

GLOBALIZATION AND NOLLYWOOD: CARVING A NICHE ON THE GLOBAL PLANE

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ABSTRACT: *Globalization has become an irresistible phenomenon. Virtually all aspects of human life, however remote are now affected by globalization. The Nigerian film industry has equally been affected. The effect of globalization on Nollywood can be noticed in various ways. One of these is the attempt by the industry to take its place on the global plane. The concern, however, is the kind of image Nollywood is attempting to create for Nigeria. This paper finds that, so far, Nollywood has not been able to establish the kind of identity by which the ordinary Nigerian can be identified. The paper therefore suggests some values, attitudes and cultural practices that Nollywood can emphasize as a means of establishing an identity for Nigeria as a nation, in the quest of carving a niche for itself on the global plane.*

KEYWORDS: Globalization, Nollywood, Culture, Film

INTRODUCTION

Globalization has become a phenomenon that is highly topical especially to scholars. This is because of its phenomenal irresistibility. The concerns expressed by different shades of opinion about it stem from its effects on different societies which have continued to experience it in different ways. The point here is that, however isolated a society may be, it must feel the pull of the phenomenon.

It could be posited that virtually all societies have either experienced it or will experience it or become part of it. Equally important is the fact that the vortex of globalization has continued to sweep all aspects of human existence, however insignificant or remote they may seem. This is why one may be tempted to see the phenomenon as an attempt to subsume the societal structures of weaker societies within and under such structures of stronger societies.

In the light of the foregoing, one sees the Nigerian society as one caught up in the web of the globalization phenomenon. Nigeria as a country has become part of the globalization process. The country's leadership has continuously sought relevance in global affairs by engaging in such conduct that would not draw negative remarks from prominent world leaders. Negative comments on any issue may signify disapproval of such leadership. Even refusal to invite a country's president to certain international fora where pertinent global issues may be discussed signifies the rejection of such a president as part of the global political family. Thus, when President Muhammadu Buhari was invited to the G8 summit in Germany shortly after his inauguration on May 29, 2015, it was largely regarded as an endorsement of his ascendancy to power and acceptance of his leadership of Nigeria by the G8 which is made up of the world's most advanced countries and who operate the most stable economies.

Nigeria has therefore, continued to be integrated into the global nexus in virtually all spheres, be it politically, economically or socio-culturally. The country's leaders have continued to attempt to be relevant, leading in the opposition of certain practices such as same – sex

marriage. Economically, the leadership has continually sought bilateral relations with other countries with a view to increasing trade and getting the developed countries to invest in Nigeria. On the socio-cultural front, the country continues to seek ways of both enriching its indigenous people's culture while ensuring that its culture is globally recognized and accepted as valid.

One of the ways through which the country promotes its relevance on the global scene is film. The Nigerian film industry is popularly referred to as Nollywood. It has been known to release thousands of films yearly. Some of these films are now finding their way to other countries. If such exportation is successful, it only means that soon, the Nigerian film should be expected to dominate the global film pantheon.

The fact that film has several advantages in making a statement about a society is not in doubt. It is also true that film can be a vehicle for exporting a society's culture to other societies. It is in this context therefore that this paper examines the attempt by Nollywood to place the Nigerian film on the global plane as part of the globalization process. This is to determine the position of the Nigerian film as well as offer suggestions regarding carving a niche for the country on the global film plane.

CONCEPT OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has become a very topical phenomenon in contemporary times. It connotes an attempt at the integration of different societies or nations into a global whole. This is in different spheres of life. This is why it is defined in different contexts. For example, Wikipedia defines it as "the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, ideas and other aspects of culture". This definition focuses more on culture. But Swedish journalist, Thomas Larsson has extended the definition, stating that:

Globalization is the process of world shrinkage, of distances getting shorter, things moving closer. It pertains to the increasing ease with which somebody on one side of the world can interact to mutual benefit with somebody on the other side of the world. (2001:9)

The definition of Larsson appears to be in the context of the individual and not whole societies. The concept is given an all-embracing definition by sociologists, Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King in their book, *Globalization, Knowledge and Society*. According to them, globalization refers to "all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society". (1990:8). This definition aggregates all the means of interaction by which countries and societies are integrated into a single global society. This can be viewed in various contexts. For example, there is cultural globalization, political globalization, economic globalization and so on. Of concern to this paper, is cultural globalization, as film exhibits the elements of the culture of the society from which it emerges. Paul (2006) has defined cultural globalization as "the transmission of ideas and values around the world in such a way as to extend and intensify social relations". (see en.wikipedia.org?title=globalization).

Cultural globalization is characterized by the adoption of such cultural elements that have been diffused to the various societies through the various media such as internet, film as well

as personal movement. Thus people experience these elements through such interactions that take such cultures across national borders, thereby resulting in the sharing of norms and eventually culminating in culturally collective identities.

What goes on then is the exportation of particular societies' cultures. Wikipedia has it that "a 2005 UNESCO report showed that cultural exchange is becoming more frequent from Eastern Asia but western countries are still the main exporters of cultural goods" (see en.wikipedia.org>title=globalization). The UNESCO report exposes the need for some action from Africa, in general, and Nigeria particularly. This is because of the subtle threat to the continent's cultures which could soon be on the verge of extinction. Wikipedia has significantly noted as follows:

Some critics argue that the dominance of American culture influencing the entire world would ultimately result in the end of cultural diversity. This process understood as cultural imperialism is associated with the destruction of cultural identities, dominated by a homogenized and westernized consumer culture.

(see en.wikipedia.org>title=Globalization)

The submission by critics referred to above is quite significant to the Nigerian situation in which the invasion of elements of western culture has continued to erode indigenous cultural values. A significant way through which foreign culture permeates the society is film. Yet the Nigerian film industry has been acclaimed to be the third largest in terms of volume of production (see Institute of Cultural Diplomacy, 2013). This compels some necessity on the part of Nollywood to respond to this cultural invasion. The point here is that it may be an insurmountable task to resist or halt the infiltration of elements of foreign culture as there are various ways through which people experience them. The response then is to disseminate Nigeria's own cultural elements and make them relevant part of the global culture. And Nollywood can perform this role creditably by carving a niche for itself on the global film plane. It is therefore imperative for Nollywood to act earnestly and find its place on the globalization train where it can be seen as representing the African interest in this regard.

NOLLYWOOD FILMS: The term "Nollywood" is a coinage used to refer to films produced in Nigeria or the Nigerian film industry. The films are video films, as celluloid film has since vanished from the Nigerian movie scene as far back as the late 1980s. The term itself is an imitation of the American Hollywood which is used generally to refer to the American film industry. The Indians equally took after the Americans calling their own Bollywood. Thus the "wood" has become a globalization suffix used to refer to film with the appropriate prefix used to denote the area the film emerges from.

While the term is seen in the context of globalization, it can equally be contemplated in the context of imperialism because those who coined Nollywood could have adopted a term that is purely Nigerian rather than the American "wood"

As has been noted, the Nigerian film industry is one of the largest in terms of production. What lags behind in the industry is the quality. Low quality production is the hallmark of the Nigerian film. This is why one critic proclaimed that "once you've seen one, you've seen all" (see Osha, 1998:50). They all seem to be produced by one person. In corroboration of the

above statement, Anyanwu (2008: 126-138) examined the Nigerian film and concludes that it is an exercise in theme and plot recycling. Other scholars have equally studied the Nigerian film and come up with negative submissions. Adedokun is one such scholar. His conclusion is that, technically, the Nigerian film is a “comedy of errors in camera and continuity interplay” (2008: 259-265). Elo Ibagere has also contributed to the critical analysis of the Nigerian film. He notes in his attempt at theorizing the Nigerian film that it is “subsumed within the precincts of the realistic tendency” (2008:3). He submits that:

a critical analysis of cinematic techniques of the Nigerian film would reveal a simplicity of camera movement and editing as well as a complete avoidance of anything that may compel an intrusion into the realm of the formative tendency (11)

Another scholar who has focused on Nollywood is Matthew Brown. He has noted some technical flaws that continue to be shamelessly exhibited in Nollywood films. According to him, “scenes are often long and overflow with interminable improvised dialogue. At times the sound track employs conspicuous effects and keyboard melodies that overdetermine the films “emotional content”. (2008:61).

Beside the technical flaws of the films, the subject matter remains an area of serious concern. And this is what should stimulate a compelling reorientation of Nollywood film makers, as they attempt to launch Nigeria on to the global film plane and occupy a place worthy of note by other film cultures. Unoma Azuah submits that “most Nigerian films present an unsophisticated and inhumane image of Nigeria because they lack literary merit and promote the demonization of women, occultism, homophobia and fundamentalist Christianity” (cited in Brown 2008: 57). Yet many of these films which deal with traditional themes are folkloric as Okome has appropriately called them in his treatise, “Towards a critique of the Nigerian folkloric cinema” (1993: 55-76). It is therefore the content of the Nigerian film that gives it its identity. What then is the image that the Nigerian film has attempted to present about the country?

It must be noted that whatever image Nollywood attempts to create for Nigeria is tied to the prevailing conditions in the country. This point is well noted by Ekwuazi (1991:20) who submits that “what the movies offer society, the manner in which it is offered, and its content are inextricably bound up with the condition of industrialization”. Ayakoroma has added other indices such as “the social, economic, political, philosophical, cultural and artistic developments” (2008:79). Thus the potential of Nollywood and its ability to carve a niche for itself on the world film pedestal should be analyzed against the backdrop of the above enumerated circumstances. In this context then, the possibility of creating an image for Nigeria through film would be from the perspective of the environment from which the film emerges and in which the people live. Whatever image then that film attempts to create for Nigeria should be taken as what truly transpires in the country. But the truth of the matter is that since most of these films merely exploit the naivety of the viewing public, such an image may not represent reality as it really is, in the Nigerian society. This informs the negative submissions scholars and critics continue to make about Nollywood. This presents a problem in the attempt to carve that significant niche on the global movie plane.

CARVING A NICHE ON THE GLOBAL PLANE

In achieving the task of acquiring and effectively occupying a space on the global film plane, Nollywood must first have an identity. Such an identity must emphasize the Nigerian or African philosophy which must be geared in the direction of success or progress in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles that may threaten to scuttle the march forward. If the submissions of Ekwuazi (1991:20) and Ayakoroma (2008:79) as stated above, are placed in context of the Nigerian society, it means that Nigeria would be presented in a very negative image. Today, the country is witnessing a turbulent political condition with the National Assembly engulfed in leadership crisis. This is not helped by an obvious lack of political ideology that should create a path for the country to follow. The economy is in the doldrums with several states owing workers salaries up to seven months. Socially, the society continues to live in fear as there are threats from several fronts including terrorists, kidnappers and armed robbers. Added to the catalogue of socio-economic woes is now the unacceptable pressure from the west that the country should recognize the reprehensible practice of same – sex marriage. Such a development would destroy one of the pillars on which the socio-cultural foundation of Africa, in general, is built. The pressure is followed with veiled threats to stop economic aid in the various guises to indigent countries. Fortunately, many African countries have risen to openly denounce the pressure with Nigeria and Zimbabwe leading the African defence by passing laws that criminalize the practice.

In the light of such development, whereby obnoxious social and cultural practices now appear to supplant cherished norms, with leading producers of global culture aiming to globalize such damaging norms, it becomes imperative for Nollywood to be in the vanguard of the African defence, in general, and protection of Nigeria, in particular. Nollywood must seek to present a positive image of Nigeria. The country appears to present a negative image of itself. But there are numerous developments that present positive characteristics. For example, the Nigerian (nay African) hospitality and humane disposition towards strangers is a positive norm that can form the bedrock of our films. Also, Nigerians have been acclaimed as “the world’s most optimistic people” (*Vanguard*, Friday July, 24, 2015:49). Properly harnessed, this attitude could translate to the kind of patriotism reminiscent of the United States with her citizens’ preparedness to die for the country in any situation. The Nigerian optimism could thus serve as a model for others to emulate and should be emphasized in all films.

It should be noted that the major film cultures in the world such as America, China and India have characteristics by which they are identified. In analyzing Hollywood films, Ayakoroma observes:

in the Hollywood convention the American dream is projected in such a way that America is seen as the ideal country regardless of the sovereignty or integrity of other countries. Most of the Hollywood war/action films portray America as a dedicated country ready to sacrifice everything to save just one of its own citizens (2008:80)

What Ayakoroma has observed above can be seen replicated by individuals who are prepared to lay down their lives to maintain American integrity and superiority. Films like *Rambo*, *Armageddon* and *Independence Day* are obvious examples of the American dream. The Chinese films are known for the usual martial arts and self defence tactics while equally

emphasizing their ability to stand up against Japanese domination. Indian films express love epitomized in singing in lovely voices and dancing. An analysis of these films would reveal a positive representation of the societies from which they emerge. It is no wonder that many people conceive of Indian women as very beautiful, just as the United States is regarded as God's own country where anybody can aspire to whatever he wants to be because the country exists to protect him.

Sadly, the Nigerian film has not done enough to establish any socio-cultural norm by which the country can be identified. Neither has it advocated any political ideology. If anything, Nollywood has projected the Nigerian society in negative terms. A couple of years ago, in Ghana, Nigerians were attacked after a headless corpse was found. Nigerians were suspected of committing the murder because it was typical of Nigerian films which featured such murders for money-making rituals. Okome (1997:93) has observed that "Nigerian cinema has done next to nothing to create a truly popular political film culture". Nollywood should adopt a policy of encouraging the propagation of a truly Nigerian political ideology as a way of placing the country on a positive global pedestal while leading the citizens to adopt positive norms that would enhance development. This becomes crucial when viewed against the backdrop of American domination of global politics. Nollywood can assist the Nigerian government to attain at least political leadership in Africa, thereby enhancing the place of Africa in global politics.

The significance of this point stems from the fact that, in terms of volume of production, the Nigerian film already occupies a prime place on the global plane. What remains to make such space relevant in terms of being part of globalization is the quality bordering on the technical aspects as well as the content. When they are well harnessed, the Nigerian film would enhance better appreciation of the Nigerian society, thereby attracting citizens of other countries to visit the country. The suggestion then is for Nollywood to adopt certain characteristics exclusive to it. Such would make its global space assured and accepted by other films cultures. This will also enhance the Nigerian economy. The Institute of Cultural Diplomacy has stated that the annual turn-over from Nollywood "was about 590 million dollars and is reputed to be the most popular on the African continent with a release of over 1000 films per year" (2013). If these 1000 films continue to emphasize the relevant positive cultural content the Nigerian global film space would be better utilized.

It is therefore necessary for Nollywood to start operating with the intent of carving a niche for itself on the global plane with a view to justifying its position as the third largest film industry in the world. It should not merely hold this position by virtue of the number of films it churns out annually, but by the quality of such films and the content. It should help to establish an image for Nigeria that would enable the world understand the country as one worthy of visiting and living in.

CHALLENGES OF NOLLYWOOD

The task of carving a niche on the global plane is not an easy one. It involves, first, adopting a particular approach that would establish such characteristics by which the Nigerian film can be identified. Several challenges therefore confront Nollywood in this regard.

First, the adoption of a particular approach will take some time in coming to fruition because there is no umbrella body in the industry that may promote the adoption of such a model approach. Akeh (2008:38) notes that:

... there are over 12 guilds and most of them are set up to satisfy selfish ends, duplicated and either had to dupe each other or the investors. With this, organizations find it difficult to relate with the industry.

In a situation like this, it would be hardly possible that the industry would adopt the kind of content that would edify the industry, especially if such approach or content would not enhance the commercial success of the film makers and make them smile to the bank.

Another challenge is the attitude of the government which film should operate to aid, in the development of the economy. The Nigerian government does not seem to be concerned with film production. Frank Aig-Imokhuede notes that this is not the situation in other climes. According to him:

in Canada, finance is channeled through the film board, although the Canadian Film Development Corporation produces its own feature films. Australia has a Film Development Corporation set up in 1972 which finances films. Funds for film production in Britain and India are also derived from a levy on Cinema admissions (1979:49)

It is clear that these countries' governments have taken film as an important medium that can be utilized for development, hence their assistance. In Austria:

the Austrian Film Fund (AFF), created in 1981, is empowered to provide selective aid from public subsidies as well as automate aid which was introduced in 1987. Both aids are reserved for film satisfying Austrian nationality criteria (see Dible, 1993:13)

In contrast, the Nigerian government, over the years has never been involved in film to the extent of making any reasonable impact regarding how the industry can be used to appropriately utilize our global film space to advantage.

One other challenge can be gleaned from the way Nollywood evolved. The pioneers of Nollywood were businessmen who saw film merely as a commercial venture. They had no practical experience or training in film production. Worse still, Nollywood evolved as a response to the death of celluloid production and the cinema. Video was handy and did not require the huge capital that celluloid needs. These businessmen therefore established a culture of mediocrity in the industry. They are still largely in control. Their main reason for making these film is to make profit on their investments. The development of the technical apparatus of the industry is not crucial in their consideration. They, thus continue to exploit the naivety of the viewing audience who are mostly the poor and the low class. A situation like this can hardly serve the purpose of carving a niche for the industry on the global plane. This is why content revolves around common themes of puerile love and rituals with many of the issues resolved through Christian miracles. These themes continue to be recycled in

different forms because they appeal to the gullible poor and low class who make up a major part of the film audience.

Another challenge emerges from the curriculum of departments offering media courses. Most of these departments teach film courses as if film is merely a theoretical programme. The courses are usually introduced without the much needed equipment to complement theoretical instruction. There is hardly any department of Theatre Arts or Media studies that can boast of the basic equipment needed to make even a student film. Students therefore graduate with only theoretical knowledge and without practical experience. Those fortunate to get into Nollywood find themselves learning from the charlatans that have virtually colonized the industry. They eventually become compelled to adopt the prevailing standards established by those they meet there.

The foregoing challenges are quite fundamental to the success of Nollywood in its attempt to carve a place for itself on the global plane. They are quite formidable and it is only through a conscious and meaningful action that any progress can be made in this regard.

TACKLING THESE CHALLENGES

The challenges so enumerated and discussed are not insurmountable. A number of steps must be taken to surmount them. First, the attitude of government must change. The government should realize the prime position film occupies and strive to utilize the industry to launch elements of the country's culture into the world as its contribution to globalization. The involvement of governments of various countries in their respective film industries has been well stated. Nigeria can do same for its film industry. The government can go ahead to institute a prize for the film that best epitomizes the Nigerian dream. In this regard, the government must adopt a Nigerian philosophy and socio-cultural policy that would be the hallmark of the Nigerian citizen. When such content is emphasized in every film, it would be seen as the character of the common Nigerian. This would then compel the world to have a different impression of the ordinary Nigerian who is constantly seen as a criminal in other countries. Government must do much more to enhance film production. The Nigerian Film Corporation exists but is yet to make any impact in film production. No film has been produced by the corporation. Government should revive the corporation and cause it to produce real Nigeria films. A fund should be created to produce films that express the Nigerian dream; like it is done in other film cultures.

Nollywood should diversify its approach to film making. The industry should search for other works to adapt into films if such works express the country's socio-cultural values. This point is supported by Okwilagwe (2008:55) who opines that "high quality and effective films for cultural engineering can be produced through adaptation of films from indigenous, relevant, appropriate and successful literary works". There should also be a synergy between Nollywood and other media organizations such as Multi Choice and Star Times which can promote Nollywood films with a view to making them globally acceptable. This is why an umbrella body becomes necessary. Such a body would enhance the production of films that can launch Nollywood into global acceptance. Such an umbrella body should be led by intellectuals who have film making experience and who can establish standards that would endure in the industry, and not merely aping western standards. Such standards should relate to how indigenous socio-cultural content could be emphasized in the films. The bottom line

of the argument here is that if most of the films churned out from Nollywood focus on positive socio-cultural content and are good technically, they would earn global recognition.

Academic departments where film courses are offered should endeavor to provide adequate equipment to enhance the teaching of film production. A situation whereby students are not exposed to technical knowledge would not make for technically sound graduates that would go into the industry. The prevailing situation in Nollywood is only a reflection of the level of technical knowledge of those who control the industry.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on globalization and the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood). The paper has emphasized that Nollywood should strive to carve a niche for itself on the global film plane by focusing on such socio-cultural content that would give Nigeria a positive image like American films do for America. This is indicative of the fact that Nollywood has not done enough to occupy its place in the globalization train. This is because, its films are technically poor and feature a negative content that cannot display the characteristics by which the common Nigerian can be identified or inspired. The films do not present Nigeria positively to the extent of encouraging foreigners to want to visit the country. There is therefore the strong need for Nollywood to adopt a new approach to film making in order to carve a niche for itself and usefully occupy its space on the globalization train.

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