

Culture: Understanding the Place of Film in Promoting and Preserving the African Culture

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ABSTRACT: Nollywood films have presently been made available by content providers to different individuals both home and in the diaspora due to the availability of various new media platforms supported by technology. Due to globalization and the exponential rate at which those in the developing world are embracing western cultures, concerns have been raised as to the future of African cultural heritage. Consequently, this study examined the role of Nollywood films in promoting and preserving the African culture. The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) qualitative method was adopted involving 16 discussants. Findings revealed that to some extent, the Nollywood films are used to promote African culture but they do not fully depict the original African culture due to cultural hybridization. Furthermore, findings showed that most films are haphazardly produced neglecting the original African contents. However, it was concluded that as much as these films are originally targeted towards promoting and portraying African cultures, they defeat the whole essence by marrying different cultures. The study thus recommended that priority should be given to local contents as this will make the African culture appear indispensable and important. Conclusively, the study also recommended that filmmakers must conduct thorough research and read extensively about the African culture if they must get it right.

KEYWORDS: *Culture, Cultural Imperialism, Films, and cultural promotions*

I. INTRODUCTION

Culture is believed to be a way of life of a people who are bound by certain beliefs, customs, norms, and values. According to Spencer-Oatey 'Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member's behaviour and his/her interpretations of the 'meaning' of other people's behaviour.' [1] In the same vein, Jakayinkaas cited in Excelstates that from wider perspective, culture includes the total repertoire of human action which are socially transmitted from generation to generation. [2] Similarly, Obiajulu aptly elucidates: [3]

A peoples' way of life. It is about their beliefs and practices, their ideas on solving their problems of existence, how they go about doing the same thing. Culture is about a people's concept of right and wrong, their customs and traditions. It is about the social components of their relations. Culture derives its sociological importance and strength from the mere fact that it is shared by a collective group of people having it and, of course, a conceptual

scheme of defining a people having it as a social category. Culture is expected to be a man's blueprint for social action.

Nigeria is a country rich in land, people, and culture. Its uniqueness lies mainly on its culture, it is not only the most populous country but also the most culturally diverse black nation. [4]Nigeria, which is one of the most blessed, beautiful, and attractive African countries due to its many rich and diversified cultural values; in recent times, is gradually losing its cultural heritage because of cultural imperialism.

Cultural imperialism according to Tomlinson is the exercise of domination in cultural relationships in which the values, practices, and meanings of a powerful foreign culture are imposed upon one or more native cultures. [5] In the same vein, Best and Kombolsee cultural imperialism as a process that brings societies into modern system. [6] It is also a process in which dominant culture exerts pressure and force on other cultures that are perceived to be less significant even by members who belong to that culture. [7] Cultural imperialism simply defined is an act of allowing and paving way for one culture which is seen and deemed superior by a people to another culture to dominate a people's culture thereby making the inferior culture extinct. In most cases, the western cultures seem to dominate the cultures of those in the developing or third world countries. Surprisingly, this cultural imperialism which leads to African cultural erosion is directly and or indirectly perpetrated by those in the developing countries through certain portrayals and promotions of foreign contents, lifestyles, mannerisms by various channels of communication including films as opposed to local contents.

Nigerian culture, believed, perceived, and described by many as a totality of a way of life of many bound by certain beliefs, customs, norms and values; has over the years been infiltrated and contaminated by foreign culture through several mass media channels including the television and radio. Similarly, Danbello&Dakogol averred that the Nigerian culture has suffered untold damage over the past years due to cultural imperialism which has crept into the society via communication facilities like radio, films etc.[4] Due to cultural imperialism those in developing countries including Nigeria have been constantly exposed to foreign culture, lifestyle, through the various mass media contents they watch and listen to; thereby, inculcating, imitating, and gradually changing their ways of life and abandoning their identities. Today, the very essence of existence, cultural values, and patterns with which most developing countries are known with are not only being eroded but also badly on the brink of extinction.[8]Owing to the nearly one-way information flow moving from the developed worlds to the underdeveloped nations of the world, cultures are daily inundated, through the media, with the western lifestyle. [8]The implication of these above assertions is that Nigerian culture which is supposed to be cherished, valued, preserved, and upheld by the citizens of Nigeria is gradually eroding and going into extinction because of over exposure to foreign contents through the various mass media channels by individuals. Furthermore, the mass media in developing countries have been described as trojan horses for the transmission of western values and for the perpetuation of cultural imperialism.[7]Buttressing further, Nnonyeluas cited in Excel "Nigeria culture following its contact with lifestyle constantly portrayed by the media appears to have caved in" and continues to do so as years go by.[9]

1.2. Statement of Problem

Cultural imperialism and the erosion of African culture, values, norms, however, have become a thing of worry to most Nigerians due to the exponential rise and advancements in technology. Technology has gradually turned the world into a global village breaking and shrinking all geographical barriers introducing and exposing third world countries to several foreign contents and cultures at their detriments. This exposure to some extent is beneficial and to a large extent appears to cost these third world countries their most valued asset and means of identification which are their culture and norms. This, however, has aroused concerns from many individuals from all walks of life as to what becomes of Nigerian culture, norms, and values in the nearest future. This concern is due to the importance and value placed on foreign culture at the expense of the African cultural heritage. Thus, it is considering this concern that this paper attempts to understand the place of film as one of the mass media channels of communication in promoting, showcasing, and preserving the Nigerian culture. The emphasis on film in this study is because films are perceived as powerful medium of mass media

through which several messages and information about a people or clan are disseminated to a large audience in order to achieve a set goal, and also due to the fact that from time immemorial, the media have played a gigantic role in rescuing, incorporating, preserving, and mediating elements which serve the interests of these popular classes. These interests include not only the people's aspirations, but also those factors which define their beliefs, expressions, and historical cultural development in general. [10]

1.3. Theoretical Anchor

In positioning this paper in the proper theoretical framework, the cultural imperialism theory is adopted. This theory was propounded by Herb Schiller in 1970. The cultural imperialism theory posits that western nation dominates the media around the world which in turn has a powerful effect on the third world cultures by imposing on them western cultures, thus, destroying the developing countries native culture.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The major objective of the study is to understand the place of film as one form of mass media channels of communication in promoting, communicating, and protecting African/Nigerian cultural heritage.

The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To ascertain whether Nollywood films promote African culture
2. To determine the extent of portrayal of African culture by Nollywood films
3. To ascertain how the African cultural heritage can be communicated, promoted, and preserved through films.

1.5. Research Questions

2. Are Nollywood films used to promote African culture?
3. What is the extent of portrayal of African culture by Nollywood films?
4. In what ways can films be used to communicate, promote, and preserve African culture?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. Culture, an Overview

Culture according to Nwamuo includes ideas, values, customs, and artifacts of a group of people. [11] It encompasses the totality of human behaviour, lifestyle, beliefs, customs, values, and value system that shape any society [12] as well as a set of patterns of thoughts and beliefs. [13] From these definitions, one would simply define culture as the way of life of a given people which they believe in, honour, identify with and hold dear to that should not be defied nor relegated to the background.

2.2. Cultural Imperialism

Acholonu averred that imperialism is the expression of over-bearing tendencies of one country through which social, cultural, and economic harsh influences are spread over another country which suffers the harrowing effects of such influences. [7] Imperialism describes the ways that one nation asserts its power over another. [14] The term cultural imperialism emerged in the 1960s and has been described by many with different terms such as cultural dependency, structural imperialism, cultural domination, ideological imperialism etc. Cabral defines cultural imperialism as a situation where foreign culture appears to dominate a local culture in such a way that those locals begin to see and perceive their own culture as inferior to the foreign one. [15] Cultural hegemony refers to the power of the dominant culture to overshadow and even overtake local cultures. [14]

III. Film as a Mass Media Tool of Communication and Cultural Promotion

The Mass Media perform an important role in the society in informing, educating, enlightening citizens. [16] In today's contemporary society, the mass media appears to be a source of content, ideas, information, and educative materials. [17] Nigerian films are classified among the most watched media products in present times.

[18] As a medium of communication, which also serves as a medium for internationalizing of cultures, films can positively promote cultures as they can also wrap their messages in such a way that will create in the audiences' mind a cynical and depressed notion about certain group of persons in the society.[18]

Film as a medium first arrived Nigeria in the late 19th century, in the form of peephole viewing of motion picture devices. Film as we know today, came into existence on 28th December, 1895 at the grand café on the boulevard de opera in Paris, France when the Lumier brothers Augusta and Louis exhibited their 'workers leaving the factory' this was the first time a motion picture would be exhibited a viewing audience; this remarkable event opened the gates for the flow of motion pictures. [4] The earliest feature film made in Nigeria is 1926's Palaver produced by Geoffrey; [19] the film was also the first film ever to feature Nigerian actors in a speaking role.

Nigerians started the development of television dramas in the early 1960s to educate the people about Nigeria and Nigerians instead of the foreign product that came from the colonial government. [18] The Nigerian film (Nollywood) is undoubtedly the most important and most popular film industry in Africa. It is the world's third largest producer of films, howbeit video films. The industry is growing and fast building structures that would enable it to sustain itself. [20] Opubor et al cited in Bello and Nasidimaintained that film (the motion picture) of all media of communication possesses the most universal appeal and impact because it can rise above the limitations of language and cultural barriers by the power of visual images, its uses of music and sound effect can succeed in conveying much to heterogeneous audiences. [21]

IV. METHODOLOGY

For this study, the qualitative research design was employed by the researchers to help establish answers as to the how's and whys of the research phenomenon. The researchers felt it was apt for this study because it would enable them gain in-depth insights and help explore the complexities inherent in the study. The Focus Group discussion research method which happens to be one of the qualitative research methods was utilized for data collection. Before the selection of the study respondents, the researchers came up with inclusion and exclusion criteria to ensure that those who would eventually participate in the focus group discussions exercise are those who watch Nigerian Movies and are very passionate about them. This decision was made to ensure true and sincere presentation of facts and feelings thereby making the study reliable.

The areas of study are the South- South and the South-East geo-political zones of Nigeria. The South-South zone comprises of 6 states, Delta, Edo, Cross Rivers, Rivers, Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa while the South-East zone comprises of 5 states, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi and Abia. Four discussants each were selected purposively for the FGD exercise from two states in each of the two geo-political zones totaling 16 discussants who are above the ages of 18.

V. DISCUSSANTS' DEMOGRAPHICS/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A total of sixteen (16) discussants participated in the Focus Group Discussion exercise- eight discussants per session. For both groups, 4 participants each fell in the age brackets of 18-25, 3 discussants were within the age brackets of 25-35, while 1 participant fell within the age bracket of 35-40. Similarly, it was revealed that 10 participants were urban dwellers while the remaining 6 participants were rural dwellers.

Table I: A tabular summary of the analysis of the Theme of “Nollywood Films being used to promote African Culture”

Sub-Themes	Emerging Facts	Conclusion
<i>African cultural promotion by Nollywood Epic movies</i>	<i>*Almost all respondents revealed that Nigerian epic films are used to promote African culture to an extent and not its whole entirety.</i>	<p><i>The participants were largely of the opinion that Nollywood films are mainly used to promote African culture in one way and another which are now made available by content providers to different individuals both home and in the diaspora, through the traditional media like television and the new media like Youtube, Facebook etc.</i></p> <p><i>However, it was deduced from the findings of different respondents that in as such as the movies try to promote African culture, they do not fully depict the original African culture because most of them are embellished and coloured with foreign cultures and contents that do not portray African cultures.</i></p>
<i>Embellishment & partial depiction of African Culture through Films</i>	<p><i>*Majority of respondents revealed that some Epic Nollywood films are used to promote African culture, but they do not fully depict the real African culture due to a mixture of western lifestyles.</i></p> <p><i>*Very few respondents admitted that Nollywood films depict African culture fully in its originality. For instance, some believed that while trying to portray African cultures in movies, filmmakers tend to blend cultures thereby making these movies lose their originalities.</i></p>	
<i>Limited knowledge about the original African Culture</i>	<p><i>*majority said that by mere watching these films, one would conclude that these filmmakers are at some points confused as to what really makes the real African culture due to the manner at which they combine cultures. Some respondents maintained that most filmmakers do not have a clear understanding of the true African culture.</i></p> <p><i>*Some respondents believed that a culture is unique in its way and should not in any way or for any reason be married together with another culture, because that would mean losing one’s culture.</i></p>	

Table II: A tabular summary of the analysis of the Theme of “Nollywood’s extent of African cultural portrayal”

Sub-Themes	Emerging Facts	Conclusion
<i>Large/Low Extents</i>	<i>*Some of the study respondents revealed that to a large extent Nollywood films portray African cultures, while majority of the respondents felt otherwise. A good number of respondents believed that the extent of African cultural portrayals by Nollywood films are appalling, low and disappointing.</i>	<i>The participants were rather divided due to differences in their individual responses and views. Some believed that to a good extent, Nigerian films try to portray African culture while a good number of them disagreed to that fact. Some believed that the extent of portrayal is appalling and disheartening as this appears unhealthy to Africans, especially</i>

<p><i>Cultural Hybridization/Over dependence of foreign contents</i></p>	<p><i>*Majority of respondents said that even though the African films are targeted at portraying African cultural heritage, most of them fail to portray the original African culture due to hybridization of cultures and dependence on foreign cultures.</i></p> <p><i>*Some believe that the extent to which these cultures are intertwined makes for difficult portrayal of the original African cultures by the movies.</i></p>	<p><i>Nigerians. However, some respondents believed that in order to largely portray African cultures using films, that filmmakers should step out of their comfort zones to conduct proper research and enquiries about the real African culture because it will be very difficult for someone to offer what he or she barely knows. Clearly, majority of respondents believed that a lot must be done with the Nigerian films to ensure that these films are adequately used to promote African culture to avoid cultural erosion and extinction.</i></p>
<p><i>Societal Recognition, fame, and Quest for Money.</i></p>	<p><i>*surprisingly, the theme for recognition and fame, quest for money as opposed to cultural promotion largely emerged.</i></p> <p><i>*Some respondents said that most of these filmmakers are not interested in upholding their cultures, rather, they just want to produce films that sell fast regardless of the originality of contents, as such, making African cultures appear meaningless.</i></p>	

Table III: A tabular summary of the analysis of the Theme of “Ways of promoting, communicating and preserving African culture through Nigerian Films”

Sub-Themes	Emerging Facts	Conclusion
<p><i>Proper Research and Enquiries</i></p>	<p><i>Majority of study respondents believe that films are good tools for cultural promotion if only they are well researched on. *Some believed that for the African cultures to be well promoted, for instance the Igbo culture, filmmakers need to do their homework well by visiting traditional rulers like Obis, Asagbas, Igwes etc. to them, these will help them learn the intricacies of the African culture and how well they can be portrayed in order to promote</i></p>	<p><i>Films generally, appear to be good tools for African cultural promotions, but are constrained by a variety of factors. The participants generally accepted that for films to be adequately used for cultural promotions, certain factors must be considered. These factors include but are not limited to Use of Local Languages; Conducting proper research and enquiries; and prioritizing African cultures and local contents.</i></p>

	<i>African cultures.</i>	
<i>African Culture Prioritization/Appreciation and Acceptance</i>	<p><i>*Majority of respondents insisted that for films to effectively promote African culture, priorities must be given to local contents as opposed to foreign contents.</i></p> <p><i>* Some persons also felt that African cultures as a matter of fact must be supreme and well appreciated.</i></p> <p><i>*Others believed that Africans should first believe in themselves and be proud of who they are.</i></p>	
<i>Language</i>	<p><i>There seemed to be a universal agreement on the need for usage of the African languages in these films.</i></p> <p><i>Most respondents felt and revealed that African cultures can be well promoted if filmmakers will stick to using local dialects in their movies as opposed to general use of English language which they termed "Foreign"</i></p>	

VI. CONCLUSION

The fundamental reason behind this study was to examine the place of film (Nollywood Films) as an indispensable medium of communication in promoting the African culture. The study realized that in as much as the Nigerian films to some extent are used to showcase, promote African cultures, they have to an alarming extent misplaced their identities and the African heritage due to hybridization of cultures and over reliance on western cultures/contents. In addition, the study realized that lack of knowledge about the African culture and inadequate research into the real African cultures have led to misrepresentations and haphazard presentations of the "supposed" African culture, thereby, resulting to marriage of different cultures. This, however, has led to the gradual erosion of the African culture.

Further, the findings of the study reasonably validate the postulations of the cultural imperialism theory which posits that western nations dominate the media around the world which inevitably has adverse effects on the third world cultures by western culture impositions, which regrettably, leads to culture erosion and the bastardization of native cultures. The theme of cultural hybridization and over reliance on foreign cultures, resonate with the assumptions of this theory.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

With regards to the various findings of the study, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

- ❖ For films to be properly used to communicate, promote, and preserve African culture, filmmakers need to have a good mastery of the African culture, norms, values, and traditions. They can achieve this by painstakingly conducting proper research to enable them have a better knowledge of the different cultures inherent in Africa especially in Nigeria.
- ❖ Secondly, to promote and preserve African cultures, filmmakers, Africans should be proud of their cultures and appreciate their cultures as opposed to just imitating western lifestyle.
- ❖ The study further recommends that local African contents should be given utmost priorities by filmmakers to enable them effectively promote and portray the diverse cultures inherent in Africa.
- ❖ Filmmakers should begin to place importance on culture portrayal first while also thinking of the financial benefits and societal recognitions.
- ❖ Finally, there is also need for proper sensitization of individuals not just through films but by other mass media channels of communication on the need to appreciate, uphold, promote the African culture to help save it from totally eroding.

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