CINEMA GLOBALIZATION AND NATION BRANDING: AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT OF NOLLYWOOD ON THE NIGERIAN IMAGE CRISIS

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The Nollywood phenomenon has remarkably become a transnational cinematic culture, serving as one of the cardinal vectors of the exportation of Nigerian cultures to other African countries and the world at large. Though it may be presumptuous to claim that this cinematic industry is known everywhere in the world, one thing remains certain: Nollywood films are avidly consumed in many African countries, in African Diasporas and in some Caribbean climes. The phenomenal globalization of the Nollywood industry has raised a serious debate around its potential to serve as Nigeria's image maker in the international scene. This debate has essentially opposed two schools of thought: critics who count Nollywood films among the factors that contribute to the Nigeria's image crisis on one hand and those who instead laud Nollywood for having done very much (in terms of projecting the diverse cultural heritage of the country) in just a very brief period of time, on the other hand. This paper revisits this debate, arguing that most of the criticisms which draw a parallel between Nollywood films and the Nigeria's image crisis are not emanating from empirical, scientific and logical understandings. Usually, they are mere subjective and speculative statements which tend to overlook or lose sight of the real sources of Nigeria's image dilemma. Some of these criticisms – from national and international audiences – tend to be subtly influenced by the negative stereotypes Nigeria and the Nigerian peoples have over the years, been associated with, in the international scene. This index in itself tends to rationalize the thesis stating that Nigeria's image crisis equally affects international audiences' perception, review and consumption of Nollywood films.

Keywords: *Nollywood films, Nigeria's image crisis, Nollywood criticism, nation branding, national brand identity.*

Introduction: Cinema and Cultural Globalization

Cinema has in recent times represented a serious vector of cultural globalization. This has been so to the extent that, most of the scholars who associate globalization with westernization, tend to anchor their position in the seemingly imperialistic nature of western cinema, particularly Hollywood. In effect, most of the critics who equate globalization with Americanization tend to premise their claims on Hollywood's dominance of the international cinema landscape. Whether this persuasion is pertinent or not is a subject for another debate. What appears crystal clear is the fact that, Hollywood films have seriously proliferated in various parts of the world, to the extent of becoming more than a cultural ambassador for America. The industry accounts for about 70 per cent of films seen in Europe and even 90 per cent of those consumed in other parts of the

world. Over 60 per cent of the box office hauls taken in by Hollywood major filmic productions come from abroad, with Europe and China being major consumers of these films (Yantao 2012; Siliwinski 2015). Hollywood films have found ready markets mostly in such European countries as France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain and Germany. Meanwhile, in the oriental regions, China has been predicted as a major if not the number one market for Hollywood films by the year 2020. The spectacular global expansion of the Hollywood industry has been due to innovative tactics ranging from sub-titling in addition to well-designed scenes that will appeal to specific global audiences. Hollywood film producers have for instant often made their productions to integrate scenes acted by iconic Chinese nationals just to appeal to Chinese audiences. Additionally, in the remake of some films, careful amendments are usually effected to avoid alienating audiences in Asian countries, particularly those pockets of viewers perceived to be America's rivals in the international scene. A case in point is the remake version of *Red Dawn* destined to Chinese audiences. In this remake revised the nationality of the invading army is changed from Chinese to North Korean.

The proliferation of Hollywood films has sometimes been to the perceived detriment of national and nationalistic cinemas. It is therefore not uncommon for many European countries (notably France) and some Third World countries to brand it a vector of cultural imperialism. However, whatever description critics give of this film industry, the point remains that Hollywood and other strong symbols/forms of global cinema have become not only an international political issue but suitable instruments for international public relations and nation branding. Indeed, global or transnational cinema's power to influence international opinion and shape cultural values has seriously grown over the years. And today, most – if not all – countries dream of fully harnessing it for their nation branding or rebranding campaigns. Stille (2001: 1) is therefore right when he posits that 'if poets were "the unacknowledged legislators of the world" when Percy Bysshe Shelley wrote in the early nineteenth century, that role passed to filmmakers during the twentieth century'. In other words, filmmakers have in recent times been one of the cardinal forces at the centre of cultural globalization.

Following the Hollywood model, various cinema cultures have emerged or been redefined across the world. Many nations have progressively expanded into the film industry. Globalization has thus caused the Hollywood industry to faced stiff competition from Europe cinema and also from a number of regional cinemas in Third World nations. Good examples are Bollywood, Nollywood, the Korea film industry and Australia.

Like America's Hollywood and India's Bollywood, the Nigerian video films industry brand named 'Nollywood' has, in just a brief period of time, grown to a global phenomenon, putting Nigerian on global spotlight and fueling international socio-cultural and political debates over African cinema's potential to serve as soft power for Black African countries. In effect, in just about two decades, the Nollywood industry has changed from a purely national cinema to a major transnational movie industry, what some enthusiastic African scholars have called a 'pan-African affair' (Endong 2017). From a local 'travelling theatre' culture in the 1990s, the phenomenon has morphed to a $ 590–600 million commercial giant by the year 2013, becoming the second employer in Nigeria (*New African Magazine* 2013; Oh 2014). It has continued to grow from local to global presence fueling debates and speculations. It has equally progressively reviewed the quality of its massive production, seemingly in conformity with the cannons of cinematic production. The rapid growth of the Nollywood industry was clearly evidenced in 2009 when UNESCO ranked it the second largest film industry in the world

(in terms of volume of films produced), declaring it second after Bollywood and ahead of Hollywood (Adefuye 2011; Dyikuk-Dyikuk 2015; Oh 2014). This ranking has followed the fact that Nollywood produces over 50 films a week though such movies are relatively of low quality compared to those produced by Hollywood film studios. The production cost of Nollywood film generally varies between $20,000 and $70,000, which is a token compared to the $250 million and plus often spent for top Hollywood films (BBC 2014). Major theatrical releases in Nollywood include Ken Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* (1992), Nkem Owoh's *Osoufia in London* (2003) and *Ije* (2011) among others. *Ije* – which by 2012 was Nollywood highest-grossing movie of all times – is said to have generated only 2.8 per cent of what an average, humdrum Hollywood film makes. The film is equally said to have earned only 0.03 percent of what Hollywood's highest-grossing movie generates (Dawodu 2013). Despite their low technical quality, Nollywood films have become popular in both local and international markets.

According to a number of sources, Nollywood films have been avidly consumed in almost all climes of the Black Continent as well as in a portion of African Diasporas in Europe, North America and Caribbean countries. It may be difficult to quantify the volume of exportation of Nollywood films to foreign markets (because of lack of exact statistics). However, many scholars and geo-politics pundits have discussed the trans-nationalization of Nollywood and its impacts even on Hollywood (Adefuye 2011; Siliwinski 2015). Oh (2014) estimates at 20 million, the volume of Nollywood following in Africa and in African Diaspora in Europe, America and Asia. He observes that these pockets of Nollywood consumers have been widening over years, pushing Nigerian filmmakers to rethink the contents and aesthetics of their movies in order to appeal to a wider range of international audiences. As Oh puts it, the demand for Nollywood films – particularly among the African Diaspora – has fueled 'a surge in the export of Nigerian films. In practice, the legal and illegal markets grew to coexist as Nigerian film marketers began to adjust their storylines to appeal to wider audiences, incorporating more diverse plot formulas' (Oh 2014: 2).

The popularity of Nollywood films particularly in Africa has made many national cinemas to copy or replicate the Nigerian experience. Such a popularity has equally inspired critics to describe Nollywood as a reflection of the African vision. There however exist pockets of nationalistic critics who view the growing presence of Nollywood films in their countries as a cultural aggression or 'pollution'. Similarly to the Hollywood film industry which is often accused of perpetrating Americanization in non-American climes, Nollywood is often taxed with being an agent of 'Nigerianization' in many African countries (BBC 2016). Its trans-nationalization in the African continent has, in recent times, been associated with a Black form of cultural imperialism or cinematic colonization in Africa. It may be very presumptuous to present Nollywood as a cinema which is well known in all climes of the world; however, one thing remains evident: its films have progressively made their way across various parts of the globe. The industry has thus successfully flaunted its tentacles across all the other continents.

Despite its spectacular globalization, the Nollywood film industry is most often cited among factors contributing to the Nigerian image crisis. In other words, many observers have described Nollywood films' contents as a deformation of Nigeria and have numbered them among factors which inform the negative perception of Nigeria in foreign countries. This paper attempts to examine the extent to which this thesis is pertinent and plausible. After a critical examination of positions which blame Nollywood films for intensifying the negative perception of Nigeria in the international scene,

the paper explores the impact of Nigeria's image crisis on Nollywood. It argues that the Nigerian image crisis has, on its own part, negatively affected the profile of the Nigerian film industry. In other words, the Nollywood film industry has been a victim of the Nigerian image crisis. The paper is divided into three main parts. In the first place, the paper x-rays the Nigerian image crisis paying particular attention to its origin, its complexity and dynamism over the years. In its second part, the paper illustrates ways in which Nollywood may have contributed to tarnishing the image of Nigeria in the international scene and in its last part, the paper shows how Nigeria's negative image in the international scene has tended to affect that of the Nollywood film industry.

Global Cinema as a Vector of Nation Branding

Cinema is counted among the most powerful vectors of cultural diplomacy. It has often been deployed by world nations or governments to spread their soft power in the international sphere. This observation is connected to the fact that filmic texts technically represent kinds of windows through which foreign audiences may view – or be made to view – and appreciate some of the relevant or typical cultural aspects of the country from which they originate. They tell the stories of their nations/countries of origins and thus mirror life in these countries. They add color, detail and richness to foreign audiences' perception of their countries of origin. Because of such immense potential, the cinematic medium has become a fantastic arsenal in the realm of cultural diplomacy. It is suitable for country branding and for both product and place placement. Countries such as the U.S. and major European nations have reaped enormous dividends from such a strategic use of the medium. According to a number of imaginations, myths and even empirical studies, the impact of Hollywood films go far beyond spreading American soft power as it (the impact of Hollywood films) includes instituting American cultural imperialism (Americanization) and political supremacy in numerous 'Third Worlds' and even in some First World countries like France (*New Work Times* 1992; Nwamuo 2016; Endong and Essoh 2013). Callimanopulos (2015) notes for instance that Third World audiences' heavy exposure to Hollywood films has tremendously heightened their empathy for Western – and mostly American – values; and there is increasing fear that Third World nations' progressive embrace of these exocentric values and ideas may reshape their political and cultural aspirations in favor of the American or western world view. Hollywood films have, over the years, succeeded in luring large segments of Third World audiences into perceiving the West and particularly America as an Eldorado, a land of prosperity and justice and the legitimate gendarme of the world.

In view of this international relation scenario, critical observers strongly associate the Hollywood project with a byword of the American dream. Some of these observers simply brand Hollywood as US advertising department. As Yantao (2012) rightly remarks, Hollywood films fervidly aid the US foreign policy and international propaganda. This is very much evidenced in the fact that they (Hollywood films) serve to extol the virtues of the American vision of the world. They equally promote American products and construct or/and reinforce a favorable image for the country. They thus mold and reinforce foreign audiences' (largely positive) perception of the US. Additionally, these films lead international audiences to embrace the US world view and thus constitute a subtle but solid tool for US propaganda in the global political sphere. It goes without saying that highly grossing films worldwide such as *Avatar*, *Harry Porter* and *Deathly Hallows-Part 2* are strong advocates of American socio-political values. Such films represent egregious examples of one of Hollywood favorite troupes: the leader

who epitomizes American values and who, together with his allies, heroically faces and conquers the forces of evil in view of enforcing the Declaration of Independence which stipulates that all men are equal with inalienable rights some of which are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Hollywood films thus strongly project American values. As Yantao (2012) insightfully observes, Hollywood films serve as America's advertising Department. They are aimed to brainwash foreign audiences – particularly non-western ones – into believing that non-western under-developed nations will be better off if they allow the much wiser America serve as their model and tell them what to do in all aspects of life.

Cinema's potential to serve as soft power is further illustrated in the tremendous impact other high grossing films such as *Titanic* and *The Lord of Rings* have had on international tourists' perception of America and New Zealand respectively. It has, in effect, been estimated that, since its production, *The Lord of Rings* has indirectly marketed New Zealand to global audiences, attracting thousands of international visitors to the various scenes where the film was shot. By so doing, the film has enabled a massive tourist industry in New Zealand (Glen 2010: 25). Similarly, the *Titanic* is said to have pull millions of 'fascinated' international tourists across the world to America. The film is said to have attracted over 20 percent of the world population to America in 1998 (Fafiolu 2013). It made millions of international moviegoers to recognize the power of the American culture.

Other emerging cinemas – which, to an extent, are thriving and are successful in the international market are Bollywood, and Nollywood (respectively the first and second biggest film industries in the world, in terms of volume of production). As the most powerful cultural ambassador of India, the Bollywood industry has phenomenally helped reversed the hitherto negative image international audiences had of India; thereby spreading the country's soft power in the world. The industry has, to a relatively great extent, contributed to efforts aimed at correcting the stereotypical images that used to present India as a land of poverty, 'snake culture', caste atrocities, human right violations, communal riots and religious fundamentalism among others. As Kishwar (2016) will put it, 'Bollywood has synthesized the emotional life of NRIs [Non Resident Indians] living in distant and diverse cultures and has made them feel "Indian" by making them feel connected to their cultural values'. In virtually all climes, 'these films are the heartbeat of the Hindustani dil, both of the resident and the non-resident variety'.

Nollywood films have similarly gone global, integrating the mix of factors that inform international audiences' perceptions of the country. It is recognized among a host of Nigerian critics, diplomats and policy makers that the industry has, to an extent been projecting the rich cultural diversity of Nigeria, starting from language to dressing codes. However, despite the fact that they are avidly consumed in numerous international markets, Nollywood films are yet to unarguably be viewed as a serious marketing tool for the Nigerian nation. One actually wonders why, despite their popularity in Nigeria and abroad (especially in the Black African continent and in some Caribbean countries), audiences and erudite Afro-centric critics still have mixed feelings about them. According to some acerb criticisms, Nollywood films constitute one of the most recent and active vectors of the Nigerian image crisis as they have subtly contributed to factors that tarnish the country's image in the international scene. This belief has mostly been anchored on the observation that most Nollywood film producers tend to put (exaggerative) emphasis on controversial themes such as juju, voodooism, occultism, easy money generation, corruptions, ethno-religious conflicts, misguided religiosity and oth-

er salient aspects of the moral decadence eating deep into the Nigerian social fabric. Critics fear that such emphasis on negativity has adversely affected international audiences' perception of Nigeria as a brand. In line with this, Nigerian Minister of Information and Communication Dora Akunyili embarked on wooing Nollywood to be part of the government's constant – but poorly structured – efforts towards rebranding the country. She lamented Nollywood contribution to the Nigerian image crisis, enjoining stakeholders within the industry (particularly film producers) to rethink their portrayal of Nigeria. In her words,

> Negative perception about Nigeria is generated by Nigerians because we [Nigerians] don't believe in ourselves, even in the press [...] If nothing is done, the image we have as a country of 419-ers [corrupt people], where nothing works [and] failing leadership, [will] become a liability. The most systematic way [to reverse this situation] is to re-brand, to tell our story and prevent others from telling it the way they want to tell it (cited in Ajeluorou, 2009: para 8).

It is important, here, to underscore the fact that the thesis which stipulates that Nollywood films have rather been tarnishing the image of Nigeria abroad is subject to serious controversy. Before exploring the thorny debate which has emerged over the issue, it appears expedient to first of all affect an incursion into the age long Nigerian image crisis.

The Nigerian Image Crisis

The Nigerian image crisis is an old and persisting national problematic which has inspired various corrective measures and nation (re)branding campaigns by the successive Nigerian governments. In effect, the crisis dates back to the periods of military dictatorship in the 1980s and 1990s, and has witnessed various developments over the years. As has been argued by most political analysts, communication scholars and international relation critics, undemocratic traditions have always been associated with barbarism. A county which 'cherishes', such paradigms always runs the risk of being negatively profiled, sidelined, blacklisted or isolated in the international scene. No doubt, most countries which have terminated democracy in their climes through the instrumentality of *coup d'états* have always suffered suspensions among other regimes of sanctions from international organizations. This particular sin (military dictatorship) coupled with some other factors have been at the root of Nigeria's image crisis in the 1980s.

Nigeria's image in the international scene has thus been fluctuating in the course of its political history. This image has swung between periods of extreme positivity to periods of extreme negativity. Periods of positivity have been in the years 1960–1967, 1970–1983 and 1999–2007, meanwhile periods of extreme negativity include the period of the Biafra war (1967–1970), that of General Abacha's regime (1993–1999) and 2007 till date. During the periods of extreme positivity, Nigeria gained respect not only from her African counterparts but also from western chancelleries. After the Nigerian civil war for instance, (particularly during Mohamed Murtala's regime), the country was seen as a heavy weight in African geo-politics and the toast of the international community. Africa was seen as the center piece of Nigeria's foreign policy. Nigeria thus assumed the role of giant in the continent politics and her views were diligently sought even by western powers when addressing any issue bordering on African affairs (Egwemi 2010). The country equally radiated in the international sphere during President Obasandjo's administration, partially grace to the country's involvement in international peace keeping missions on African soil. An egregious example is Nigeria formidable

leadership of the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces which succeeded to restore peace in Liberia by bringing to an end the civil war which brutalized that country for years. Under Nigeria's leadership, the ECOMOG achieved an unprecedented exploit in Liberia, what the immensely equipped Western powers could not achieve in Yugoslavia.

In spite of these positive indexes, Nigeria's image has largely been negative in the international scene. When some enthusiastic or 'patriotic' Nigerian nationals refer to the country as 'the Giant of Africa' they mostly have in view the enormous/impressive human and natural resources the country is endowed with. However, having a large population and being blessed with enormous natural and human resources are not sufficient acumen to gain respect and a favorable image in the international scene. A nation (viewed as a brand) is an edifice which requires complex and well-thought efforts ranging from intelligent national reforms to an attractive foreign policy – one that will include participation in laudable international schemes like humanitarian and peace keeping efforts among others. From a number of indications, Nigeria's image has remained negative since 2007 and this negativity seems to have intensified in recent years.

In concrete terms, Nigeria is generally associated in the international scene with multiple vices; some of which are corruption, counterfeit, insecurity, election rigging and dictatorship among others. As Adebola, Talabi and Lamidi (2012) remark, both national and international observers have likened Nigeria to the proverbial Nazareth from which nothing good can come. Nigeria's image has thus been seriously battered before the world. Nobody seems to believe noble anything can work in the country. This moribund or sordid view of the country and his people has partly been enabled by the so-called Nigerian factor as well as by a kind of 'Nigerianophobia' prevailing in number of African countries. The Nigerian factor is simply a defeatist myth – particularly popular among Nigerians – that the country has attained such an alarming level of moral decay that any corrective measure to redress the situation may only yield patchy dividends or be totally futile. The negative perception of the country has been responsible for the marginalization and victimization of Nigerians in foreign climes. It is no surprise that Nigerians are today often blamed for social pathologies prevalent in most countries where they reside or which they visit. They have for instance become a veritable scapegoat for anything negative in most African countries. In line with this, Sydelle (2010) laments over a popular South African film producer's justification of his abysmal portrayal of Nigerians in his film. According to this producer, 'the most honest refraction of a crime group will be Nigerians'.

The factors responsible for Nigeria's image crisis are multiple. A school of thought has pointed out that Nigeria – like her other African counterparts – is just victim of an old tradition sustained by western media, consisting in always portraying the Black Continent in a negative light by always emphasizing only on bad news about the continent (Zina Saro-Wiwa cited in Barrot 2009; Tari 2014). Other observers have advanced the conspiracy theory. According to such a theory, Nigeria's resistance to western total control of her impressive natural resources has made her be subject to western powers' negative campaigns in the international scene. Such campaigns are aimed to curtail Nigeria's influence in the international scene. All these persuasions are, of course, arguable.

One plausible cause of Nigeria's image crisis is the country's glaring failure to adopt serious internal reforms and design actionable policies that will curb social and political pathologies such as corruption, insecurity and poverty among others. The prevalence and persistence of issues like the Boko Haram insurgency, incidence of corruption

among government officials and bloody ethno-religious conflicts over decades are undeniable indexes pointing to the fact that the country is yet to find the suitable antidote to numerous of its socio-political pathologies. It is in tandem with this situation that a number of political observers refer to Nigeria as a 'failed state'; that is, a state which has not been able to satisfy the basis conditions and responsibility of a sovereign government (Ademola, Talabi and Lamidi 2012; Egwemi 2010). It is even this failure to embark on effective internal reforms that has partly caused the reduced productivity if not failure of most of the rebranding campaigns deployed by successive Nigerian government to launder the image of the country. Most efforts to rebrand Nigeria seem to have been limited to elaborating captivating logos and slogans with very little or no governmental efforts towards constructing what is often called 'a national brand DNA'. The construction of Nigeria's 'brand DNA' or national brand identity is possible only through empirical research and well enunciated and executed internal reforms. It is, indeed, funny to think of rebranding a country where corruption is still officiously celebrated and tolerated by both the ruling class and the general populace. It is, indeed futile to think of rebranding a country whose people's mind is still 'poisoned' with the 'Nigerian factor'. It is equally unrealistic to think of rebranding a country where poverty, counterfeit, abuse of human rights and insecurity continue to constitute a prominent problematic and clear indexes of government's failure or inefficacy.

In view of this, O'Tudor (2014) recommends that 'before rebranding Nigeria, we ought to perfect the internal processes that constitute the brand DNA. A good product sells itself in the market place, but at the moment, Nigeria is still a hard sell, even to its own people'. Building a national brand DND is not done overnight or in a vacuum. And countries which have staged successful rebranding campaigns did not solely depend on logo and slogans as has been the case for Nigeria through initiatives such as the 2009s 'Nigeria: Great Nation, Good People', or again, the 'Nigeria: do the Right' campaign and the 2012 "Nigeria: Our Heritage (NOH) campaign. Nation (re)branding efforts that are solely or principally anchored in flashy slogans and logos are hardly effective in reviving the international reputation of a country. As Teslik (2007) pointedly argues, it is sordid for a country to assume that it can whitewash bad policy with good public relations – that is sophisticated nation branding campaigns. Logic wants that bad policy be addressed first before attention is given to good public relations.

Is Nollywood Really Contributing to the Nigerian Image Crisis?

According to a number of critics, Nollywood is part of the mix of factors responsible for Nigeria's image crisis. These critics mostly anchor their opinions on the fact that some of Nollywood favorite tropes are rampaging corruption in prominent Nigerian institutions (notably the police); advanced moral decadence visible in occultism and student cults, violence (ritual killings) and religious indoctrination (portrayed in religious movies which present God and not necessarily hard work, as the answer to societal and economic problems). Critics have, in different platforms, expressed serious worries about the way most Nollywood film portray iconic Nigerian socio-political institutions such as the police. The impression they give to the international audiences is that the Nigerian police is not to be trusted as some of its members are often parts of – if not the brain behind – shameful and criminal initiatives. Nollywood film producers also tend to over emphasize occultism as a popular culture or a tradition in Nigeria. With this, critics fear and tend to speculate that international audiences mainly see Nigeria as a 'juju land' that is, a clime where occultism, barbarism and ritual crimes are just so rampant

and relatively naturalized or legitimized. Sydelle (2015) underlines this fact, with close reference to Ugandan critics and audiences' reception of Nollywood films. He notes that a segment of Nollywood film audiences in this country (Uganda) is of the persuasion that Ugandans' exposure to and heavy consumption of Nollywood films have caused ritual killings against children to be in the rise in the country. Sydelle cites a Ugandan Nollywood critic as warning that

> The scenes depicted [in Nollywood films] are mostly those that involve violence, witchcraft, murder, child sacrifice, robbery, theft and breaking families. The images these movies portray are detrimental to our society and could possibly be one of the little known causes of increased crime in Uganda. Desperate people pick tips from these movies on how to execute crimes (Sydelle 2015: para 4).

Though it may be dishonest to totally exonerate Nollywood from such an accusation, it is important to underscore the fact that the impact of Nollywood on international audiences' perceptions of Nigeria may be either very minute or largely undemonstrated by its 'detractors'. Most of the observations purporting a strong co-relation between Nigeria's image crisis and Nollywood films stem more from personal and subjective understandings than from empirical research. The observation authored by the critic cited above is an egregious example of such illogical and unscientific reasoning. In effect, the fact that Nollywood films contain scenes depicting various forms of violence or negativisms does not in itself suffice to establish a correlation between these films and crime or negative perceptions of Nigeria in international markets. In line with this premise and many other similar ones, it may be argued that critics tend to exaggerate their blames against Nollywood; meanwhile, the real causes of Nigeria's image crisis lie elsewhere, for instance in government's failure to initiate relevant socio-political reforms and trigger social and economic transformation in the nation; thereby enabling the construction of its national brand DNA.

One cannot deny the fact that there are replete cases of Nollywood films producers who major in exaggerating the negativity of life in Nigeria. Indeed, there are films that could be branded as bad ambassadors for Nigeria. This includes Nollywood films which portray pornography or violence (gun-happiness) as common features of life in Africa or Nigeria. However, it takes little lucidity to see that most Nollywood films exploit experiences which, to a great extent, are part of the Nigerian's quotidian life. They mostly exploit or get inspiration from what is in vogue in the contemporary Nigerian society.

It is not an exaggeration to lament that issues like corruption in governing institutions, infrastructural decay, violence, secret cults and societies, wickedness, greed and government inefficiency – which are most often portrayed in these films – constitute a sad socio-political reality in Nigeria. Only dishonesty will deny that these social cancers exist and eat deep into the Nigerian socio-political architecture. It therefore becomes objectionable to profusely blame Nollywood films for portraying and decrying these ills. Nollywood films mostly portray the hardship, dreams and aspirations of the Nigerian people. The fact that negativity is often emphasized in them should not always be regarded as an index suggesting that they (Nollywood films) are automatically at odd with the principle of realism. As Nollywood film producer Christian Putsch (cited in Alawode 2010: 118–119) puts it, 'we tell stories Nigerians can identify with [...] unlike Hollywood movies, ours don't always have a happy end. The world's not fair, so why should we pretend it is? Professor of film theory Kwaghkondo puts it in a more plain language when he concedes that 'Everything is a reflection of the society itself [...] Ni-

geria is becoming violent. So, the films [Nollywood movies] must reflect that' (as cited by Adagbo 2016: 11).

Nigerian presently witnesses a plurality of socio-political and economic problems that need to be given serious attention. It will be dishonest to pretend – in the context of Nollywood film productions – that these socio-political problems don't exist (at all) and that all is well with/in the country. Rather, it will be more strategic or expedient to wholeheartedly tackle them (these problems) and initiate a relevant socio-political therapy that will be beneficial to the country's image and Nigerians. And it is the conviction of this author that portraying and denouncing them through the platform of Nollywood will be one of the steps of this socio-political therapy. This is in keeping with Osofisan's conception of the fundamental role of cinema/theatre in a society as Nigeria. This conception highlights that the role of cinema is to:

1. Liberate the spirits and strengthen the minds of the populace, thereby raising their level of consciousness,
2. Deal with burning socio-political problems existing in the community, for instance the oppression of masses,
3. Educate the masses, that is, give knowledge and truth,
4. Enlighten masses on reasons for the prevalence of social ills in their society and highlight ways of eliminating negative conditions and strengthening positive conditions, and
5. Intelligently entertain.

Another observation establishing a link between Nollywood and the Nigerian image crisis lies on the somehow faulty assumption that portraying Nigeria in a negative light in a film is automatically tantamount with tarnishing the image of the country. A related maxim stipulates that international audiences' perception of Nigeria and its people are primarily and automatically informed by Nollywood films' contents. And so, if one is to follow this logic s/he will arguably conclude that international audiences (who consume Nollywood films) are bound to have a negative perception of Nigeria because the country is more often negatively portrayed in Nollywood films. As we have earlier contended, these two theses will need empirical research. They seem to largely hinge on speculations and personal/subjective understandings. From simple observation, one may see that the two above mentioned theses or 'hypotheses' are anchored on a number of inferiority complexes and the principle of double standards. To a relative extent, almost all cinemas tend to emphasize negative stereotypes that can be associated with their countries or cultures of origin. This should not imply that audiences (consumers of these films) automatically brand the cultures depicted in the movies along the portrayed stereotypes. This can be amply illustrated by the fact that Hollywood films hardly avoid, fail or hesitate to portray America as a country where there is violence (justified and unjustified) as well as, as a society where there is a plurality of controversial popular cultures (for instance the cultures of jumping from one sex partner to the other and *beautified* pornography/nudity). Corroborating this position, Damm (2015) underscores the fact that a huge amount of Hollywood filmic productions portray Americans as being gun-happy and girl-happy. However, such constant portrayal of America hardly inspires international audiences (particularly Black African ones), to have an abysmal perception of America. America continues to tremendously 'seduce' foreign audiences and to be a dream land for many non-western nationals, despite the fact that major theatrical releases from the Hollywood dream factories emphasize crude violence, waywardness, and controversial cultures among other questionable practices as part of life in America.

One even observes that, most Hollywood filmgoers of Black African extract paradoxically interpret these popular cultures (presented as prevailing in American) as superior and fascinating, thereby viewing America and Americans as a cultural model to emulate at all cost (Shahadah 2017; Endong 2018; Ekeanyanwu 2015).

The reasons for this constant *America-mania* among international audiences (particularly those in the Third Worlds or Black Africa) are obvious: a mix of other agents have, over the years, successfully cultivated the minds of international audiences in favor of America. Hollywood is just a marginal vector of this multifaceted pro-America campaign. As Anholt-GMI (2015) will put it, Hollywood only adds color, details and richness to foreign audiences' perception of the U.S. In some sense, it finishes a work started *a priori* by other subtle agencies of country branding or national brand management. Besides, the American governments have long ago adopted policies and initiated infrastructural developments that have made life in the US to be seen by foreign audiences as attractive. They (these American governments) have been sustaining both internal and external initiatives and giant projects to launder or manage her image in the international scene. This can be illustrated by the fact that America is first and foremost branded as a successful nation by the excellent products associated with it, from Microsoft software, to Boeing airplanes, to Coca-Cola drinks and to MacDonald Hamburgers. Other impressive infrastructural development and institutions such as the NASA and solid educational system among others contribute enormously to its national brand identity. It is not only on paper that America and her First World allies claim to be the champions of democracy, peace keeping and human rights in the world. All these visible indexes plead in favor of America. In themselves, they fascinate millions of audiences in Third World countries.

In the light of all these, it may be enthused that Nigeria will need a number of internal reforms and a splendid foreign policy to first of all ensure its radiation before its own people and before the world, for Nollywood to complete such efforts through portraying/projecting them in its productions. It is improbable that Nollywood operates a miracle, when the country cannot in itself sell itself to both internal and international audiences. Expecting Nollywood films to substitute the so-perceived negativisms they portrayed in their storylines and aesthetics with a favorable one without prior social change and infrastructural revolution/revival in Nigeria may amount to distortions, that is telling a false story about Nigeria. Cinema is certainly not reality but it must be in line with principles of realism for it to have palpable positive fruits, specifically in the domain of nation branding. It is a plausible premise that any nation branding strategy – notably cinema – cannot do the work of well thought internal reforms and positive transformation. As noted by Pickard, such nation branding strategy 'cannot create an image that doesn't correspond with reality. It can make the best of a country's capabilities and attractions but cannot invent what's not there' (cited in Sudhaman and Magee 2009: para 8).

How is Nollywood Victim of the Nigerian Image Crisis?

Many critics have been spurred into blaming Nollywood and numbering it among the factors behind the Nigerian image crisis. Little – nay no – attention has been given to exploring manners in which the Nigerian image crisis has been affecting Nollywood as a brand. This section will devote attention to this angle of the issue. The paper's specific thesis here stems partly from the yet-to-be fully explored verity that Nigerian made products irrespective of industry are presently often perceived in a negative light as a result of the image of

their country of origin (Hoffman and Melly 2015; Endong 2014; Ademola, Talabi and Lamidi 2012; Egwemi 2010). Nollywood films have somehow not been exempted from this phenomenon. One will easily observe that most of the negative critiques that associate Nollywood films with incidences of crime in foreign markets are more the product of critics' negative perceptions of Nigeria and Nigerians than the actual contents of the films. In the preceding lines of this discourse we have, for instance, mentioned the case of Nollywood critics in countries like Uganda, Ghana and South Africa who, out of illogical and unscientific reasoning concluded that the vodoowism, violence and multifaceted fraud shown in Nollywood films are at the root of increasing incidences of ritual crimes and other forms of sordid acts in their countries. Such a line of argument totally sidelines internal factors and other external indexes such as Hollywood films (which portray equal, if not more alarming amount of violence) and which may, as well, constitute primary factors responsible for the prevalence of crime in those countries.

In reaction to such biased anti-Nigeria(n) critiques, Sydelle (2010) laments that international critics who accused Nollywood of being at the root of violence in Ghana for instance, tend to lose sight of the fact that the country is surrounded by socio-politically instable neighbors such as Ivory Coast and Liberia which have witnessed serious tensions, civil wars and political turmoil capable of inspiring incidences of violence in the country (Ghana). Sydelle likewise censures Ugandan critics' argument stipulating that Nollywood films are at the base of increasing rate of crime in the country. To him, such allegations are not only unfounded but they tend to overlook the fact that the country's persisting civil wars and harboring of very aggressive pressure groups – notably the Lord Resistance Army of Jonas Samvimbi – could partly be the roots of a culture of crime and moral bankruptcy in the country. In view of the above mentioned trend it may be pardonable to hypothesize that, observers who place Nollywood films among cinematic models which inspire crime in various African climes are more informed by the persistently negative perception of Nigeria and Nigerians in the international.

Another example is given in Zambia where audiences and critics taxed Nollywood films with informing children's mispronunciation of English words (Seo 2015). Beside the fact that the veracity of such a postulation will need to be established through research, this criticism is somehow rooted in the fact that a good number of international audiences are of the persuasion that the 'Nigerian accent' in speaking English is defective or just *un-English*. According to popular imaginations (in Black African countries – notably Cameroon and Ghana – the average Nigerian adopt a defective pronunciation in his or her oral expression in English. This author has come across many international audiences who, out of experience or arguable speculation, perceive Nigerian accent in speaking English to be unique, 'incorrect' or indigenized.

As earlier argued, foreign audiences have, over some decades now, cultivated the tradition of seeing Nigerians as the scapegoats for some (if not most) of the negativisms that prevail in their climes. Nigerians are mostly (though arguably) associated with drug trafficking, money laundering, counterfeit (production and distribution fake product), media piracy, fraud, ritual crimes and armed robbery among others. These stereotypes tend to sometimes influence international audiences and critics' reviews and consumption of Nollywood.

Conclusion

Nollywood's potential to unarguably serve as Nigeria image maker remains subject to controversy. The virulent debate over the issue is yet to be concluded. While a number

of critics have enlisted Nollywood films among factors contributing to the Nigeria's image crisis, others have instead lauded them (the films) for their monumental contribution to projecting the diverse cultural heritage of the country. Such observers are of the persuasion that Nollywood has done so much in just a very brief period of time.

This paper has revisited this debate, arguing that though it may be dishonest to totally exonerate Nollywood from the accusations of tarnishing Nigeria's image abroad, most of the criticisms establishing a co-relation between Nollywood films and Nigeria's image crisis are somehow questionable. They can be problematized on multiple grounds, one being the fact that, most of these criticisms do not emanate from empirical, scientific and logical understandings. Usually, they are mere subjective and speculative statements. Another issue is that, some of these criticisms – from national and international audiences – tend to be subtly influenced by the negative stereotypes Nigeria and the Nigerian people have over the years been associated with. This, in itself, tends to rationalize the thesis stating that Nigeria's image crisis equally affects international audiences' perception, review and consumption of Nollywood films.

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