

**FILM AS A PURVEYOR OF NIGERIA'S IMAGE AND SOCIO-CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOLLYWOOD MOVIES**

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**Abstract**

*Film is one of the significant tools of communication available to human society. In Nigeria, the Nollywood which is the household name for the movie Industry in Nigeria can be described as a potential tool for the promotion of cultural identity and national development. However, there seems to be some lapses and permissiveness of undesired contents in most Nollywood films which tend to imprint negative socio-cultural images of the country in the mind of viewers. Lately, Nollywood movie producers have started looking socio-cultural themes and concepts to drive home the quest for promoting Nigeria's rich cultural heritage so as to limit the effect of globalized media contents on our socio-cultural development and national integration. This paper intends to evaluate how Nollywood movies which is the most accessible form of exhibiting Nigeria's cultural indigenous heritage, is promoting and projecting the indigenous cultural values of Nigeria to the outside world. Of consideration to this paper, was the theme of the selected*

*Nollywood movies within the context of indigenous cultural development. The paper made use of documentary observation and content analysis methods on selected Nollywood films such as: 'Inale'—produced by Keke Bongos and directed by Jet Amata in 2010, Lion heart produced by Chinny Onwugbenu and directed by Genevieve Nnaji 2018, and 'Wedding Party 1' directed by Kemi Adetiba in 2016. The selection of the films was based on the fact that they reflect some of the genres like Classic, Comedy, Romance and so on in Nollywood. These categories of films contributed significantly in unraveling the different lifestyles and socio-cultural experience of Nigerians in their ethnic and socio-cultural contexts. From the analysis of these films, it was found that the potential for cultural representation and portrayed of the diverse indigenous cultural heritage of the Nigerian society in Nollywood is immensely high. This, one would say, could help in ensuring cultural renaissance in the face of erosion of our cultural values due to globalization.*

**Keywords:** Film, Nollywood, Culture, Nigerian Image, Globalization

## **Introduction**

The Nigerian movie entertainment industry popularly known as Nollywood is a very powerful communication platform. The industry evolved on the platform of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage in the arts. The talents from traditional street theatres, traditional story telling cultures and early attempts at indigenous television programming also made enormous contributions to this evolution. In building on the antecedents of indigenous cultural values, Esan (2005) is of the veins that "Nollywood evolved around a dominant language structure which also reflects the original geopolitical structure of Nigeria. Nigerian's Nollywood remains the dominant film industry in Africa that is poised to championing the projection of the Nigerian cultural values through film." The development of Nollywood dates back to the colonial era, through the efforts of the European merchant, colonial administration and the church (Ibe, 2004)

## **Statement of the Problem**

Film is one of the significant tools of communication available to human society. In Nigeria, the Nollywood which is the household name for the movie Industry in Nigeria can be described as a potential tool for the promotion of cultural identity and national development. However, there seems to be some lapses and permissiveness of undesired contents in most Nollywood films which tend to

imprint negative socio-cultural images of the country in the mind of viewers. Lately, Nollywood movie producers have started looking socio-cultural themes and concepts to drive home the quest for promoting Nigeria's rich cultural heritage so as to limit the effect of globalized media contents on our socio-cultural development and national integration. This paper intends to evaluate how Nollywood movies which is the most accessible form of exhibiting Nigeria's cultural indigenous heritage, is promoting and projecting the indigenous cultural values of Nigeria to the outside world.

### **Aim**

The aim of this paper is to established the significance of Nollywood movies as a purveyor of Nigeria's socio-cultural development with the view of enhancing social identity, integration and development.

### **Objectives**

- i. To explore the potential of Nollywood movies in projecting Nigerian indigenous culture.
- ii. To examine the themes of the selected Nollywood movies within the context of indigenous cultural development.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Film as a Meaning-Making Site of Cultures**

Today, much emphasis is still being placed on the social interactions that spectators bring to 'reading' films (Campbell, 2005) and the way meanings are made by their reception and interpretations. This study's filmic analysis aims to arrive at the interpretation of cultural symbols invested in films to gain meanings of the socio-cultural activities among the communalistic people of Africa and Nigeria, in particular. In this way, the Nigerian national cinema is being used to explore the representations of Africa from across Europe and America. Since 'a film is not only a sequence of moving images but also an organized mixture of images, words, texts, music and noises that are characterized by a constant displacement and circulation of meaning' (Jensen, 2002). What all these show is that in films, there is an ample array of meanings that can be made of human societies, especially of African continent and people, given the dominance of their representations. Nollywood films embody much of the history and stories that could be read to illustrate that filmic text conveys a huge range of meanings of societies and their cultures as seen in most studies done already in film studies.

## **Nigerian Indigenous Cultural Values and Nollywood**

The Nigeria movie industry evolved on the platform of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage in the arts. The talents from traditional street theatres, traditional story telling culture and early attempts at indigenous television programming also made enormous contributions to this evolution. For building on the antecedent of indigenous cultural values, Esan (2008) states that;-

'Nollywood evolved around a dominant language structure which also reflects the original geopolitical structure of Nigeria. The industry thus has three distinct sectors; Yoruba movies, Igbo movies and Hausa movies. The movies tend to reflect the cultures in these areas and are often produced and distributed from the commercial nerve center in these regions and Lagos-the nation's commercial capital. This structure has been inherited by the Nigerian film and video censors Board as a basis of classifying the videos. There are also English Language productions and what has evolved as a distinct category - the Engligbo, so labeled because of the tendency to use both Igbo and English languages.'

The ethnic affiliation around the industry is very clear in the storylines, shooting location and sometimes even in the cast. To this end, it becomes easier for audiences to relate to and identify with Nollywood. The collateral challenges fostered by Nollywood are as a result of diverse interests, needs and preferences of its heterogeneous audiences. This heterogeneity is rooted in the range of ethnic, linguistic, religious and other socio-political factors within Nigeria and other parts of Africa that constitute the primary market for Nollywood movies (Esan, 2008).It is therefore important to restate here that culture identifies a people and is central to primordial and self- determination sentiments in the themes of its movies.

### **Methodology**

The paper made use of documentary observation and content analysis methods on selected Nollywood films such as: '*Inale*'-produced by Keke Bongos and directed by Jet Amata in 2010, *Lionheart* produced by Chiny Onwugbenu and directed by Genevieve Nnaji 2018, and *Wedding Party 1'* directed by Kemi Adetiba in 2016. The selection of the films was based on the fact that they reflect some of the genres like Classic, Comedy, Romance and so on in Nollywood. These categories of films contributed significantly in unraveling the different

lifestyles and socio-cultural experience of Nigerians in their ethnic and socio-cultural contexts.

These films were analyzed in details according to the criteria indicated earlier in the research methodology. The research has detailed the sampling procedure and the justification for the choice of the films, the method to be used in the analysis and the reasons for the choice of particular methods over others. The unit of analysis of the qualitative content analysis is as follows:

Culture Portrayed	=	Local or Foreign
Costumes/Props	=	Traditional or Western
Language	=	Nigerian or English
Setting/Location	=	Rural or Urban
Food	=	Local or Foreign
Etiquette	=	Proper or Improper
Names	=	Local or English
Dressing	=	Traditional or Western
Song/Dance	=	Afro-Hip Hop or Western

**Result and Analysis**

**Table 1: Content Analysis for the film “Lionheart 2018.”**

Variables	Local	Foreign	Trad	Western	Nigerian	English	Rural	Urban	Local Cuisine	Inter-Continental Cuisine	Proper	Improper	Local	English	Trad	Western	Afro hip-hop	Western
Cultural Portrayal	*	*																
Costumes			*	*														
Language					*	*												
Setting /Locati							*	*										

on																			
Food								*	*										
Etiquette										*	*								
Names												*	*						
Dressing														*	*				
Song/Dance																*	*		
Source:						Qualitative						Observation,						2019.	

The movie *Lion heart* produced by Chinny Onwugbenu and directed by Genevieve Nnaji was a rich Nigerian film released in 2018. The film strive to promote local industry especially in car manufacturing and transportation sector of the Nigerian economy. The movie which started in a car park somewhere in Enugu State, South East, Nigeria depicting the notoriety of motor part tout who go about elicit for the payment of operational levies is synonymous to the everyday experience of what most Nigerians go through when using this form of transportation. However this negative portrayal of human relation, the ability of Nigerians in managing conflict situation was brought to bear in Genevieve interaction with the motor part tout leader. Finally, the voice of reason overcame that of violence.

The *Lion heart* movies is said to be a promoter of indigenous innovation in the car manufacturing industry. Here again, industrialization of a society is seen as a form of its cultural industry. Although some might claim, the technological advancement like vehicle production and transportation business should not form a part of cultural portrayal, advance countries like America, Germany to mention a few have all used this to portray their culture to the rest of the world especially in movie like *007* and *Transporter 1&2*.

Enugu state being a state created out of the old Anambra state in 1991 does not only serve as the administrative capital of Eastern Nigeria but also the transportation hub of most popular transport companies in Nigeria. Some of the common companies include Ekene Dili Chukwu, ABC Transport, F.G. Onyenwe Motors, Labour Mass, Udeno Mass Transit, Cross line to mention a few. This partially support the choice of the city and state by Genevieve in depicting the transportation business prowess of the peple of the area. The use of modern costumes as depicted in the clothes worn by Genevieve and her assistant (Jemima Osunde) as well as those worn by Peter Okoye, and Kalu Ikeagwu and some other character who played less prominent roles in the film. On the part of costumes also, the use of traditional clothes by Pete Edochie, who was all adorn in Igbo clothes associated with royalty alongside the use of stick and fan as well as wearing of traditional beads on the neck and wrist promote indigenous culture of the people from the East. Similarly, the adorning of Kaftani by Yakubu Mohammed and Baban Riga by Sani Mua'zu also portrayed and



projected the way of life of most people in Northern Nigeria especially the city of Kano.

Language is one form of communication that a society is identified with. In this regard, there are three languages that were spoken i.e. English, Igbo and Hausa languages. The choice of English as used in the movie is to enable the movie audience understand the movie without readily resorting to reading the translation as it is been shown on the film. However, there is the predominance in the use of Igbo language in this movie. One of the reason adduced for this could be the fact that the producers as well as most of the actors and actresses were Igbo. For example, Pete Edochie, Onyeka Owenu, Nkem Owoh, Kanayo Kanayo, Ngozi Ezeonu, Peter Okoye and Chika Okpala. Similarly, in the instance where Hausa language was used, it was used at the instance where actors such as Sani Mua'zu and Yakubu Mohammed conversed and later at an interaction between Pete Edochie and Sani Mua'zu. The use of these two languages which are two of the predominant languages spoken in eastern and northern Nigeria could be said to have reflected a very significant portion of the Nigerian culture.

The setting of a movie is also another way of portraying indigenous way of life. However, in this film, the only depiction of rural area was at the beginning of the movie especially when the film took a bird eye view of the entrance into Enugu town. The rest of the settings were modern or urban in nature which hardly project nor promote our indigenous architecture and building techniques. Furthermore, the film made use of office locations and furniture's as most of the scenes were shots in offices and homes in Enugu as the main thrust of the movie in the promotion of transport business through the patronage of local vehicle manufacturers for example, Innoson Vehicle Manufacturing Company - IVM based in Nnewi. The food used inn the film were basically local meal especially "Apku" (fresh cassava flour meal) with "Ukazi" soup. This is a clear example of a local way of life. However, the use of china wares, spoons and fork in eating of the meal is completely a negation of Nigeria mode of eating the type of meal with the hand. Again, the etiquette depicted in the films to a large extent is culturally inclined. Take for example, the exchange of pleasantries between Nkem Owoh and Pete Edochie is typical of the exchange of salutations common to the Igbo speaking tribe of

Nigeria. Similarly, the exchange of serious thoughts and discussion over the meal although a very bad eating habit or etiquette when weighed within the standard of European and Western table manner, it is actually a very good thing within our cultural setting a view shared by Ezenweke and Nwadiakor (2013) where he states that more robust conversation and dialogue takes place while the meal is being served.

Every work of art is a reflection of the society that created it. Nollywood films cannot be an exception. Film is art, and therefore, it is the reflection of the cultural sensibilities, beliefs, values and the world view of society that created it. This implies that film is largely concerned with the preservation and propagation of people's culture across the globe. Nollywood film emerged as a response to satisfy the audience clamor for indigenous film reflect the culture of Nigerians and to market their national agenda to rest of world. Dressing is an act of expression. It readily tells us when a person comes from. It is a mark of social identity. In this film, the Igbo traditional clothes especially the use of "akwa-oche" by Pete Edochie and the use of "Baban Riga" by Sani Mua'zu expressed the Hausa culture. This type of dress mode is exemplary and encouraged in order to safeguard our cultural identity from Western influence. However, the promotions of indigenous dressing, the film fell culprit of over use of western dressing by the lead actress - Genevieve who most of the times wore western styled dresses. Another low point in her dressing was the exposure of her cleavage which got one of the creditors to be carried away. An action that got Nkem Owoh to intervene by covering it up. Also, by the pool side while visiting Peter Okoye to solicit for aid, the concentration of the camera short on the semi-nude lady did not speak well of the propriety of dressing in the cultural context.

Another variable which was considered in this analysis with regard to culture portrayal was the use of songs and dances. The sound track is an afro-pop song that could readily resonate with the people from the Eastern part of Nigeria. The playing of the "goje" sound and song at the time Genevieve and Nkem Owoh's visit to Kano is also cultural expression common to the people of Northern Nigeria and appropriate a way of cultural portrayal in the film. The cultural display by the Atilogwu cultural dance group is another positive of indigenous culture of the people. Again, the last song "Obi-Agu" performed by Phyno which is another afro-

Nigerian hip-hop is one which could also be said a better portrayal of the culture of a people in the Nigerian society. Name calling is also a very vital part of the culture of the people in Nigeria.

**Table 2: Content Analysis for the film "Inale 2010."**

Variables	Local	Foreign	Trad	Western	Nigerian	English	Rural	Urban	Local Cuisine	Inter-Continental Cuisine	Proper	Improper	Local	English	Trad	Western	Trad / Afro hip-hop	Western
Cultural Portrayal	*	-																
Costumes			*	-														
Language/ Mode of Comm					-	*												
Setting							*	-										

/Locati on																
Food								-	-							
Etiquet te										*	-					
Names												*	-			
Dressi ng													*	-		
Song/D ance															*	-

Source: Qualitative Observation, 2019.

Inale was a Nigerian movie that portrayed the rich cultural traditions and heritage of the Idoma people. The film completely portrayed the local tradition of the Idoma people in a folkloric way especially through the act of story telling, song and dances. The portrayal of the forms of the peoples way of life was shown at the movement of King Oche from his palace to the village for the commencement of the contest through which the champion would be given his daughter Inale's hand in marriage.

The movement of the king and his entourage accompanied by some number of different Masquerade, drumbeats and dance to the village is akin to the modern day escort blaring siren that announces the arrival of a very special guest. The significance of the masquerade in Idoma society is that it represent the physical presence of the spirit of the ancestor among the people. Common masquerades in this ceremony are the "*Odomu*", "*Akatakpa*", "*Elechi*". Masquerade performances and all the associated theatricalities according to Ted (2015) reinforces the people's close relationship with the spiritual and physical world.

The costumes largely used in the film were basically props that could be said to be significantly traditional and local to the Idoma people. The adorning of King Oche and Queen Omade traditional Idoma cultural attires in red and black. The red colour according to Ogbe (2013) is one which signifies strength while the black colour signifies the fertility of soil in areas where the people lived being an agrarian society. The language promoted in the film was the Idoma language although the film was acted in the English, the Idoma language was used in the songs, interjections. The use of maiden of same age group in the opening of the film after the meeting between Inale and Odeh is one other practice of the Idoma people that was aptly captured in the film. The essence of this group for the building of cordiality among this level of sorority. The lady in the age group also act as a support base for any of their kind who is about getting married or going to her husband place as seen in their accompanying of Inale to Agaba's village.

The setting of the movie depicted a communal living which is characterized by mud building roofed with thatch mostly built close to each other. More so, the use of the village square as a place of social gathering and public communication is also one that is very popular with

the Idoma people. The village square and not the King's palace is the place for public ceremony as well as public communication.

Another feature which was also highlighted although not allowed to play any prominent role when compared to another film in this analysis "Iyore" is that of the "Elders". In Nigeria socio-cultural set up, the elders are known to be the custodian or the store house of social knowledge which could be relied upon to tell the history of the people, event and economic development. Their knowledge and wisdom is also relied upon in the time of serious decision making. No wonder, they were always shown at scenes such as the wrestling contest when the king had to follow through with his decision to give the hand of his daughter in marriage to anyone who wins the contest.

Wrestling (*Otambla*) among the Idoma people does not only serve the purpose of sport which young agile and able bodied men participate in. wrestling also serve the purpose of entertainment and comical relief as shown in the use of a dwarf to fight Odeh which amuses the people. The accompanying local song and the playing of the local drum "*uba*" further attaches the importance of the use of the village square to also play the function of entertainment and sport beyond just its use for social gathering and public communication.

In this film also, some of the song and dance at both of the wrestling contest like the "*ogrinya*" and "*kpaló*" are common place in the Idoma society. Finally, a significant aspect of cultural representation in the name given to people, events, things etc. The names of the lead actors and actresses such as Oche, Ochanya, Odeh, Inale, Omei, Agaba and Omade are all Idoma names and appropriately pronounced to a large extent even when the cast are mostly not from the area. Hence, it could be said that Inale significantly portray and promote the Idoma culture positively. The place of the children playing at the playground is another way of enhancing social harmony as well as a way of encouraging youthful participation in the social development of the society.

**Table 3: Content Analysis for the film “Wedding Party 1.”**

Variables	Local	Foreign	Trad	Western	Nigerian	English	Rural	Urban	Local Cuisine	Inter-Continental Cuisine	Proper	Improper	Local	English	Trad	Western	Trad / Afro hip-hop	Western
Cultural Portrayal	*	*																
Costumes / Props			*	*														
Language / Mode of Comm.					*	*												



Setting /Location						-	*										
Food								*	*								
Etiquette										*	*						
Names												*	-				
Dressing														*	*		
Song/Dance																*	-

Source: Qualitative Observation, 2019.

The cultural portrayal of this film is the focus of this analysis beyond any other theme such as love and intermarriage that the movie tries to promote. The film had a strong representation of two predominant cultures in Nigeria namely the Yoruba and Igbo culture. The main thrust of the film is the promotion of inter-ethnic cohesion in a diverse society such as Nigeria. Another culture reflected in this movie is the western mode of marriage depicted in joining of the husband and wife at the church rather than a traditional marriage rite. Similarly, the adornment of wedding suit by the groom and that of the bride alongside the accompanying groom friends and brides maids also relegated the place of indigenous cultural propagation which the film should engender.

However, this lull in the traditional cultural portrayal, the wedding party proper is one that could be said to be inundated with a plethora of cultural events and displays.

The costumes used by the Okafor's and that of the Ade-Coker were all traditionally inclined. Mr Okafor specifically was adorned with a red cap fitted with a bird feather on his head. His wrist was adorned with a white bead which is also adorned round his neck. Similarly, he wore the signature Igbo shirt "Akwa-Oche" alongside a chieftaincy fan signifying royalty. Mr. Ade-Coker wore the popular Yoruba "Fila" typical of a Yoruba man from Ile-Ife. He wore the popular "Agbada" long robe with a moderate creamy coloured beads round his neck. His wife was adorned with a red beaded necklace with a head tie "Gele" on her head or an "Iro" styled "Buba" shirt. Most of the guests at the party to a large extent were dressed in traditional apparel representing one culture or the other.

There was the use of Yoruba and Igbo language on few occasions but not an extensive one to signify the true representation of the two cultures. The setting used in this film was urban and therefore did not promote local architecture of the people from these two cultures. There was a very significant show of social etiquette with regard to the act of the white lady who knelt down to greet Mr. Coker who in turn reprimanded the Nigerian lady to do the same before accepting their salutation.

Food again could be a variable that promotes the identity of a society's culture. In this film, the display of "amala" in a three legged pot, the use of leaves to serve the meal on a "gbegiri" and "ewedu" soup is one that resonates easily with the Yoruba. However, the film failed to also highlight Igbo foods and delicacies as

was done with the Yoruba cuisine. The film also failed to show any local drink or beverage as a way of portraying either culture.

The playing of the popular marriage song, "Adan'ma" by Flavour to usher in the Okafor's and "Emi by Yinka Ayefele to user in the bride family was a focal manifestation of cultural promotion. To a large extent, the audience from both culture appreciated these songs by dancing to its melodious tunes and beats. Although, a comical film intended to promote cultural cohesion through inter-marriage and tolerance, it has to a large extent also portrayed Nigeria culture significantly.

From the analyses of the selected films, it was found that:

1. The potential for cultural representation and portrayed of the diverse indigenous cultural heritage of the Nigerian society in Nollywood is immensely high. This, one would say, could help in ensuring cultural renaissance in the face of erosion of our cultural values due to globalization.
2. Theme selection in the films analysed were positively inclined marking a shift from the barbaric and weird classification of previous film in this regards. Themes such as peaceful co-existence, trust, heroism, love, justice, truth, bravery, industry, social integration to mention a few were adequately featured in the films, thereby ensuring content and contextual representation of Nigerian culture.
3. The forage into movie production and directing by stars such Genevieve Nnaji, Kunle Afolayan and Jetta Amata to mention a few has tremendously boosted the quality of culturally inclined movies being produced by the industry today. Similarly, accessibility of funding, availability of technical capacities and capabilities as well as researched scripts have contributed significantly to the improving of the industry's drive to promote indigenous culture.
4. The ability of cast to speak indigenous languages even when they are not from the clime whose culture is being projected was seen as a way of cultural socialization and integration.
5. More, the significant use of local dress modes in the movies analysed shows a deep projection of our rich cultural heritage and therefore a positive way of projections indigenous culture.

## Conclusion

As earlier stated, film is the harbinger of the culture of the producer. No one film is devoid of cultural products, promotions, attributes and characteristics. The more advanced movie industry in the West and Asia have all continually projected their way of life to the outside world either overtly and covertly. Being a cultural diverse society, the Nollywood movie indigenous is one that would be the best medium is first projecting our heritage cross-culturally so that every Nigerian would learn to know about other Nigerian society's culture and cherish it. Secondly, projected to the outside world, so as to portray the cultural essence and product of the over 500 indigenous language and 300 societies that make up the Nigerian nation state. The study therefore concludes, that the Nollywood movie industry serves a veritable medium that could well project and promote indigenous cultural development of Nigeria better than any medium. No one can tell and show out story better than ourselves.

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