A 'NIGERIANISED' FILM INDUSTRY? A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF NOLLYWOOD'S PERCEIVED CULTURAL IMPERIALISM ON COLLYWOOD

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The Nollywood low-budget, fast-paced and lean-script production format for creating narratives has over the years permeated filmmaking cultures in countries across the world. Through this permeation process, Nollywood has influenced national cinemas particularly in Caribbean and Africa countries. In line with this trans-nationalisation and globalisation of the Nollywood cinematic model, filmmaking in Cameroon has in various ways, been influenced by the Nigerian film industry; so much so that a number of scholars tend to view Cameroon's home video culture as yet another version or a surrogate of Nollywood. This popular trend among critics has brought to the fore the issue of Nollywood imperialism on Cameroon's film industry, a phenomenon which has remained grossly understudied if not totally outside the purview of studies devoted to Cameroonian film industry. This paper seeks to fill the above mentioned gap in knowledge. It specifically examines the extent to which the thesis of Nollywood's imperialism on Collywood (Cameroon's home video industry) holds waters. In tandem with this, the present work answers three principal research questions, namely: What is cultural imperialism in the context of cinema trans-nationalisation or globalisation? To what extent has the Nollywood home video model exerted an imperialist influence on African local filmmaking cultures? And to what extent is the cultural imperialism theory relevant to explaining the influence of Nollywood on Collywood?

Keywords: *cinema globalisation, Hollywoodisation, Nollywood, Collywood, cultural imperialism, nigerianisation, trans-nationalisation, hegemony.*

Introduction

Having started in the mid-1990s like a 'weak and battered plant in the desert', the Nigerian home video industry (codenamed Nollywood) has, in just few decades, grown into a veritable 'cinematic baobab' and a multi-million commercial giant.[1] In this spectacular and remarkable growth, Nollywood has spread its tentacles in almost every part of the world. It has also drawn a lot of debate and emotions. Although its existence and influence on the international sphere may be unknown to, or unrecognized by the majority of continental Europeans, North Americans and Asians, the Nollywood industry has in recent times, seen its film productions exponentially grow.[2] It has also seen its film productions being distributed and avidly consumed in markets across the world, particularly in African diasporas in Europe, Asia and America, as well as in most Car-

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ibbean countries and the whole of Black Africa (Bouillon 2019; Haynes 2011; Endong 2018).

While writing about the transnational or global character of the Nollywood cinematic movement, authors have deployed various qualifiers and explored multiple perspectives. Passchier (2014) for instance, observes that Nollywood has progressively conquered the African continent and penetrated countries such as the US, the UK and all the Caribbean countries. The scholar adds that the industry is also influential in countries such as Spain, France and Switzerland among others. In the same line of argument, Emily Witt explores the global influence of Nollywood. In her book titled *Nollywood: The Making of a Film Empire*, she argues that, the Nigerian film industry is set to become a global brand much in the manner of Bollywood (the Indian film industry) and the Kung fu movie movement. This predictable ascension of the Nigerian film industry to cinematic heights is irrespective of the many quotidian obstacles Nollywood filmmakers face in the course of producing their movies: unstable electricity supply, the unstructured nature of the Nigerian film industry, lack of proper training in filmmaking, scarcity of investors, piracy and more.

The above mentioned scholars are actually not exaggerating. Their readings of the growing 'pan-Africanisation' and globalisation of the Nollywood film industry, as well as their predictions on the industry's ability to be a strong vector of globalisation of African and Nigerian cultures in the world are to some extent founded. This is true due to the fact that since the first half of the 2000s, Nollywood films have enjoyed a huge following in most if not all sub-Saharan African countries. They have also been dominating television screens on the continent as well as in African diasporas in the West, south America and Asia (Haynes 2011; Endong 2018). Furthermore, Nollywood actors have quickly become household names not only in Africa, while the industry's films have for decades now, influenced local cultures in countries across Africa, from the simple way of speaking English (the use of Nigerian slangs and nigerianisms) to the ways of dressing and practicing Christianity (Barrot 2011). No doubt, in one of his 2013 public addresses, the former Nigerian president Goodluck Jonathan referred to the Nollywood industry as Nigeria's 'shining light' adding that 'whenever I travel abroad, many of my colleagues ask me about Nollywood' (cited in Moudio 2020: 31).

If Nollywood's existence and tremendous influence are unrecognized or unknown largely in the West, its nature as a well acclaimed transnational visual culture in Africa is established by a wealth of research studies (Ajibade 2009; Haynes 2011;Endong 2018). This evident growth of the industry has been reported mostly by African researchers or Africa-focused film scholars. Nollywood films have permeated African countries to the extent that they are today viewed as the major factor determining norms and values in many African countries, thereby confirming former director-general of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Koichiro Matsuura's contention that 'film and video production are shining examples of how cultural industries, as vehicles of identity, values and meanings, can open the door to dialogue and understanding between people, but also to economic growth and development' (cited in Moudio 2020: 32).

In line with this, filmmaking in many, if not all Black African countries has progressively hinged on the Nollywood model, causing the Nollywood phenomenon to be –

or rather become – more vanguardist and avant-gardist than it is often presented. In various opinion articles and scholarly works, critics have highlighted the fact that the cinematic production in Kenya, Ghana and Uganda is more and more inspired by the Nollywood model (Mooser 2019; Witt 2017; Bernier and Bernier 2010). A case in point is Haynes (2011) who observes that the export of Nollywood films is no less remarkable than their domination of the local Nigerian market. They have created the Pan-Africanism which is much needed in the Black continent as well as the re-invention of African cinema. Haynes (2011) also observes that over the years, the Nollywood films have created 'the most powerful and influential images in circulation of African tradition and an African modernity'; and their popularity has long been perceived in countries across the Africa and the Caribbean. Many national cinemas on the African continent have, according to Haynes, sought to emulate the Nollywood model. In the same order of ideas, Mooser (2019) observes Nollywood's direct influences on filmmaking cultures among African diasporas in Switzerland. She notes various ways in which Nollywood's low-budget fast-paced lean-script production format has been influencing filmmaking in Europe as a whole.

The Cameroon cinema industry has not been untouched by the tentacles of Nollywood. In effect, following the rapid trans-nationalisation of the Nollywood cinematic model, filmmaking in Cameroon has in various ways, been influenced by various aspects of the Nollywood industry from acting to production and exhibition/distribution; so much so that a number of scholars now tend to describe or view Cameroon's home video culture as yet another version or a surrogate of Nollywood (Santanera 2019; Ajibade 2009). In a paper titled 'Anglophone Cameroon Video Film: Borderline Cinema' for instance, Nalova (2015) criticizes Collywood's[3] heavy dependence on Nigeria at all levels of production (scripting, screenwriting, acting, directing and post-production). She contends that such dependence stifles originality and creativity in the Cameroon film industry. Nalova also laments the fact that Cameroonian audiences most often clamour for non-Nigerian influence in Collywood films; yet, it is Collywood films that are shot following Nollywood production paradigms that paradoxically work best among Cameroonian audiences. In the same line of argument, film director Mfuh Ebenezer decries Anglophone Ca-meroonian filmmakers' tendency to considerably emulate Nollywood production paradigms. He notes that 'the influence [of Nollywood on Collywood] has actually been quite great' (cited in Voice of America 2009). Another Cameroonian film director Eka Christa Assam notes that most Cameroonian cineastes tend to copy Nollywood production paradigms; meanwhile, Nollywood production standards clearly depart from the cannons of cinema (cited in Kennedy 2014).

This popular tradition among critics to regard Collywood as a 'grotesque' copy of Nollywood or an un-Cameroonian cultural product has brought to the fore the issue of Nollywood imperialism on the Cameroonian film industry – a phenomenon which has remained grossly understudied if not un-researched. This paper seeks to fill this gap in knowledge with the conviction that the analysis presented here could go a long way to contribute to the design of Cameroon's film industry's brand DNA. The paper specifically examines the extent to which the thesis of Nollywood's cultural imperialism on Collywood (Cameroon's home video industry) holds waters. The paper answers three principal research questions, namely: what is cultural imperialism in a context of cine-

ma trans-nationalisation or globalisation? To what extent has the Nollywood home video model had an imperialist influence on African local filmmaking cultures? And how or to what extent is the cultural imperialism theory relevant to explaining the influence of Nollywood on Collywood?

Film and Cultural Imperialism: A Conceptual and Theoretical Discourse

In this section, a conceptual definition of cultural imperialism is provided followed by an exploration of the manifestations of the phenomenon (cultural imperialism) in the specific context of cinema trans-nationalisation or globalisation. By definition, imperialism is a policy by which a country extends or expands its power and influence through the instrumentality of military power, colonisation, territorial acquisition or some more subtle means. It is also a scenario in which specific economically dominant nations systematically exert some forms of economic, political and cultural control over economically weaker countries (including their territories and people). Such a situation generally leads to relation of dominance, subordination and dependency between the economically advanced nations and their less developed counterparts (Tomlinson 2001, 2003). The nineteenth and twentieth century scholars' definitions of the term 'imperialism' focused more specifically on its economic and political manifestations (see, *e.g*., Lenin's (1934) association of imperialism with the highest stage of capitalism). Meanwhile, the concept is more complex. As noted by Gudova (2018:494), imperialism does exist in a world, which is 'without colonies, [...] without classical capitalism, in new and still poorly understood forms.' Gudova (2018) adds that the 'huge perspective in studies of imperialism now is closely connected with the "phenomenon" and notion of "cultural imperialism" in all spheres and levels,' including the cultural/media sphere.

In the cultural sphere in particular (which engulfs the media and is the main focus of this paper), imperialism is construed as a situation in which the core authentic values of a particular country are utterly 'battered out of existence by the indiscriminate dumping of large quantities of slick commercial, cultural and media products' originating from a dominant nation (Nwamuo 2016:18). In the words of the American cultural studies scholar Herbert Schiller, cultural imperialism is 'the sum processes by which a society is brought into the modern [U.S.-centred] world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating centres of the system' (Schiller 1976:9). In a modern context of cultural imperialism, a less economically developed society is 'pressured, forced or bribed' into integrating a stronger country's expansive capitalist model as well as into incorporating foreign cultural values into their social system. In this situation, the imperialist centre succeeds in instituting its dominance by leveraging not force but attraction and persuasion, through winning the 'mutual consent, even solicitation of the indigenous rulers' (Schiller 1976).

In line with the above, imperialism in the cinema/media sub-sphere could be construed as a process whereby a country's film industry is subject to tremendous external pressures from the cinema interest of one or more countries, without a proportionate reciprocation of influence by the country so affected. According to Mirrlees (2018), it is a scenario where there are 'asymmetrical and unequal power relations' between globalising cinema giants (notably, Hollywood and European cinemas) and local film indus-

tries and cultures in other parts of the world. In such a scenario, the globalising/transnationalising film industry is seen as a part of the Empire of its country of origin. Viewed as such, this imperialist cinema contributes to widening of the sphere of influence and supporting the capitalist and cultural-ideological expansion of its country of origin. Cultural imperialism in the realm of cinema is usually manifested in the domains of structure and ownership of means of film production as well as the distribution of film productions (Mirrlees 2018; Rampal 2005; Kavanagh 1973). Imperialism is manifest when the production paradigms prevalent in the dominant cinematic industry become rife in peripheries without proportionate reciprocation by the screen industries based there. This kind of imperialistic influence could be illustrated using two case studies: the phenomenon of the Hollywoodisation and the neo-colonial dependency of African cinemas on western cultural giants.

The Hollywoodisation of World Cinemas

The Hollywoodisation of national cinemas is a scenario when the American film industry subtly affects filmmaking in some Asian and Third World peripheries. In effect through the process of Hollywoodisation, movie industries in Asia, South America and Africa have been adopting Hollywood production style, storylines and set designs among other values, and have even been imitating the name Hollywood. Good examples are the Indian and Nigerian film industries which have been named after Hollywood, respectively as Bollywood and Nollywood. Thus, the Hollywood industry has come to dominate filmmakers' working ethics and philosophy of film in peripheries across the whole world, thereby seriously affecting local film industries which, originally, were conceived to suit local audiences. Hollywood successful cultural imperialism is not so much thanks to the business models adopted by American filmmakers or the fact that the movies born from its dream factories are more compelling than those of its counterparts but more because Hollywood successful imperialistic influences are much more facilitated by the near sacralisation of Hollywood production paradigms in other parts of the globe. In effect, scholars such as Andrew (2013) have argued that the concept of Hollywood production paradigms have become some, if not the main worldwide movie business's defining traits. In line with this, Mirrlee (2018) recognizes that Hollywood exerts a serious influence over weaker film industries across the world. Its films radiate outward to the planet, influencing film industries across the globe in different ways; these films travel the globe carrying with them business models, production techniques and procedure, narrative forms and aesthetic norms that turn out to delimit what a film should or should not be. Additionally, there is generally a unidirectional flow of films from the USA to the rest of the world enabled by the fact that many countries import Hollywood films but the USA infrequently imports movies from other countries. Sharing corollaries, Christopher Jordan observes in his 2003 book titled *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics* that:

> To suggest that Hollywood completely homogenises global cinema would be to ignore the two-way trade between America's dream factory and other nations' filmmaking industries. Movies made in other countries do get shown extensively in the United States. However, the box office potential of even the most

> successful foreign film released in the U.S. market pales before the global grosses of the top American money-earners (Jordan 2003: 41).

In spite of these indexes of cultural imperialism, authors such as Mirrlee (2018) tend to present Hollywood as an industry which is dominant in the world cultural landscape, but not imperialistic in the strict sense of the word. Mirrlee in particular suggests that Hollywood's dominance should not, in a militaristic or aggressive sense, be associated with imperialism. He writes that

> Hollywood is today evidently and undoubtedly still the dominant force in the cross-border financing, production, distribution, promotion and exhibition of film. Hollywood is still dominant around the world, but it is unhelpful to conceptualise this dominance as an expression of coercive economic and cultural domination. Hollywood's globalizing majors (and the vertically integrated mega-media conglomerates that own them) do not forcibly impose themselves and their commercial entertainments upon other countries. Rather, Hollywood wields strategies that aim to attract and integrate other countries – and their film producers, exhibitors and audiences – into its global entertainment imperium. As Hollywood struggles to link non-US film industries into the cross-border chains of corporate power and channels of commercial pleasure that it presides over and exerts influence through, much of the world's integration with Hollywood occurs through capitalist relations of consent, not force (Mirrlee 2018: 17).

In the above citation, Mirrlee tries to dissociate Hollywoodisation in particular and cinema imperialism by extension, from force-driven imperialism. However, it remains axiomatic that the phenomenon (of Hollywood's dominance of the global film industry) is a clear example of what Antonio Gramsci calls hegemonic control (or new form of imperialism). In concrete terms, hegemonic control is all about imperialism by winning consent and not by coercion. It is this Gramascian notion of (cultural) imperialism that Christopher Jordan (2003) deploys in his book titled *Movies and the Reagan Presidency: Success and Ethics* to describe the Hollywoodisation of the world cinema as a form of 'cultural colonization.' According to Jordan, Hollywood's imperialism on other world cinemas is seen in its heavy contribution to the popularisation of a 'colonialism-style of storytelling.' This colonialism style in turn, has contributed to making the 'Americanised Protestant work ethics theme' a universal cinema formula in the world. This Americanised Protestant work ethics theme revolves around the American Dream or the myth that hard work inevitably leads to worldly success with the hidden corollary that poverty is the consequence of laziness rather than a simple social problem. With most world cinema's tendency of adopting Hollywood storytelling styles, filmmaking in the world has, according to Jordan, been made to glorify the American Protestant work ethics as well as to emphasize action and spectacle over character development downplaying or overlooking complex issues.

It should, however, be underlined that the Hollywoodisation theory, particularly as concerns the one-way flow of storytelling formulas from America to other world cinemas, is subject to controversy. A number of observers have contended that in recent times, Hollywood film directors' desire to conquer international markets has pushed

them to revise their storytelling approaches in favour of foreign film aesthetics. A case in point is Klein (2004) who contends that the advocates of world cinema have for decades regarded Hollywood dominance as a threat to the prevalence of indigenous film aesthetics in fragile national film industries across the world, but now, Americans Hollywood fans are increasingly making similar protests with respect to the American dream factors' embrace of exogenous film aesthetics for commercial reasons. The author explains that the Hollywood film industry is actually 'turning its back on American viewers and producing films primarily for its lucrative overseas audience instead'; and the consequence of this development is that 'a stream of formulaic studio blockbusters that feature beefed-up spectacle, dumbed-down dialogue, actors chosen for their international appeal, and little genuinely American cultural specificity [...] If Hollywood is making movies for the world, [...] who is making movies for America?' (Klein 2004: 2). The citation mentioned above suggests that even very big cinema industries such as Hollywood do have influences from exogenous cultures and cinemas. These influences seem however not to be proportional to Hollywood's influence on other world cinemas.

The Neo-Colonial Dependency of African Cinema on Western Supranational Institutions

Another form of film imperialism which has particularly been so prevalent in Africa, is linked to national African film industries' neo-colonial dependency on Western supranational institutions for funding and technical assistance. This has mainly been observed in the production of celluloid films on the African continent, particularly in Francophone countries. Given the exorbitant cost of celluloid film production, most African 35-mm filmmakers have entrenched the culture of depending on such supranational structures as the government of France, the European Union, the *Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) and European television networks among others, for the financing of their film productions. The money received from these structures has always come with string attached to it. These strings have not only stifled local creativity and hampered the development of indigenous film aesthetics in local African cinema, but have also enabled these supranational structures to systemically control celluloid film production in African countries. Using the Government of France as an example, Haynes (2011) explains how the foreign structures' financing of filmmaking in African countries has turned out to institute Western countries/structures' cultural hegemony on local African film industries. He notes that

> Until recently, most celluloid African films have been made with at least partial funding from the French government. The money came with important strings attached. It was fronted in exchange for the rights to distribute the films in non-commercial venues such as French Cultural Centers; after such screenings, it was unlikely that commercial distributors would be interested in the films. French cameramen, editors, and so on were often imposed on productions in order to guarantee technical quality (and to guarantee work for people in the French film industry), which had the effect of compromising the development of indigenous film aesthetics; and postproduction work had to be done in France, with the result that no matter how many films were shot in Africa, Africa never acquired its own infrastructure for filmmaking (Haynes 2011: 69–70).

Heavy dependence on Western sources of funding and technical assistance has thus caused a good portion of African cinema produced on celluloid to rather be vectors of exogenous ideologies and cultural values. In fact, depending on western funding has entailed that African cineastes subtly reproduce the aesthetics of western films and release films that are less or not leasable at all for the African publics. In this way, external funding has served as a yoke maintaining African cinema in a kind of artistic colonisation. Sharing corollaries, Haffner and Vieyra (2005) observe that African cineastes' heavy dependence on Western cultural institutions for funding has made many African films to be mere copies of European films, in terms of themes and aesthetics. They note that such westernised filmic productions should not be counted among African films. Their contention is that any so-called African film that caters to the sensibilities of western critics and viewers and which leaves no cultural footprints, should not be regarded as African in the strict sense of the word.

Examining Nollywood's Imperialistic Influences on African Cultures and Film Industries

Shot in cheap video format, edited on personal computer under volatile and uncertain conditions, copied and reproduced on discs and cassettes, and made to travel beyond the bounds of the Black Continent, Nollywood films remain one of the main cultural products exported by Africa. The Nollywood film industry actually represents the most visible cultural industry and 'dream factory' on the African continent since 2009. Bisschoff (2015) contends that it is one of the greatest explosions of popular culture that has happened in Africa. It is also the first economically self-sustainable film industry in the African continent.

Brief Profile of the Typical Nollywood Film

A typical Nollywood film is based on a small budget which ranges from $10,000 to $70,000 (Fleishman 2019; Endong 2018). Only very few films such as BiyiBandele's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, *The Wedding Party* and Robert Peters'*30 Days in Atlanta* are shot on bigger budgets. The shooting of a typical Nollywood film is generally done within few days to reduce expenses. This is contrary to the production of films in Hollywood or Western cinemas where shooting can sometimes be done during years. In effect, the shoot process in Nollywood is very speedy as explained by Ajibade and Williams (2013):

> Cameras roll quickly through multiple scenes. To save precious time, a good many scenes are shot only once. Retakes are kept to the barest minimum. Amidst the screaming of directors, tempos and tempers stand very high as cast and crew scamper to meet deadlines. These deadlines are set not by directors but by video marketers. As bankrollers of the films, marketers literally wait at film locations with video jackets in hand – ready to sell. (Ajibade and Williams 2013: 205)

A typical Nollywood movie is also based on a strong cast. This cast usually includes at least one popular figure and many other actors who, according to many commentators, are hardly professional (Igwe 2015; Barrot 2011; Alamu 2016). The strong cast most often functions as part of the films' Unique Selling Proposition. In other words, the casting of popular figures in the films is ultimately aimed to massively at-

tract potential viewers. Nollywood productions usually involve a lot of improvisation as dependence on film scripts is most often a rarity. Ajibade and Williams share the conclusion that 'rehearsals are not overly stringent. At some instances there may be no rehearsals at all. Scripts are loose and actors simply improvise dialogues in-between. Besides the high degree of improvisation, the most spectacular aspect of Nollywood is the time it takes to shoot a film' (Ajibade and Williams 2013: 205).

In addition to this, Nollywood film productions are generally done on video format. The films are edited on personal computers. Thus, a typical Nollywood film is produced under very volatile and uncertainly conditions, so much so that commentators such as Igwe (2015) have likened Nollywood production model to producing films out of nothing. Igwe writes that film-making in Nigeria can metaphorically be likened to 'performing open-heart surgery with forks and knives, but the genius of it all, [...] is that the patient survives' (Igwe 2015: 4).

Nollywood films also reflect life in both traditional and modern Nigeria. They depict the diverse Nigerian cultures and the modern transformations the country is undergoing. In many cases, they reflect many of the harsh socio-economic realities of the country. These include the widening gap between the poor and the rich, ethnic discrimination and abject poverty among others. Driven mainly by financial motives, the film directors generally go for believable stories that reflect popular myths and Nigerian idiosyncrasies and resonate with target audiences. This entails producing films with popular themes such as love, marriage, fertility, blood money and the influence of religion/Christianity on all aspects of life in Nigeria. The dominant themes in Nollywood thus include voodoo, ritual killings, political violence, betrayal, deception and triumph among others (Nkechi 2017; Omuzulike 2016). While films such as Kenneth Kebue's*Living in Bondage* provide imagery for popular Nigerian myths such as blood money and voodoo, other film productions such as Roberts Peters'*30 Days in Atlanta* reflect the growing urge felt by Nollywood directors to engage in cross-cultural film-making projects.

Nollywood's Influence on African's Cultures and Cinemas

The Nollywood films are remarkable for the role they play in connecting Africa in general and Nigeria in particular with its far-flung diasporas. They are also remarkable for serving as a virtual window through which diverse international audiences see Nigeria and Africa. Its growth and globalisation have been tremendous and variously interpreted. In effect, a number of moral panics and nationalistic voices from African countries have derogatorily branded it a phenomenon with immense viral effects as well as a movement aimed at the systematic 'Nigerianisation' of the whole of Africa. Geiger (2012) argues that the opinion mentioned above has largely emanated from the fact that thanks to Nigerian films, the whole Black Continent has 'come to snap its finger the Nigerian way'. In some sense, almost all the Black Continent has been positively or negatively '*Nigerianised'* thanks partly to the proliferation of Nollywood films in various African markets (Omojuwa 2013).

The globalisation of Nollywood is equally signaled by the fact that many other national film industries of the continent are presently struggling to emulate Nollywood, literally transposing the Nigerian style unto their local productions. From Anglophone to Francophone countries most African cinemas have diverted from the celluloid to the

video technology, closing down theatres and copying Nollywood style of content creation (Labouba 2012; Dovey 2015).

The huge commercial success of Nollywood has actually inspired many if not the majority of cineastes on the African continent to copy the Nigerian low-budget video-film-making model. In fact, Nollywood films have become so popular in Africa that they are not only tremendously watched all over sub-Saharan Africa but are copied by filmmakers from other African countries. In less than ten years, the Nollywood model has been exported and adapted in countries across the continent, as seen in the emergence of video-film industries in Kenya (Riverwood), Tanzania (Bongowood) and Uganda (Ugawood) among others. Haynes notes this development thus:

> [Nollywood] has begun to have visible effects on many cultures as far away as South Africa […]. Similar film industries are springing up: Johannesburg now has its 'Jollywood'; Tanzania has 'Bongowood'; Kenya has 'River Road'; and so on. The films are wildly popular in the Caribbean, and appear to have influenced the video films coming out of Jamaica and Haiti (Haynes 2011: 72–73).

By scrupulously copying the Nollywood style, some national cinemas have sometimes provoked virulent criticism from nationalist voices within their countries. Such nationalist critics tend to view Nollywood as a culturally imperialistic force which ought to be neutralised. Some of these nationalist critics go to the extent of equating Nollywood with a cinematic 'syndrome' which, in a multidimensional manner, has seriously defaced African audiovisual practices as well as has offensively reshaped or deconstructed the traditional ways in which local audiences relate to their cinema (Labouba 2013; Soyinka 2013). In effect, it is no exaggeration to view most of the other cinema industries on Black African soil – apart from South African cinema – ideologically, aesthetically and paradigmatically as offshoots or clones of the Nollywood phenomenon (Ralph and Mahir 2010; Haynes 2011). The majority of Tanzanian cineastes for instance, openly confess their inspiration from Nollywood. A similar pro-Nollywood sentiments are observed among video film makers in Tanzania, in Kenya and even in South Africa, Jamaica and Jamaica (Haynes 2011, Soyinka 2013).

A concern has equally been raised in numerous African countries over Nollywood contents' potency to 'corrupt' local audiences (Akande 2010; Alawode and Uduakobong 2014, 2016). Seo (2016) notes, for instance, that in Zambia mothers are often worried about their children speaking English with a Nigerian accent (with improper pronunciation) because of their heavy exposure to Nollywood films. The worst has been the suspicions in various African countries bordering on Nollywood films' potency to morally corrupt audiences with their too much emphasis on gratuitous pornography, voodoo and crude, bloody and 'pernicious' rituals. With respect to Ghana (one of Nigeria's rivals in the domain of cinema on the continent), Akande (2010) takes up these suspicious imaginations. He notes that:

> In the early 2000 when the popularity of Nollywood held the entire African continent spell bound, one of the industries that was threatened by Nigeria's ingenuity was the Ghanaian film industry. Once described as specters of an occult economy, [...] Nigerian films have been variously seen as having a

> negative impact on Ghanaian audiences. So bad it was that it became a bit difficult to say whether the bias was a result of the insurgence of Nollywood on Ghanaian terrain or simply a matter of morality (Akande 2010: 22).

While addressing some of the fears and suspicions by nationalists voices within African countries that Nollywood is a vector of cultural infiltration on their terrain, Seo (2016) employs a nuanced rhetoric. He clearly underscores the fact that the Nigerian film industry has none of the allures of a socio-cultural colonialist, given the fact that its films are produced by private individuals who receive neither funds nor socio-political and philosophical orientation from the government. He additionally explains that the films are distributed via small companies which need to overcome various official barriers to trade; and are finally bought by consenting and highly enthusiastic international audiences.

Based on the premises reviewed above, it is evident that Nollywood should not be viewed as a cultural imperialist force in the strict sense of the word. The industry is rather a phenomenon which has gained in magnitude thanks to the receptive and enthusiastic nature of its fans including foreign audiences. Whether all the (above mentioned) concerns hold waters or not, is a matter for another debate. What is clear is that Nollywood continues to fascinate diverse nations on African soil. These nations seem to have received it as an authentic version of their African story and thus have accorded it tremendous patronage. Actually, Nigerian films display the lifestyles, world views, traditions, locations and socio-cultural structures that are recognisable for most sub-Saharan Africans. Their narratives are mostly rooted in the cosmologies, dreams and aspirations not only of Nigerians but most black Africans. As put by Ajibade (2009: 409), Nigerian video films are 'moving images of Africans doing familiar African things – quite unlike colonial cinema and imported features in which mainly white faces do unfamiliar things.' Ajibade adds that these films are 'one means through which contemporary possibilities and opportunities (however, imaginary) are glimpsed' by rural African dwellers of urban African centres.

In view of the above, the Congolese linguist Katsuva Ngoloma argues that 'I doubt that a white person, a European or American, can appreciate Nollywood movies the way an African can [...] African – the rich, the poor, everyone – will see themselves in those movies in one way or another' (cited in Norimitsu 2016). The positive reception of Nollywood in many African communities is a rather 'good news' for Nollywood apologists. Hinging on such 'good news', a large number of observers, cinema connoisseurs and pan-Africanists equate Nollywood with the heart-beat of contemporary African cinema and drama (Geiger 2012; Alamu 2016).

If the Nollywood industry has relatively expanded overnight, it is thanks to a plethora of auxiliary factors. Some of these factors include international broadcasters/satellite television outlets (such as Multichoice DSTV), the internet (the social networks), international cooperation involving major stakeholders of the industry with their counterparts in other African climes (Ghana, Tanzania, Cameroon and Kenya among others), as well as a growing international market which has been extended to some Caribbean countries in recent times (Haynes 2011; McCall 2017). Of all these auxiliary forces, the South African international broadcaster *Africa Magic* seems to be most prominent. As the leading provider of premium African entertainment, Africa

Magic has, through its constant broadcasting of Nigerian movies, made the narratives of the industry to be consumed by various ethno-linguistic communities on the continent and in countries as far as UK, Australia and the USA.

With the creation of its new channel (*African Magic* in Igbo), this globalisation of the Nigerian/African story through Nollywood will unarguably be accentuated. Stressing the major role the satellite television has been playing in this globalisation process, *Africa Magic* regional director Mba-Uzouku notes that:

> *Africa Magic* is renowned for providing entertainment made for Africa by Africans. We are renowned for telling the African story, and giving African entertainers a platform to show the world what they can do. We have demonstrated this with our channels, including the indigenous language channels which continue to promote the richness of Nigeria's different cultures beyond the nation's borders and we are continuing this trend with the Africa Magic Igbo channel (cited in Ikeke 2016: 56).

In the same line of thought, the Managing Director of *MultiChoice* Nigeria, Ugbe John underscores the support his media institution provided the Nigerian film industry for it to attain such a global dimension. He contends that 'at *MultiChoice*, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of the development of the Nigerian film and television industry. For over 20 years, we have consistently invested in Nigeria's creative industry' (cited in Ikeke 2016: 58). Ugbe adds that 'the *Africa Magic* channels which sit on our DStv and GOtv platforms provide Nigerian talent with the opportunity to showcase their works to the rest of the continent and indeed the world' (cited by Ikeke 2016: 58).

The Internet and the social networks have equally, in no small measure contributed to the globalisation of the Nollywood industry. Countless are the online platforms which enable the downloading of Nollywood films. In addition to social networks such as Youtube, prominent downloadable entertainment application such Afrinolly, Netflix, African Digital Film Platform, IROKO and SOLO have come to facilitate and intensify access to Nollywood production online and in countries across the world. Social networking sites, particularly Youtube have thus enable the building of regional and even global tastes for Nollywood film production, which to an extent are competing with formal distribution channels such as Time Warner, Fox or SterKinekor. As enthused by Kerr (2011), this phenomenon coupled with the video piracy of Chinese retailers account for the phenomenal success of Nigerian video films in many part across the African continent and beyond.

With the ongoing creation of Video on Demand (VOD) platforms – notably African digital content start-ups – for greater circulation of its films, it is speculated that the Nollywood industry may have greater reach. As earlier alluded to, the combined role played by foreign television broadcast, podcasting and piracy is not to be undermined in this trans-nationalisation and globalisation processes of Nollywood. Haynes (2011: 72) puts it succinctly: 'Nigerian video film is […] what is on television in Namibia, and on sale on the streets of Kenya. In Congo, they are broadcast […] In New York, Chinese people are buying them. In Holland, Nollywood stars are recognized on the street by people from surname and in London, they are hailed by Jamaicans.'

Another factor facilitating the trans-nationalisation of Nollywood in Africa is the brilliant and fruitful cooperation between Nigerian filmmakers and their counterparts

from other African countries and even from the West. A relevant illustration of this kind of cooperation is seen in the recurrent cinematic partnerships involving Nigerian filmmakers and their Ghanaian counterparts. Ghanaian actors constantly feature in Nigerian films. In the same way, the Nigerians participate in many Ghollywood films. One of the positive results of these collaborative efforts is that actors from both film industries have gained popularity across Africa, the same as the films in which they star. Another result of this partnership is that westerners often confuse Nollywood movies with Ghollywood films, which is to the advantage of the former industry. There has equally been cooperation between Nigerian filmmakers and other cinema industries that has led to the shooting of films in Nigeria and abroad. Yvonne Chaka Chaka, fondly called 'The Princess of Africa' starred in *Foreign Demons*, a film shot in both Nigeria and South Africa. As highlighted earlier, such efforts contribute to making Nollywood popular across Africa. In addition to this benefit, the collaborative efforts engender social and bi-lingual interactions and contribute to building Nigeria's image as a 'Big Brother' in the domain of cinema. All this is good for Nollywood and Nigeria.

It is however important to equally mentioned that, one (controversial or paradoxical) factor responsible for the globalisation of Nigerian is cultural homogenisation, which has made most Nollywood films to structurally be 'a mirror of transnational practice' which according to Haynes (2011) implies a relatively high deal of loss of cultural depth. This implies that Nollywood is a carrier of homogenised cultures or better, a version of adulterated Nigerian cultures which may reflect the cultural reality in many modern African states. The fact that it functions as a reflection of such a homogenised culture justifies why it is received as cultural product by modern/westernised Africans and the some Western audiences. Buttressing his position, Haynes contends that Nollywood filmmakers have developed the culture of embracing and absorbing transnational media forms – mass media forms, 'exclusively – with the unselfconscious eclecticism characteristic of the "African popular arts," in a process of critical selection and adaption governed by its audience's complex desires, predispositions, and ontologies' (Haynes 2011: 43).

Nollywood's Perceived Imperialism on Collywood

According to many Cameroonian film critics and filmmakers, Nollywood influences on Cameroon's motion pictures industry have been tremendous. These tremendous influences could be described with the use of the term 'Nollywoodisation' (Robold 2017; Ndogmo 2010; Balancing Act 2021). The proponents of the above thesis tend to hinge on at least four evident factors. The first is the growing 'nigerianisation' of many Collywood film productions. In effect, most Cameroonians who venture – or think of venturing – into cinema as independent cineaste, likely go for the small-budget video film format. This disposition is determined not only by the exorbitant nature of celluloid film production but also by the fact that the small budget video film format has, according to the popular fantasy, worked for Nigerian cineastes. Many Cameroonian video filmmakers strongly hope to achieve the same success as their Nigerian counterparts. Collywood's national chairman Waa Musi (cited in Ndogmo 2010) shares corollaries. He confides that 'We [Collywood filmmakers] want to capitalise on the interest the Cameroonian audiences already have in the Nigerian home video' [My translation].[4]

In the same line of argument, the female Cameroonian film director Eka (cited in Kennedy 2014: 3) argues that Cameroonian cineastes' likeliness to adopt the Nollywood filmmaking formula predisposes their films to be paltry copies of Nigerian movies and inauthentic windows into Cameroonian cultures. She observes that 'In Cameroon, the film industry is still trying to find its feet, especially the English speaking section. Many filmmakers try to copy what Nollywood – the Nigerian film industry – is doing, which is mostly home videos for entertainment that don't follow cinematic techniques.'

The second factor which rationalises the Nollywoodisation thesis is the fact that most Collywood filmmakers are likely to copy Nollywood film production paradigms, sometimes transposing Nigerian actors' ascent in speaking English or the latter's style of acting and dressing unto their productions. Therefore, it is more and more common to find Collywood films that are veritable replicas of Nollywood movies, in terms of film title, film aesthetics and goals. A case in point is *Pink Poison* which, in its representation of university girls tends to overly copy typical Nollywood films' imageries and structure. The film is a replica of Nollywood's *Black Berry Girls* in terms of how university girls are represented. Two other cases in point are *China Wahala* and *American Wahala*. The films' titles are coined with nigerianism (wahala[5]). Furthermore, the actors' diction and way of speaking in the films integrates various nigerianisms. Thus Collywood film directors usually transpose Nigerian actors' ascents in speaking English.

Collywood filmmakers actually tend to copy Nollywood's popular genres. They release their films in many parts and deploy the same special effects and Nigerialisms you find in Nollywood movies. This nigerianisation of Collywood films is even more evident in cases where Nigerian actors are made to star Cameroonian films. Two cases in point are Fred Amata's *Before the Sun Rise* and *Clash of Inheritance* which star prominent Nigerian actors. From theme and special effects to actors' diction and dress codes, the two films mentioned above are Cameroonian versions of Nollywood films.

The third evidence often used to support the Nollywoodisation thesis lies in the codename adopted for the Cameroonian video film industry, namely 'Collywood.' According to a number of critics, this codename is, in itself, the symbol of Nollywood's imperialism on the Cameroon's motion picture industry, as it reveals Cameroon's cineastes and film ideologues' tendency to imitate the Nigerian way of branding cinema production. Actually, it is popularly argued that the name 'Collywood' is no other thing than a linguistic/onomastic adaptation of Nollywood, which in turn is an imitation of Hollywood. Cameroonian film director and producer ZigotoTchayaTchameni associates such imitation with cultural and cinematic imperialism thus:

> Considering imitation as a *phrase*, the definition will be: '*imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.'*Making it *common* '*copying someone or something is an implicit way of paying them a compliment*.' Clinking on the common definition, one could hold strong to the fact that we are in the Postcolonial era and it seems as if some Cameroon filmmakers have remained constant with the fulfillment of the requirements of courtesy. It somehow makes sense to give compliments in filmmaking, but highly inadmissible to brand the name of a film industry from a capitalist as well as a post colonially distorted manner that generation may come to question the founders of a nation (Tchameni 2012: 6).

Tchameni tends to suggest that by adopting the '*lywood*' addendum, Collywood proponents are accepting or passively enabling not only Nigerian influence, but also American cultural imperialism on Cameroon motion picture industry. He explains that:

> It cannot be an over-emphasis that all the countries that are carrying the '*lywood'* addendums can be considered to be under some form of Postcolonial colonialism. It splinters a pleasant debate on the anthropology of African cinema. The major question is: *why is it that only countries in development are subscribed to the philosophy of the 'lywood' addendum*? If it was a generic name that characterizes the universality of filmmaking, then countries like: Britain should have had '*Britiwood'*, Germany '*Germiwood'*, Spain as '*Spani-wood'* as well as Belgium with '*Belgiwood'*. Adopting 'COLLYWOOD' as a form of cinematographic branding operation is a wound that is opened for outsiders to mock at one's preys (Tchameni 2012: 6).

The fourth evidence one may use to rationalise the Nollywoodisation thesis is linked to the distribution and heavy consumption of Nollywood films in Cameroon. In effect, though a number of companies (notably Magic Touch and Rainbow) facilitate the distribution of Collywood films in Cameroon, the proliferation of Nigerian video films in the Cameroonian market continue to surpass that of Collywood movies. Semi-structured interviews conducted with owners of film distribution shops in the cities of Yaounde, Douala, Buea and Bamenda revealed that out of 101 Cameroonian and Nigerian film bootlegs sold by these shops, 100 are Nollywood films and one, Collywood movies (Ndogmo 2010; Coulon 2011). In view of the above observation, it may be argued that, Nollywood films still flood and dominate the Cameroonian market. They are avidly consumed by Cameroonian audiences; and are still more popular than Collywood film productions.

The factors discussed above illustrate a cultural influence which in no way is negligible, especially as a reciprocal Cameroonian influence is not observed. A part from a growing number of Cameroonian actors who star in Nollywood filmic productions, the literature available does not reveal instances of Collywood's influence on Nollywood. Such literature does not particularly reveal cases of Nigerian filmmakers copying Cameroonian production paradigms.

In spite of the evidence of Nigerian influence reviewed above, the Nollywoodisation thesis still remains debatable or doubtful on at least two grounds. The first argument to debunk Nollywood imperialism is the fact that the adoption of the Nollywood filmmaking culture is not a general culture among Cameroonian video filmmakers. Many local filmmakers still struggle to be original in their production style and ethics. In line with this, a number of Cameroonian videastes do depart deliberately – or show willingness to depart – from Nollywood film production paradigms. In an interview granted Kennedy (2014: para 9), a Collywood film director contends that:

> Sometimes when we do movies, people say that we're copying Nigeria, but we're trying to tell our own stories. It's a gradual process; first we have to prove our worth, and then we can use this platform to showcase ourselves so that Cameroonians and those living in the diaspora know that things like this can happen in our own home.

In the same line of argument, Cameroonian film director Mfuh Ebenezer (cited in Voice of America 2009) contends that although Nollywood has tremendously inspired many Cameroonian videastes, Collywood films have continued to be a reflection of Cameroon's diverse cultures and identities. He makes a case for a Cameroonian model of cinematic production as he contends that: 'I think it's rather good to start off a Cameroonian film industry because our ideas are still very new instead of partnering with people [Nigerian filmmakers] who are already recycling' (cited in Voice of America, 2009).

The second argument against the Nollywoodisation theory is that, evidence of Nollywood influence is observed mainly at the level of production. And this influence does not really touch the post-production aspect of film production in Cameroon. In effect, Cameroonian/Collywood cineastes manly depend on local production outfits. Local filmmakers also depend on local Cameroon-based networks for the distribution of their films – although these national distribution networks are still not really efficient. Thus, the Nollywoodisation of the (Anglophone) Cameroonian film industry is limited to selected aspects of film production in Cameroon; meanwhile, film imperialism most often involves exogenous dominance in other areas such as funding, distribution, promotion and exhibition of films. Following this partial Nigerianisation of film production in Cameroon, it may be exaggerated to advance the thesis of Nollywood film imperialism.

Conclusion

The Nollywood small-budget video-filmmaking model has spectacularly transnationalised and globalised. Cineastes not only in Africa but also in the Caribbean, and in African diasporas in Europe, have adopted the model for their cinematic projects. This rapid proliferation of the Nollywood model particularly in Africa has raised not only the question of Nigerian cultural globalization but also Nigeria's cinematic imperialism on other sub-Saharan countries. This paper has focused on this perceived Nollywood cinematic imperialism, using Collywood (Cameroon video film industry) as a case study of dominated cinema.

This paper specifically sought to examine the extent to which the cultural imperialism theories could be relevant to describe or explain Nollywood's influence on Collywood. The paper argued that Nollywood has considerable impact and influence on Collywood, particularly at the levels of production and distribution. Most video filmmakers in Cameroon tend to copy the Nollywood model in terms of scripting, acting, use of special effects among other production paradigms. Also, poor distribution networks enable Nollywood films to continue to dominate in the Cameroonian market. Compared to Collywood films, Nollywood films are better distributed in the Cameroonian market. They are thus more avidly consumed and more popular, compared to Nollywood films.

In spite of above, the thesis of the Nollywoodisation of Cameroon's video film industry still remains arguable. This is so since the nigerianisation of Collywood is mainly observed at the production. Other key levels such as funding, distribution, promotion and exhibition are not really touched by this Nigerian influence. Additionally, not all Cameroonian cineastes actually copy the Nollywood model. Furthermore, a number of Colly-

wood filmmakers use the Nollywood model simply as a medium to showcase Cameroonian cultures and initiate social conversations about their country.

NOTES

[1] The Nollywood film industry has morphed to a $590–600 million commercial giant by the year 2014 (Oh 2014). According to a number of sources (notably Vota 2019), the industry annually generates $US11 billion. It also employs more than a million Nigerian, representing the second employer after government and agriculture.

[2] In 2009, the UNESCO rated Nollywood third most prolific cinema industry in the world after Bollywood and Hollywood. This rank was ameliorated in 2015 by a British Council Report, as Nollywood became second largest cinematic industry in the world with a production capacity of 50 films per week or 2000 to 2500 movies and TV series yearly. It has since that year been second to Bollywood and more prolific than Hollywood.

[3] In her paper, Nalova defines Collywood as Anglophone Cameroon film industry. This definition is reductionist. Most authors do extend the semantic sphere of the codename to include video film productions by both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonian cineastes.

[4] Nous avons voulu profiter de l'intérêt que les gens avaient déjà pour le cinéma nigérian, essentiellement basé sur le home video.

[5] Wahala is a Nigerian Pidgin English word for problems. Many Nigerians tend to borrow the term even when they express themselves in 'standard English.'

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