Cultural Imperialism: It’s Impact on Nollywood Narratives

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Abstract

As the 2nd largest film producer in the world after India’s Bollywood, “Nollywood” has been affected by cultural imperialism which has led to the adoption of foreign ways of life portrayed in different themes of Nollywood movies today. This has certain implications with regards to national security as movies serve as agents of communication by shaping the views of the masses on certain issues. As such, this has led to the infusion of certain ideologies in the minds of the audience which can change their mind set about issues that affect societal wellbeing. Using the qualitative research to gain a deep understanding of underlying reasons, opinions about cultural imperialism, it got insights into the problem or helps to develop ideas or hypotheses for the study. The study was anchored on the Cultivation theory. It advocates that the Nigerian Films and Video Censor Board (NFVCB) should play a vital role by checkmating movie contents that poses as threats to our national security.

Keywords: Cultural Imperialism, Culture, Nollywood and National Security, image formation

1.0 Introduction

The origin of Nollywood, the Nigerian movie industry, can be traced to the 1960s when the first set of Nollywood movies were produced by great filmmakers like: Hubert Ogunde, Jab Adu, Ola Balogun, Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), Adeyemi Afolayan a.k.a Ade Love and Eddie Ugboma. These professionals were considered to be the first generation of Nigerian filmmakers. They started their career with stage performance and gradually moved into the world of film production using the Celluloid format.

Moses Olaiya, popularly known as Baba Sala, brought the modern Nigerian comedy into existence with his comic movies. Sam Loco Efe’s name also can’t be left out in this nomenclature with his humorous comedies. Hubert Ogunde was a pioneer in the field of Nigerian opera. He was known for the establishment of the Ogunde Theatre in 1945 which was the first professional theatrical company in Nigeria. He was also referred to as the father of the Nigerian theatre because of his valuable contributions to the birth of the Nigerian film industry (Onabajo & Mbayo, 2008).

However, these early filmmakers were frustrated by the cost of film production. Nigerians became fully involved in the production of films, and by 1970, the first indigenous feature film, “Kongi’s Harvest”, written by Wole Soyinka, was produced in Nigeria. However, it was directed by an American and many of its crew members were foreigners. As time went by, more individuals became involved in the production of indigenous films, the likes of, Ola Balogun, Eddie Ugboromah, Ladi Ladebo, U.S.A Galadima

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The Nigerian movie industry, known as “Nollywood” has witnessed tremendous developments in terms of advancement, and this has helped in telling the African story. According to Akinola (2013:11)


.............the unprecedented rise in Nollywood in the past two decades, attest to its successes in uniquely telling African stories from the perspectives of Africans, a story telling role that had for too long been left in the hands of many who portrayed the continents as a bastion of dangers and backwaters of human civilization.

Despite the efforts of Nollywood in telling its stories, cultural imperialism has eaten deep into the movie industry in Nigeria through the portrayal of characters, themes etc as critics have described these movies as reinforcing western stereotypes of African “primitivisms” and complained about what they regard as the poor quality of films as well as their consistency revisiting the same theme (Dhlamini, 2017). This has implications on the nation security especially now, with the incessant acts of terror inflicted on the citizens by Boko Haram terrorists, Fulani herdsmen, Niger Delta Militants and the likes.

1.2 Culture Defined
The discourse of this paper cannot be complete without the definition of culture as it will provide a clearer understanding of what cultural imperialism is all about. Adefuye (2016, p. 6) defines culture as, “the sum total of a people’s way of life, proverbs, songs, preferences, biases and prejudices.”

It can further be explained as the totality of learned socially transmitted knowledge, customs, materials, behaviours etc as it also encompasses the values, ideas, customs and artifacts of a particular group of people (Dangana, 2014). This means that every culture has its attributes that distinguish it from others as no two cultures can be exactly the same exactly though they may share certain similarities.

Culture is also the creation of human interaction. It is something learned (Onuzulike, 2007). According to Farooq (2011), below are the basic elements:

i. **Language**: This is a source of communication used in transmitting messages and information from one person to another. Language encompasses group of words or ideas that have a common meaning and it is shared. It varies from one culture to another and it is what distinguishes humans from animals who do not have a language to communicate with. Language is transmitted from one generation to another e.g. Yoruba, Igbo, Spanish, Mandarin, Berom, Hausa languages, etc.
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ii. **Beliefs**: Every culture has certain beliefs with which they hold on to and these vary from one culture to another. The beliefs of a culture provide the spiritual needs and wants of the people within the culture e.g. Muslims believe in Prophet Mohammed, recitation of the Quran and Hajj etc, Christians believe in Jesus Christ, the cross etc.

iii. **Values**: Since culture varies from society to society, so also do values that entail what one likes and what wills in a society. They are the good ideas and thinking of a person.

iv. **Norms**: These are guidelines and rules which specify an individual’s behaviour. It keeps us in check as it keeps us in boundary of what is acceptable or not within a society and its culture. Norms mould our behaviours and also guide us in knowing what is wrong or right. It consists of folkways and mores (customs).

v. **Symbols**: Symbols are things that are used to stand for and express an event or a situation. They are used as identification of an object or situation. For example, the flag, the cross symbolizes Christianity, etc.

1.3 **Meaning of Cultural Imperialism**

Cultural Imperialism, according to Kenechukwu (2014, p. 61) is “……the systematic penetration and domination of the culture of a given race by another culture that claims superiority.” This means in essence that cultural imperialism occurs when one culture dominates another culture to the extent that the culture being dominated gets into extinction over time.

1.4 **Implications of Cultural Imperialism on National Security**

The Nigeria movie industry has recorded tremendous success stories with its large booming market and the number of movies produced annually (Nigeria @ 50 Compendium), and Nollywood as an industry has taken various steps in order to checkmate the adulteration of indigenous heritage and culture. It was therefore established to produce media contents channeled towards the Nigerian cultural value (Kenechukwu, 2014). Nevertheless, it can be observed that the role played by cultural imperialism in sub-themes portrayed by movies has certain implications and could be a threat to national security.

However, Nigeria as a country has faced lots of challenges that “have been marred in political turbulence, the seeming perennial crisis showing a nation devoid of political ideology. This scenario has painted an atmosphere of doubt and fear characterized by a catalogue of social and economic woes that are unacceptable owing to the vast resources at its disposal. Added to these myriads of problems is the vertical pressure by the west to introduce alien norms such as “same sex,” explained Abubakar, (2016, p. 7).

This can be seen in an example of a Gay themed movie titled, “Men in Love” which stars John Dumelo and Muna Obiekwe. The characters were criticized for their uncommon and controversial roles as such cultures is not acceptable here.

Similarly, Ebowo (2011) explains that the Nigerian home videos are popular because of its indigenous contents which address issues of relevance and importance to a large heterogeneous audience as the Nigerian motion picture has carved a niche for itself. Abubakar, (2016 p. 6) posits that:

As these elements of globalization infiltrate regional and local borders; they share cultures which eventually results into cultural collective identity… this
exposes the domination of American, Indiana and Chinese movies before the boom in Nollywood. This elusive threat to Africa’s culture and Nigeria in particular should be a basis for concern, the dominance has become a yardstick in gauging the standard of similar industries across the globe. The dominance has led to the near homogenization of the film industry which is threatening its diversity.

Thus the implications of this on our national security cannot be overlooked especially with the production of movies hinged on themes of kidnap, robbery and even terrorism that involve the use of sophisticated machine weapons etc from the western world. Ahlamini, (2017) explains, that most movie themes centered on ritual, murder and redemption, human desires for breaking social taboos and even quest for wealth are found in many Nollywood movies which have spread like wild fire. Some of these implications include:

1. Some films that project “gangsterism” have the potentials to breed hoodlums in the society. The “Yan Daba” and “Yan Sara-Suka” groups found in some northern parts of the country, who constitute nuisance in the society and pose a threat to the country’s national security especially with the high rate of unemployment in the country, are products of cultural imperialism. Buhari (Vanguard, 2015) notes that “It is undisputable that film as a medium is a powerful weapon for influencing behaviour of our people positively. Unfortunately, due to the exposure of foreign films, our people most especially our youths have been negatively influenced. This has resulted to moral decadence and erosion of our cherished values.”

2. Cultural imperialism in movies has equally affected our dress sense. As Dangana (2014) explains, Nigeria as a country, is rich in diverse culture but is losing its cultural ideals through adoption of foreign cultures like dressing in micro-mini skirts, handless tops, bum-shorts, etc which are all portrayed in Nollywood movies today, as “Destructive Instinct”, “Blackberry Babes”. This has led to high rate of moral decadence which is a threat to our national security as such outfits and culture of dressing inappropriately is not accepted in some parts of the country due to differences in religion and cultures. This has also led to the rising cases of sexual harassment and rape among the youths which is also a threat to the country’s national security.

3. Nollywood movies have led to the proliferation of language which promotes the use of vulgar and hate speeches which are evident and occur often on various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter which can stir and lead to civil unrest. An example can be seen with the various hate speeches with on line and on various blogs with regards to a news headline that the Arewa Youths of Nigeria were asking Igbos to vacate the Northern part of the country.

4. Furthermore, the portrayal of technology usage as shown in Nollywood movies through the use of expensive telecommunication gadgets in themes of cyber crime also known as yahoo-yahoo is encouraging youths on ways of generating quick money and a threat to the country.
More examples of movies with subthemes as explained in the work are “Half of the Yellow” an adaptation of Chimamanda Adichie’s book, October 1, Blood and Oil, and Jeta Amata’s Black November which paints a violent high crime and high action picture of the Niger Delta slum revealing a gangster movie of sorts. Consequently, this in addition exposes the missing link and incompetence of the security network or system of the Nation.

5. Also, affluent lifestyles portrayed in Nollywood movies also poses a threat on national security as they increase and encourage the desperate craving at materials acquisition and wealth as many commit crimes like murder, suicide, robbery, sabotaging the developmental efforts of the state (Chijoke, 2015).

In addition, the adoption of culture in regards to language usage and choice of words from movies if used wrongly could disrupt the national security as words are elusive and vary in interpretation by different people.

Methodology
Qualitative Research is also used to uncover trends in thought and opinions, and dive deeper into the problem. Qualitative data collection methods vary using unstructured or semi-structured techniques. Some common methods include focus groups (group discussions), individual interviews, and participation/observations and content analysis. Some films were content analyzed to draw inferences about the underlying culture or subject of discuss.

Theoretical Perspective
The work is anchored on the Cultivation Theory of Mass Communication which is a media effects theory that explains the effect of the mass media on its audience. The theory was propounded by George Gerbner in the 1960s and 1970s. It is also known as Cultivation Analysis.

Mosharafa (2015) notes that the theory looks at the long term effects of television on viewers. The theory explains that the danger of television lies in its ability to shape not a particular point of view about one specific issue but in its ability to shape people’s (audience) moral values and general beliefs about the world. Similarly, Littlejohn and Foss (2009) posit that the theory explains the relationships between exposure to television and beliefs and also, attitudes about the world. The theory hypothesizes that heavy viewers of TV are more likely to hold beliefs and conceptions about the world that are congruent with what they see on TV. The theory is built on a number of premises which include symbolic environment, story telling the symbolic function of TV, the television traits, the cultural model, the cultivation of value system, the multi-directional process and the cultural indicators.

This can be applied to the topic of discourse as Nollywood movies are programmes consumed on the medium television with different themes ranging from rituals, murder, cultism, kidnapping, prostitution etc which possess significant influence on audience beliefs and attitude about society. This means that television through Nollywood movies are seen to
be “cultivating” attitudes on the audience that believe the world has been created by TV programmes like the movies are accurate depictions of the real world.

Also, the theory explains that prolonged watching of TV can induce a certain paradigm of violence in the world with Nollywood movies with examples on themes like gangsterism, thus posing a threat to national security as Omijie (2015) stated that film is a powerful tool that uses visual effect to communicate and covers a wider audience.

**Conclusion**

Movies are a projection of reality which play a vital role in the shaping of our opinions from the various themes portrayed. Desmond and Ikiroma-Owiye (2014:5) observe that the:

Unprecedented proliferation of alien behaviour such as lesbianism and homosexuality, and the jump incidences of violent crimes such as kidnapping, “gangsterism” and insurgency in Nigeria are not accidental, instead they are largely triggered by frequent exposure to films that treat violence as common in everyday life.

Therefore, Nollywood movies should be used to inculcate the spirit of patriotism like its counterpart Hollywood rather than sow seed of discord and hatred that ends up disrupting and threatening national security as “national security is hinged on peace and peace is derived from national positioning of a society”, (Iyav, 2015).

The Nigerian Film and Video Censor Board should help in checkmating and censoring movies that have certain tendencies or pose as threats of causing civil unrest, thereby disrupting the nation’s security.

**References**


