

TRANSNATIONAL AND INTEGRATIVE CULTURAL ROLES OF NOLLYWOOD ENTERTAINMENT MEDIA IN WEST AFRICA: THE CASE STUDY OF BENIN REPUBLIC AND GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *Nigerian films, under the auspices of Nollywood are becoming extremely popular among the Africans that are residing in the West African sub-region. In line with the integration agenda of ECOWAS, Nollywood films have been re-emphasising African cultural practises into the West African diasporas living in the various countries in sub-Region and in addition re- infusing the African practices and cultures into the original inhabitants of the various countries within the region. In the post-Cold War era, the Nigerian Nollywood industry has been leading a cultural shift from historical and written facts to visual images without losing the touch of Nigerian English and native dialects, which emphasises the concept of informal education of people by enticing images more that persuasion of words. It is a truism that Nollywood films has gained wide acceptance because of its accessibility among the youth and adolescence in West Africa, and are gradually gaining wider acceptance among the African diasporas within the rest of the Region in Africa and African diasporas in Europe ,America, and the Asian countries. This acceptance was made possible because of socio-cultural and educational values. It is hard to avoid Nigerian films in Africa because public buses show them, as do many restaurants and hotels. Nollywood, as the business is known, churns out about 50 full-length features a week, making it the world's second most prolific film industry after India's Bollywood. The streets of Lagos and the outskirts are flooded with camera crews shooting on location. West African people enjoy watching Nigerian home video films, thereby reinforcing the historical socio-cultural bond. This paper assesses the transnational roles of Nollywood films, its integration force by binging the West African nationals living in the sub-Region together socio-culturally, thereby promoting the ideals of the founding fathers of ECOWAS. These roles will be assessed and analysed through questionnaires that will be administered and interviews both structured and unstructured that will be conducted Benin Republic and Ghana representing Francophone and Anglophone countries respectively. The conclusion reached will be of benefits to the promoters of Nollywood towards positive projection and delivery of African values, norms and cultures within West Africa, to other African countries, so as to enhance the regional integration of African Union.*

KEYWORDS: *Integration, Nollywood, ECOWAS, Diasporas*

INTRODUCTION

Nollywood, which is the Nigeria's booming film industry, is the world's third largest producer of feature films. Unlike Hollywood and Bollywood, Nollywood movies are operated on shoe-string budgets of time and money. An average production takes just 10 days and costs approximately \$15,000. Within twenty-two years, of Nollywood's existence, the film industry has grown from nothing into a \$250 million dollar-a-year industry with thousands of people in its employment. The phenomenal Nollywood is made up of two elements which include the Nigerian

entrepreneurship and digital technology. Nollywood has significantly become involved in the process of Africa's self-reflection and identity construction by means of its cultural representations and it is popular among the youths especially in West Africa (Kunzler (2007), Onuzulike (2007), Akpabio (2007), Oluyinka (2008), Osakwe (2009). Nollywood films have gained wide acceptance because of its accessibility among the youth and adolescence in West Africa, and are gradually gaining wider acceptance among the African diasporas within the rest of the Region in Africa and African diasporas in Europe, America, and the Asian countries. This acceptance was made possible because of socio-cultural and educational values. It is hard to evade Nigerian films in Africa because public buses show them, as do many restaurants and hotels. Nollywood churns out about 50 full-length features a week, making it the world's second most prolific film industry after India's Bollywood (UNESCO report, April 2009). The streets of Lagos and the outskirts are flooded with camera crews shooting on locations.

The word "Nollywood" is derived from the acronyms such as Hollywood and Bollywood. Other competing name is "Naijwood" which has not gained ground as Nollywood among the film audiences in Nigeria and her Anglophone neighbours refers to Nollywood as the Nigerian national film industry. Nollywood actually refers to the movies produced in English language, and other Nigerian languages which include Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. These Nigerian Languages are translated into English and French languages. This accounted for the widely spread and universal appeal in Europe, America, West Africa and other African countries. There are between 1000 to 2000 movies produced each year in Nigeria. A majority of these are in English but it is important to note that there are films made in the main Nigerian languages of Yoruba (which has a long standing history of television productions for decades), Igbo and Hausa.

The Nollywood films according to Kunzler, is "an industry that has developed out of a context related to domestic and international cultural, economic, and political environments. It is heterogeneous in nature and can roughly be divided into Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo video films which designate their production centers in the South-West, North and South-East of Nigeria respectively" (Kunzler, 2007: 1).

In line with the integration agenda of ECOWAS, Nollywood films have been upholding African cultural practises and promoting such among diasporas living in the various countries in sub-region and in addition re- infusing the African practices and cultures into the original inhabitants of the various countries within the West Africa.

Nollywood's productions reflect the live-in situations of Nigerians and represent many issues that both Nigerians and other African citizens can relate with. As Kunzler argues, "they affect Africans more than other foreign films" (Kunzler, *ibid*: 10). They emerge from what Mofe-Damijo , a popular Nollywood actor based in Edo State, Nigeria, calls "real genuine stories about the cultural experience of the people

Culture is "identity, history, agency and practice, that cannot be taken as fixed entities but parts of a system of representation which is permanently in a process" (Hall, 1997, Rojek, 2003).

This means that culture is in a flux and brings about new formations with time. Nollywood can be said to combine significant features of culture which are “overwhelmingly rich and varied in [their] manifestations” (Hannerz, 1997) to represent people’s way of life in Nollywood films. West African people enjoy watching Nigerian home video films, thereby reinforcing the historical and socio-cultural connections of the sub-region. Therefore, this paper assesses the transnational roles of Nollywood films and its integration mechanisms in the sub-region. These roles are assessed and analysed through questionnaires administered and interviews, which are both structured and unstructured that were conducted in Benin Republic and Ghana representing Francophone and Anglophone countries respectively.

Statements of problem

Africans experience in everyday life communal mutuality in village festivals, traditional dancing tunes and steps, religious worships and socio-cultural cooperation in works. This experience may be identical except the language use. Twenty-two years ago, the appearance of cheap and easily-operated video equipment made possible a whole new kind of filmmaking that escaped the problematic of celluloid cinema and steadily proved phenomenally successful with the African public. The “video boom” arose on a commercial basis: not the corporate, capitalist commercialism of Hollywood, but the commerce of the African market—an enormous energy of exchange, but without large capital formations, bank loans, or much relationship with the formal sector at all. The Nollywood viewers cut across West Africa and this raises the question of sub-regional integration, can it be established that the presence of Nollywood in West African is a contributory factor to sub-regional integration in West Africa?.

Research questions

1. What is the prevalence of viewership of Nollywood films in both Benin Republic and Ghana?
2. What are the cultural components depicted in Nollywood films?
3. Do Nollywood films relevant to Benin Republic and Ghanaian viewers?
4. Do Benin Republic and Ghanaian viewers identify with Nollywood artistes?
5. What are the elements of Nigerian culture learnt by Benin Republic and Ghanaian viewers?

METHODOLOGY

Design

A survey descriptive design was adopted in this study. A non-probability sampling method was used to select the participants. Two countries were purposively selected. They were Benin Republic and Ghana; the study took place in their capitals and 645 participants were selected from each of the capitals visited. All these participants watched Nigerian movies either on the cable televisions or compact disc (CD). The distribution was well represented with 43% male in Ghana and 57% female, 48% male in Benin Republic and 52% female. In all 26% had Ordinary level certificate in Benin Republic, 46% were degree holders and 28% had various other forms of

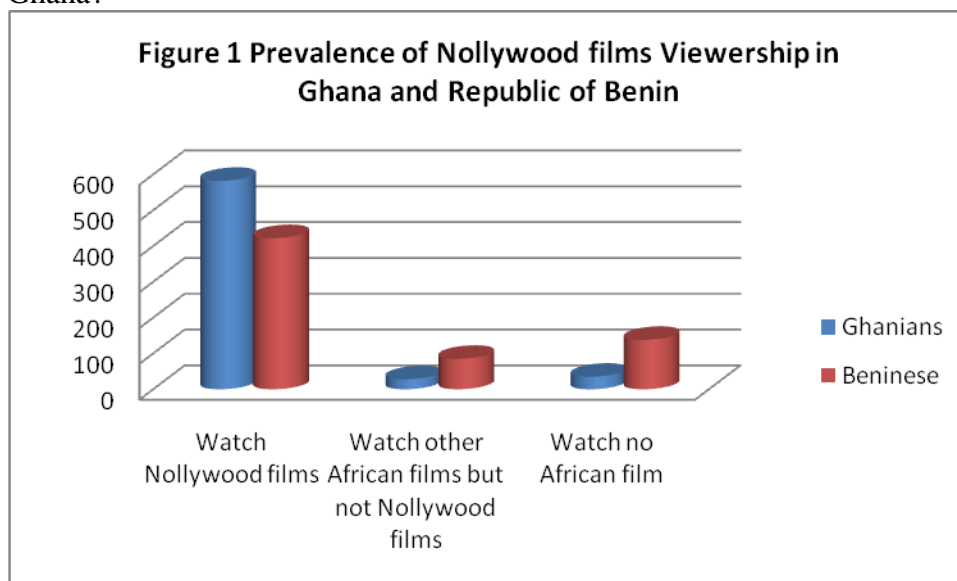
formal education. In Ghana the degree holders were 42% and others had various forms of formal education.

Instruments

The questionnaire was designed to collect information on the transnational and integrative cultural roles of Nollywood film industry. This questionnaire was made up of 24 items capturing areas such as; prevalence of viewership of Nollywood films, the cultural components depicted in Nollywood films, relevance of Nollywood films to viewers etc A pilot study was conducted with respondents selected from the two nations. The test-re-test reliability after two weeks yielded $r=0.78$ and Cronbach Alpha of 0.74 was found.

Results

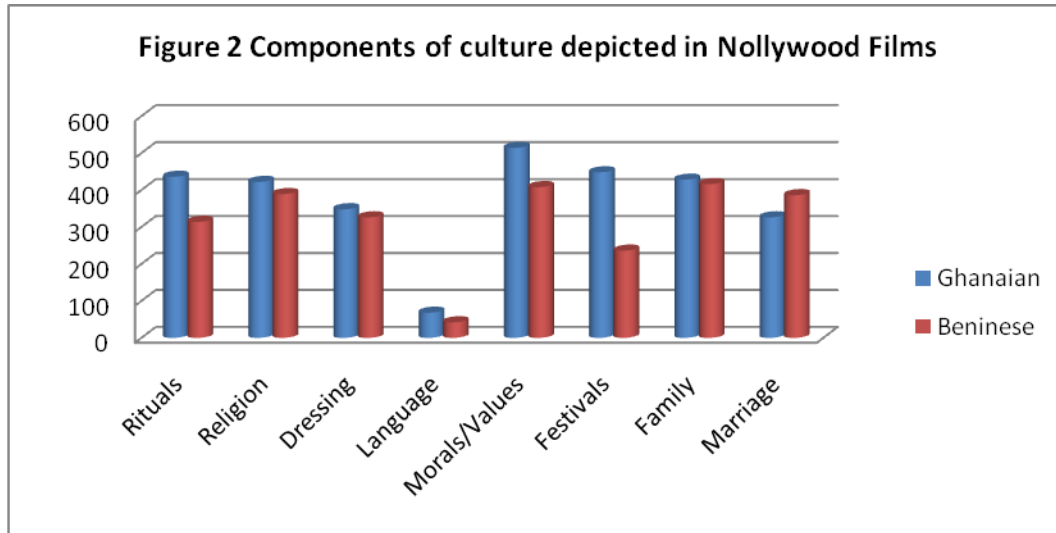
1. What is the prevalence of viewership of Nollywood films in both Benin Republic and Ghana?



Source: Survey, 2012

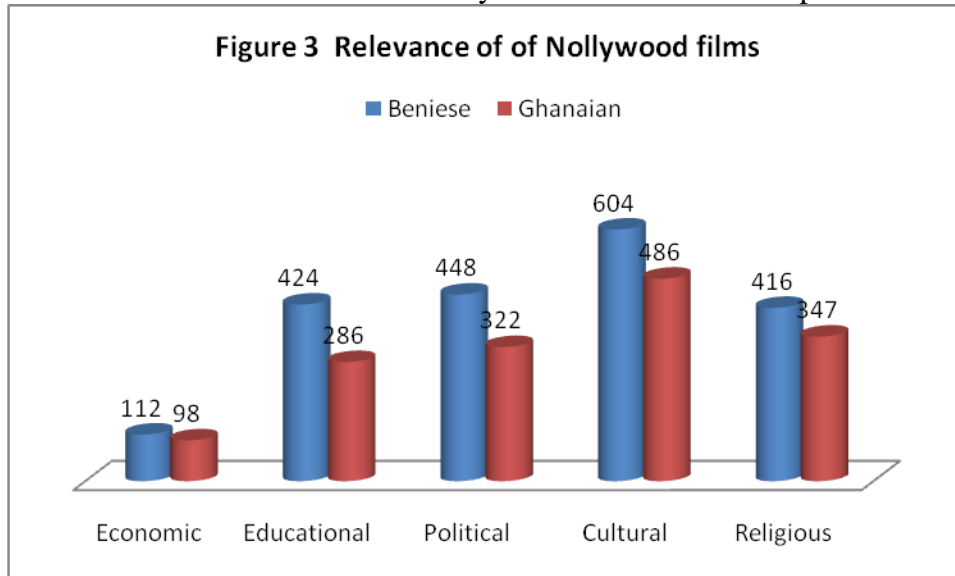
The figure indicated that 582 participants who were Ghanaians representing 90.2% against 422 participants who were Beninese representing 65.4% watched Nollywood films others either watched other African films or foreign films. The percentage of those who preferred foreign films to African films was higher in Benin Republic than Ghana. This might be the spilling effect of colonisation and policy of assimilation in French colonies.

2. What are the cultural components depicted in Nollywood films?



The figure indicated that 436 participants who were Ghanaians representing 74.9% against 314 participants who were Beninese representing 75.4% indicated rituals as a component of culture depicted in Nollywood films, 422 Ghanaians representing 72.5% against 389 Beninese representing 93.4 % indicated religion. Other components reported are dressing by 59.8% Ghanaians and 78.2% Beninese, language by 11.7% Ghanaians and 10% Beninese , morals/values by 88.3 Ghanaians and 97.9 Beninese, festivals by 76.9% Ghanaians and 56.6 Beninese, marriage by 56% Ghanaians and 92.6% Beninese and other forms such as story, folklore etc.

3. What is the relevance of Nollywood films to Benin Republic and Ghanaian viewers?



The figure indicated that 112 participants who were Ghanaians representing 17.4% against 38 participants who were Beninese representing 15.2% indicated rituals as a component of culture

depicted in Nollywood films, 424 Ghanaians representing 65.7% against 286 Beninese representing 44.3 % indicated religion. Other components reported are dressing by 59.8% Ghanaians and 78.2% Beninese, language by 11.7% Ghanaians and 10% Beninese , morals/values by 88.3 Ghanaians and 97.9 Beninese, festivals by 76.9% Ghanaians and 56.6 Beninese, marriage by 56% Ghanaians and 92.6% Beninese and other forms such as story, folklore etc.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that, 90.2% of Ghanaians and 65.4% of Beninese watched Nollywood films. This high percentage of viewership in these two countries might be unconnected with the roles Nollywood films play in Africa. Nollywood is commercially-savvy and values the entertainment of its clientele. The entertainment bit is primary to the mode of representation in the industry, yet in that pursuit, one cannot forget its sense of mission, which is to produce culture from the bottom of the street. Nollywood provides the imaginary for certain marginal sections of the society where it operates. It is the poorer part of its postcolonial base, which is no longer restricted to Nigeria.

This marginal clientele is now found among people on the continent and in the black diaspora where such postcolonial conditions prevail. However, this is not to argue that Nollywood clearly demarcates its potential audience along social and economic lines. Even if it tries, this will not be successful in a society where the gulf between the rich and the poor is often a fluid spectrum of negotiations for access to power and money. The continental significance of Nollywood and its economic and social importance to the audience that it caters for cannot be overemphasised. Outside of Nigeria, and indeed Africa, Nollywood is still largely a curiosity.

The findings equally revealed that both Ghanaians and Beninese reported that rituals, religion, dressing, language, morals/values, festivals, story, folklore etc are components of culture that were depicted in Nollywood films. Nollywood has become a piece of artefact-a piece of *something* from *somewhere* far away but something that is interesting all the same. The visual practice of Nollywood cannot exist outside of the cultural and institutional framework of Africa and its cultural heritage.

The relevance of Nollywood films to Ghanaians and Beninese were seen in the area of economic, education, political, religion and cultural. Right from its inception, the debate around the cultural relevance of Nollywood was part of the larger question of this filmmaking tradition. This debate has a direct bearing on the place of the audience, and it is intricately connected to the social sites where video films are consumed.

The exuberant presence of Nollywood in this part of Africa points to the fact that it reaches beyond its primary constituency of avid patrons, those from the bottom of the social and economic ladder in Nigeria. What was positive about this engagement was that it forced viewers into a critical introspection of those things that matter to them but were not expressed in the so-

called enlightened vehicles of public debates that are controlled by the state. The downside of this critical engagement would be that while it offered a sense of freedom for members to say what they want about language development, culture moral/values etc., and this freedom was only a pyrrhic victory of some sort.

One impressive aspect of Nollywood as related to this is in the representation of religious-cultural rituals as a major aspect of communalism. This illustrates the ability of film producers and directors to marshall familiar symbolic language of these cultures into their productions, especially to provide the experience of communal liminal (Animalu, 1990), cultural integration and nostalgic egalitarianism among proximate audiences – who are mainly Nigerians and Africans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for this study as a result of findings

1. The regional and sub-regional organisations should seize the opportunity of Nollywood general acceptance to achieve their objectives of integrations among the citizens of countries in the continent of Africa.
2. The government of Nigeria should use the medium provided by film industry in Nigeria to solve the problem of ethnic clashes and act of terrorism by commissioning the producers of Nollywood films to produce films that will promote unity in diversity among the citizens of Nigeria.
3. In addition to this, films that will promote tolerance of other citizens of the member States of ECOWAS and other African Groupings should be encouraged. Such films will enhance integration agenda of ECOWAS within the sub-region of West Africa and overall also integration agenda of African Union with the continent of Africa.
4. The major players in film industry in Nigeria should be enlightened on the important roles their works play in the unity and development of the country and African continent.

CONCLUSION

The Nigerian movie industry influences African culture. “We are often reminded that film is a powerful medium of entertainment and the transmission of cultural values” (Orewere, 2006). Cultures are the creation of human interactions. The changes in human society reflect the dynamism of culture. This dynamism is responsible for constant change in patterns associated with given cultures, and the multicultural character of most, if not all, societies substantially widens the range for influence on such cultures (Hall, 2005).

Therefore, Nollywood is very popular in West Africa and its activities include speaking to the aspects of social life that many people live cannot be ignored. It also speaks to and debates social and cultural anxieties the way no other media had done before. Its interrogation of political discourses in surreptitious manner and the involvement of individuals living in the villages and cities are quite conspicuous in the film Nollywood productions .Finally, Nollywood

can be considered as a voice of Africans whose discourse has its own regime of socio-cultural cum political meanings that are capable of catching the attention of its audience.

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