in "*Living in Bondage*:"

Breaking Free and Jay in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi* shows the dexterity in the use of psychotic lead characters in moving the film narrative and plot forward. For instance, in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*, NnamdiOkeke reacts primarily to his internal struggle with ambition, family legacy and the desires for success, leading him to become a member of an occult group while he perfects the act of living a double life. On the surface he presents himself as a successful and charismatic young man climbing the social and professional ladder. However, beneath that facade, he's deeply involved in the occult, making dark sacrifices to maintain his world and status, these immoral practices highlight the psychological conflict he faces- his ambition versus his morality. Again, in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*, Amanda, a new student at elite boarding school experiences terrifying nightmares and visions in which she discovers that her dreams are connected to MadamKoi Koi, a mysterious and malevolent entity with a dark history. As Amanda delves deeper into the mystery, she must confront her own demons and face the evil force head on.

From the foregoing, one can state that both movie directors have developed and used a blend of the psycho film genre and the thriller, which is known as psycho thriller. They have adapted the Hollywood style and filmic techniques of horror and thriller to Nigerian true to type cultural situations in other to make their films turn out from the everyday Nigerian film narrative that sometimes seem to be boring out of repetition of stories. Nevertheless, this section aims to show how psychoanalysis theories were effectively used in attempting new frontiers in filmmaking in Nigeria. First off, let us go through a brief overview of the psychoanalysis theory before applying it to the movies.

Synopsis of *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi* and *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*

In the quiet village of Malomo, a dark legend resurfaces. The story revolves around Amanda, a new student at a boarding school, where a series of mysterious deaths and disappearances occur. The villagers believe the vengeful spirit, Madam Koi Koi, has returned to exact revenge on those who wronged her.

The film explores the backstory of Madam Koi Koi, a teacher named Rosemary who was brutally assaulted and murdered by two men. Her spirit merges with that of a wrongly accused woman, condemned to wander the forest for eternity. Rosemary's spirit seeks revenge on those responsible for her death and others who deserve punishment.

As the story unfolds, questions arise about who the true villain is: Madam Koi Koi, the spirit seeking revenge; Mother Superior, who covers up crimes to protect the school; or the group of students who terrorize their peers. The film's narrative is characterized by simplicity, authenticity, and a departure from typical Nollywood action scenes.

The story raises questions about morality, justice, and the consequences of actions. Ultimately, the film presents a complex exploration of good and evil, leaving the audience to ponder the true nature of the characters and their actions.

Living in Bondage: Breaking Free

25 years after the events of the original film, Andy Okeke, now a man of God, has renounced his allegiance to the cult "Brotherhood of The Six". The story follows Nnamdi, Andy's secret son, who becomes embroiled with the cult after meeting its new leader, Richard William. Nnamdi's rise to wealth and success comes at a price, as he's forced to make sacrifices and confront the darkness of his family's past. Meanwhile, investigative journalist Uzoma seeks answers about mysterious murders linked to the cult. As Nnamdi's world unravels, he's torn between appeasing the cult and saving the people he loves. The film explores themes of power, sacrifice, and redemption, ultimately leading to a confrontation with the cult and its leader.

Exploration of Hidden Messages, Symbolism and Subtext in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi* and *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*

The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood has produced a vast number of films that engage deeply with cultural, social and psychological themes. *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi* and *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free* are films that delve deeply into the realm of the supernatural to reflect the critique the fears, value and struggles of Nigerian society. Through their narratives both themes utilise horror, suspense, and occult symbolism as a way of revealing hidden truth about human nature, culture, and social structures. This section aims on cover how these two Nollywood films views symbolism, subtext and hidden messages to convey broader societal themes, from the consequences of unresolved trauma to the destructive pursuit of materialism.

Hidden Messages in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*

Nigerian folklore has long provided a fertile ground for discussing societal concerns, often through the length of supernatural tales. In *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*, in the community of Malomo, a boarding school situated in the Malomo village known as Saint Augustine's Catholic School, becomes the setting for a vengeful spirit wrath, symbolising deep rooted social injustice. This film explores trauma gender violence, institutional corruption and the cycle of resolve generational trauma. What happens to a mere horror story consists layers of complex issues that mirror real life experiences in society much like what Beverly Engel identifies in her book "It Was Not Your Fault" "as the silent suffering" or victims who are disbelieved or dismissed when they raise alarms about their abusers. Here is a breakdown of the hidden messages explored in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*:

Gender-based violence and the silencing of victims

At the core of the film is the silencing of female voices particularly when they speak out against gender-based violence. The female characters in the narrative especially the victims of assault, face systematic dismissal by those in power. The boys who assaulted Ibukun are protected because of the academic excellence, reflecting what Beverly Engel argues in her book "It Wasn't Your Fault" when she writes that "Many victims suffer in silent for fear of not being believed or being blamed for their own victimisation". This can be seen in the scene where Ibukun was caught by the Mother Superior and was questioned about her whereabouts. Ibukun burst into tears and truthfully told Mother Superior of what the boys had done to her but instead Mother Superior shut her off and blamed her for her own victimisation by disobeying the school rules and leaving the school to an unknown destination. This idea is further compounded by the institutional shielding of the boys, as the school prioritises its reputation over justice for Ibukun and other female students. This echoes what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie highlights in "Dear Ijeawale, where she calls attention to the ways in which patriarchal system suppress the voices of women even in cases of violence and abuse.

The films depiction of the separation of female voices is also reflected in the character of Rosemary, who despite being a victim of sexual violence, find herself forgotten by the institution that should have protected her. Adiche's reflection on societal discrediting of women's voices speak directly to this. She writes; "we teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, "you can have ambition, but not too much". This shrinking of women's voices and experiences is evident throughout the film reinforcing the narrative that societal structures often allow violence against women to continue unchecked.

Symbolism in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*

Symbolism plays a key role in the film, particularly through object and spaces that carries deeper meanings beyond their immediate narrative functions. Through its characters, settings, plot devices the film invite viewers to examine deeper meaning that resonate with personal and collective experiences. Here are the key symbols and their interpretations:

1. The Cursed Tree

The tree where Rosemary dies and her blood awakens the vengeful spirit symbolises unresolved guilt and past wrongs. The curse placed on the tree originating from a woman's wrongful death of being hung by the villagers who thought she was a witch that killed all her children, suggest how nature itself becomes tainted by human actions. The tree act as a symbol of generational trauma. How past injustices, particularly those involved in gendered violence linger and resurface when not properly addressed.

2. The Red Lights

The Red light often serves as a visual indicating of impending danger. In psychological terms, red is associated with alertness and can evoke feelings of anxiety or fear. According to colour psychology, red can symbolise not just love or passion but also alarm and the need for caution. The presence of red light in the film symbolises for shadows moment of violence or traits, creating a sense of foreboding.

The recurring nature of the red light in Amanda's nightmare symbolises, the haunting memories of violence that plaque her trauma, theorist like Judith Herman emphasises that traumatic memories can manifest in dreams or visual imagery, representing the individual struggle to process past experiences. The red light, therefore can be seen as a manifestation of Amanda's internal conflict and psychological scars left by the events surrounding her. Her mother's refusal to tell her about her father, led to her ignorance about her life and the generational curse being laid upon her father's lineage.

3. The Chief Priest

The chief priest act as a bridge between the spiritual and earthly realms, symbolising the role of tradition in navigating modern crisis. His guidance reflects the importance of acknowledging cultural practises while adapting to change. He embodies the community's authority representing the wisdom of ancestral knowledge why also confronting the challenges posed by contemporary issues.

4. Madam Koi Koi as a Vengeful Spirit

MadamKoi Koi as a character who was originally a teacher symbolises the rage of oppressed and victimised women. As a spirit seeking justice after being wronged, she represents the lingering effect of trauma, sexual violence and societal neglect. Her haunting presence and killings are metaphors for suppressed voice of victim especially women whose stories of abuse go unacknowledged or are outright denied just like Ibukun. In this sense, MadamKoi Koi functions as both a symbol of vengeance and an embodiment of collective guilt. In the movie she seems to be on a vigilante role killing perpetrators that try to harm a woman or instil violence on her.

Furthermore, Amanda herself symbolises the innocence caught in the work of past atrocities, she embodied his psychological concept of inherited trauma, when individuals are forced to deal with the consequences of their forebears' actions. Her escape from the vengeful spirit, aided by sister Ruth, suggests that healing and resolution are only possible through acknowledgement of the past and the willingness to forgive. Ruth plead for forgiveness on Amanda's behalf touches on the necessity of intergenerational reconciliation, suggesting that; while the guilty must be spared from the consequences of crimes that did not commit.

Subtext in *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*

The subtexts within *The Origin: MadamKoi Koi*, not only enhances the narrative but also embodies the hidden messages conveyed throughout the film. The serve as a critical lens through which viewers can understand the complexities of trauma, gender-based violence, and consequences of institutional neglect. The interplay between this subtexts and hidden messages emphasises the films role as a commentary on societal issues origin audiences to confront and reflect on the reality's face by individuals in similar circumstances. This intricate weaving of themes ultimately underscores the importance of acknowledging the past to foster healing and justice in the present.

Hidden messages in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*

Living in bondage: Breaking Free is a sequel to the 1992 Nollywood classic "*Living in Bondage*", a film that lead the groundwork for many Nollywood horror films involving ritualistic wealth and blood sacrifices. In the sequel, NnamdiOkeke, the son of the original protagonist, follows a similar path, seeking wealth and statues true membership in a secret cult. However, the film explored deeper messages about ambition, morality and the consequences of spiritual and material greed. Here is the breakdown of the hidden messages in the film:

1. The Destructive Nature of Ambition

One of the films primary hidden messages is the warning against unbridled ambition and the destructive consequences it can have. Nnamdi's ambition to attain wealth and statues leads him down a dark part of blood rituals and occult practices. The film reflects on the pressure that Nigerian society places on young men to succeed often pushing them to pursue shortcuts to wealth. It critiques the mindset that equates success with material possessions and cautious against the moral compromises, one might make in the quest for rapid success. Nnamdi's eventual downfall is a stark reminder that the pursuit of wealth at all costs can lead to spiritual and personal ruin.

2. The Burden of Legacy and Generational Sin

Another hidden message in the film concerns the idea of legacy and the consequences of past actions. Nnamdi's father, Andy Okeke, made a similar pact with dark forces in the original film, and the burden of his decision seems to follow his son. This speaks of the concept of generational sin, where the action of one generation can have lasting consequences on the next. In many African belief systems, the idea of ancestral curses or blessings is a recurring theme, and the film taps into this cultural believe by suggesting that Nnamdi's fate in part, shaped by his father's past misdeeds. The film also emphasises personal responsibility as Nnamdi's own choices ultimately seal his fate.

3. Redemption and Consequences

The film also delivers a message of redemption and plays a crucial role in Nnamdi's journey and the film's broader message about the moral cost of ambition. Nnamdi's desire for redemption becomes evident when he begins to realise the true price of his choices. After enjoying the wealth and status that his association with 'The Six' has brought him, Nnamdi is faced with a moral dilemma to sacrifice someone he loves (Kelly) to maintain his new found lifestyle or risk everything by rejecting the cult.. His decision to not kill Kelly or his cousin Toby when he came over to his house and instead stab himself is a pivotal moment where he chooses redemption over continued moral degradation. This act symbolises his rejection of the cult's power and his attempt to regain his humanity.

However, the film makes it clear that redemption does not come easily. Nnamdi's moment of self-sacrifice and his willingness to take responsibility of his actions do not immediately absolve him of the consequences. This illustrates a powerful message; while individuals may seek to atone for their wrongdoings, redemption is not simply about acknowledging mistakes. It often requires painful, sometimes life-threatening decisions. Nnamdi's survival after his self-inflicted wound offers him a second chance at life, but it is a life that will forever bear the scars of his past choices. The film drives home the idea that some consequences are inescapable. Although Nnamdi rejected 'The Six', the fact that the cult continues to exist and Richard Williams evades justice shows that while individuals can seek personal redemption, the larger system of power and corruption may persist. Nnamdi's journey to redemption is personal, but the broader consequences of his involvement with 'The Six', such as the continuation of the cult power remain unresolved. This reflects a more cynical view of the world, where even though individuals may change, the structure of corruption they participated in are often harder to dismantle.

Symbolism in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*

The film's rich use of symbolism enhances its exploration of themes like greed, spiritual corruption and the consequences of moral compromise. Among the most powerful symbols in the film are the use of blood, wealth and the occult.

1. Blood as a Symbol of Sacrifice and Bondage

In both *Living in Bondage* films. Blood is central to the ritual that grants wealth to the cult members. Blood represents life, but in the context of the film. It also represents the cost of obtaining wealth through spiritual means. Nnamdi's initiation into the cult involves his freedom, as he becomes bound by the pact he makes with dark forces. The cult control over its members symbolises the broader societal pressure to conform to specific ideas of success and wealth. Once Nnamdi joins the cult, he finds that he cannot escape its grasp, even as he becomes increasingly aware of the moral cost of his actions. This symbolism reflects the way in which societal and spiritual expectations can dominate an individual's life limiting their choices and leading them down a destructive path.

2. The Cult: The Six

The secret cult, 'The Six', symbolises the corrupting nature of power and the moral compromises that often accompany the pursuit of wealth. The cult represents the hidden system of power in society, where influence and status come at a cost that is often unseen by outsiders. The Six's existence within the elites circles of society speaks to the idea that success, especially sudden wealth is often tied to secret dealings and immoral actions. It also symbolises the dark side of capitalism, where success can require sacrifices that strip away one's humanity and morality.

3. Wealth and Materialism

Throughout the film, wealth and material success are shown as both attractive and dangerous, Nnamdi initial fascination with the luxurious lifestyle that comes with joining 'The Six' symbolises the seduction of materialism. However, as the film progresses, it becomes clear that this wealth is however obtained through immoral means, and tied to immense suffering. The flashy cars, opulent homes, and luxurious parties or symbolises the illusion of success, masking the dark reality of what it takes to maintain that lifestyle. The material world in the film becomes a symbol of entrapment rather than freedom, binding individuals to the cult and it demands.

4. The Mirror

Mirrors appear throughout the film as symbols of self-reflection and the duality of character's lives. For Nnamdi, the mirror symbolises his internal battle between the man he wants to be and the man he is becoming as he gets more involved with 'The Six'. The mirror reflects his moral decay, showing him that why he might appear successful on the outside, internally he's losing his sense of self and integrity. It also symbolises the illusion of control as characters like Nnamdi believe that they can control their fate, but are ultimately trapped by the reflection of their own choices.

In conclusion, symbolism is used to explore themes of power, greed, moral compromise and heavy consequences of immoral actions. Each symbol reinforces the film's message that wealth and success, when came through corrupt means, come at an enormous cost, often leading to personal destruction and entrapment. The film urges viewers to reflect on the ethical implications of ambition and the dark realities behind the pursuit of material success.

Subtexts in *Living in Bondage: Breaking Free*

The subtext in the film provides underlying themes and messages that are not explicitly stated but are subtly communicated through the narrative, characters and situations. These subtexts delve into issues of societal values, power dynamics, and personal morality. Here is a breakdown of some of the key subtexts in the film;

1. Allure and Corruption of Power

One of the main subtext in the film is the portrayal of power as inherently corrupting. While the story revolves around Nnamdi's desire to achieve success and wealth, the theme subtly critiques the social structure that values material wealth above all else. Through Nnamdi, interactions with Richard Williams and 'The Six', the subtext reveals that those in positions of power often maintain the influence through immoral means. This reflects a broader societal concern about how wealth and influence often intertwined with corruption, suggesting that true success in this world may be impossible without moral compromise.

2. The Manipulation of the Vulnerable

The film subtly portrays how the powerful prey on the vulnerable. Nnamdi's ambition and desperation made him an easy target for Richard Williams and 'The Six'. This subtext critiques how those in position of power, whether in business, politics or security societies exploit individual's weaknesses such as their desire for success, ambition or financial security. Richard's mentorship of Nnamdi initially seems benevolent, but it quickly revealed as a manipulative tactics to lure him into the cult. The subtext occurs or is shown in the society, where the powerful take advantage of those who are struggling to get ahead.

3. The Illusion of Choice

The key subtext in the film is the illusion of choice in Nnamdi's life. While he believed that he is in control of his decisions, the reality is that he is being manipulated by forces larger than himself, the cult, societal expectation and his own unchecked ambitions. This subtext reflects the broader idea that many people in society are trapped by circumstances they cannot fully control, despite believing they are making individual and independent choices. Nnamdi's entanglement with 'The Six' symbolises how many individuals are drawn into systems of corruption without fully understanding the implications of their actions until it's too late.

In general, this subtext enhances the audience's understanding of the characters' motivations and the broader social commentary, making the film more than just a supernatural thriller- it becomes a reflection on the cost.

Conclusion

Nollywood horror films offer a profound reflection of Nigerian society's hidden anxieties and traumas, going beyond mere entertainment. Through symbolic representation, these films articulate deep-seated fears embedded in societal and cultural consciousness. By tapping into the psyche of the audience, Nollywood horror films expose fears tied to Colonial history, Corruption, Ritual practices and Social upheaval.

These films provide a pathway to understanding the root of these fears, encouraging introspection on how individuals and society can confront and address these hidden anxieties for progress and healing. Nollywood horror films serve as a medium for exploring and understanding the complexities of Nigerian society.

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