

## Original Paper

# Nollywood: Indigenous Culture, Interculturality, and the Transplantation of American Popular Culture onto Postcolonial Nigerian Film and Screen

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria, the Giant of Africa, has three big tribes: Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. It was a British colony which was amalgamated in 1914. The country became independent in 1962 and was right away bedeviled by military coups d'états and a bloody civil war (1967-1970). In 1999, the country experienced democratic dispensation. In the 1990s, the Nollywood nascent movie industry—following in the footpath of Hollywood and Bollywood—flourished. The movie industry grew thanks to four factors: Rapid urbanization; the hand-held video camera; the advent of satellite TV; and, the overseas migrations of Nigerians. Local languages are used in these films; however, English is the most prominent, along with Nigerian pidgin broken English. Many themes are treated in these films: tradition and customs, religion, witchcraft and sorcery, satire, urban and rural lives, wealth acquisition, consumerism, etc. I discuss the ways in which American popular culture is adopted in Nigeria and recreated on screen. Nigeria and USA share Federalism, the superlative mode, and gigantism (houses, cars, people, etc.), and many Nigerians attend American universities. In the final analysis, the arguments exposed in this paper highlight the multitude of ways in which Nigerians navigate the treacherous waters of modernity and globalization.*

### **Keywords**

*Nollywood, video and film industry, postcolonial Nigeria, indigenous cultures, Igbo culture, American popular culture in Africa, gigantism, consumerism, modernity and globalization*

## 1. Introduction

### **Historical Background: “Thou Shall Call Twice” or When Oral Culture Meets the Moving Image**

One of the biggest novelties in entertainment in Africa towards the end of the twentieth century is, without a doubt, the birth of Nigerian cinema commonly referred to as Nollywood, following into the footsteps of the American giant Hollywood movie industry and the Indian one, namely Bollywood. The latest newborn which joined the “Wood” family is Lollywood, the combination of Lahore and Hollywood. It is the film industry of Pakistan mainly based in Lahore.

At once, Nigeria epitomizes, highlights, and condenses all the hopes, impediments, success and failure of postcolonial Africa. This is the most populated country of the continent, in addition of it being the biggest black country in the world. It is important to stress the fact that this country—like all the other African countries—came into existence thanks to the 1885 Berlin Conference where the main European imperial powers (France, Great Britain, USA, Belgium, Germany, Portugal, etc.) met and partitioned Africa. It was in 1851 that the British forces invaded the, then, small fishing village of Lagos; however, it was not until 1861 that Lagos was annexed and Nigeria became a protectorate in 1901; the North and South colonies were born. In 1914, the Governor Lord Frederick Lugard amalgamated the two colonies and Nigeria, as we know it today, was born. The name Nigeria was taken from the Niger River running through the country. This name was allegedly coined in the late 19th century by British journalist Flora Shaw, who later married Baron Frederick Lugard.

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria became independent. Needless to say, the birth pang was very painful for the country experienced several military coups and the county was run by the military from 1966 to 1999. Civilians came back firmly to power after that date. Nigeria also experienced a vicious civil war (1967-1970) when the Igbos in the East wanted to secede; this was unacceptable because the eastern part contained huge deposits of crude oil. The East lost the war, peace prevailed but until today, the healing process is incomplete. Three main tribes occupy the front of the stage: Yoruba in the West, Hausa/Fulaani in the North, and Igbo in the eastern part of the land. There are myriads of smaller tribes and ethnic groups referred to as “minority groups”: Ijaw, Itsekiri, Calabar, Ibibio, Igala, just to name a few. The case of Nigeria, as described above, is emblematic of all African countries. It is also worth emphasizing that pre-colonial African societies shared many common features and the same culture crucible; of course, there were differences and customs among and between them since there were customs that were specific to each society. Likewise, both colonial and postcolonial African societies and countries do share similar traits.

The advent of the Nigerian movie industry was rendered possible thanks to the conjugation of four factors: Rapid urbanization; the development of the hand-held video camera; the tremendous development of satellite TV which brought into Nigerian homes and living rooms films and documentaries from all over the world; and last but not least, the exponential migratory trends of

Nigerians traveling all over the world. I must add the influence of Mexican and Brazilian telenovelas and films as well as the minor role played by Hindu movies (Bollywood). There are many genres and sub-genres in Nollywood cinema: satire, caper comedy, romantic comedy, horror, crime, supernatural thriller, etc. Political tussles and power play are also featured such as the elections to the Senate, the Presidency, the Governorship, etc., in short, all that has to do with the seats of power. Current topics are also featured in Nollywood films (cf., *The Uber Driver*, 2019).

As emphasized by Elizabeth Lequeret (*Le cinéma africain*, pp. 76-77), few other factors contributed to the expansion of the Nigerian home video industry. In the early 1990s, the military dictatorship was in full swing, coupled with a growing insecurity; the sale of video recorders reached explosive records. One can add that celluloid cinema gradually died because the directors couldn't find money to finance their films, in addition to the fact that most—if not all—movie theaters closed, a phenomenon that affected all African countries, not just Nigeria. Across the continent, movie theaters were transformed into churches and warehouses.

In order to give credit where it is due, the Nigerian movie industry owes a great debt to theater. Patrick Ebewo writes: “The current video film industry in Nigeria owes a huge debt to the pioneers of Nigerian theatre, particularly practitioners of the Yoruba Traveling Theater, who branched off from mainstream theater to experiment with celluloid” (“The Emerging Video Film Industry in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects”, p. 49). Thus, comes to mind the pioneer Hubert Ogunde, actor, playwright, theatre manager, and musician; in 1945, he founded the first contemporary professional theatrical company in Nigeria, the African Music Research Party. He changed the name to Ogunde Theater Party in 1947 and Ogunde Concert Party in 1950. We can add other notable names such as Ola Balogun, Jab Adu, Moses Olayia and Eddie Ugboma.

It is worth noting the transition from celluloid to video by remarking that there is a huge difference between the two: firstly, in the former, the emphasis is put on directors whereas in the latter, the actors prevail. In early celluloid African cinema, directors were known and celebrated: Ousmane Sembene, Souleymane Cissé, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Cheikh Omar Sissoko, Ola Balogun, Oumarou Ganda, Moustapha Alassane, etc. Most of these filmmakers belong to Francophone African countries such as Senegal, Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. These directors depended a lot on French grants in order to make films. Additionally, these directors won prizes at film festivals around the world. On the contrary, the proponents of the Nigerian video industry taunted these directors and celluloid African cinema by deridingly calling them “Embassy cinema”. Needless to say, in the Nigerian movie industry, all the producers are private entrepreneurs usually referred to as “marketers”.

Additionally, actors are more famous and richer than directors (the latter are hardly known); we have famous, glamourized movie stars and well-known actors such as: Olu Jacobs, Pete Edochie, Ashley Nwosu, Zubby Michael, Ken Erics, Yul Edochie, Kenneth Okonkwo, Nkem Owo, Mike Ezuruonye,

John Okafor, Nonso Diobi, Desmond Elliot, Richard Mofe Damijo, Ramsey Nouah, Chinedu Ikedieze, Kanayo O. Kanayo, Amaechi Muonagor, Chiwetalu Agu, Sam Loco Efe, Clem Ohameze, Osita IHEME, Jim Iyke, etc. Among the female actors, we can cite a few: Patience Ozokwor, Ngozi Ezeonu, Tonto Dikeh, Mercy Johnson, Ini Edo, Kate Henshaw, Omotola Ekeinde, Stephanie Okereke, Oge Okoye, Rachael Okonkwo, Funke Akindele, Liz Benson, Clarion Chukwuma, Queen Nwokoye, Uche Jombo, Rita Dominic, Chika Ike, etc. These actors and actresses own mansions, jet set around the world, are crowned, dined and wined at parties and festivals, etc. It is said that video films gross an estimated 200 million dollars a year and Nigeria has been ranked the world's third largest film industry after Bollywood and Hollywood. Thus, Nigeria's GDP was recently rebased from about USD 270 billion to USD 510 billion for 2013, taking into account the input of the movie industry.

This section focuses on the Igbo tribe even though Yorubas and Hausas also produce films. In these films, an array of languages is used: Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo, etc. However, English is the most prominent along with Nigerian pidgin English, a form of broken English. Many themes are treated in these films: tradition and customs, witchcraft and sorcery, social satire, urban and rural lives, wealth acquisition, consumerism, drama, etc. In the same order of things, quite a few other themes will be discussed here: religions (including traditional religions also referred to as paganism, Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism, Evangelicals). Among the Igbos, there are very few Muslims, Islam being predominant in the north and west of Nigeria. In passing, it is worth noting that Christianity entered into Igbo country thanks to British colonialism, mostly in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, Irish priests were in charge of implanting the Catholic church not only in Igbo country but also across Nigeria and the British Empire. It is important to stress the fact that most Africans have a syncretic type of religion which blends Islam and African traditional religion, on the one hand, and Christianity with the same African traditional religion, on the other hand. In order to truly understand African traditional beliefs, one must take into account the remarks made by Ibrahima Sow, who, in his book titled *Divination, maraboutage, destin; aux sources de l'imaginaire*, asserts that ancient Africa had "a fundamentally magical worldview" (p. 215). In the same order of things, Sow compares the revealed religions, on the one hand, and African traditional religions, on the other; thus, he writes: "In religion, we pray to the god, in magic, we give him an order" (p. 191).

As mentioned above, with the advent of Islam and Christianity, religion itself, as practiced across Africa, became a syncretic one because both Islam and Christianity are laced with traditional beliefs hailing from the African pre-Islamic and pre-Christian past. However, concerning the concept of "gods" in the plural as invoked in film, this can be understood only when put in relationship with the real pantheon of deities in precolonial African cosmogony. Contrary to what the first Western/European Africanists and anthropologists said and wrote, Africans were not polytheists; there was a single God at the top, then followed the lesser gods usually associated with nature: fire, thunder, brimstone, river, sea,

mountain, etc. Thus, monotheism existed in pre-colonial Africa. This idea of Africans being polytheists had gained so much currency among these early European anthropologists that it was difficult to put it in disrepute; however, nowadays the myth has been debunked; things have been put back to their proper place and perspective.

Schooling (European/western education) was important and was intimately tied to the church; thus, the first schools in Nigeria were Christian and Catholic ones. A few other themes featured in Nollywood films are: Human sacrifice, the supernatural and the pathological, kidnapping for ransom, the occult, the magical, ancestor worship, the explanation and understanding of death, the collective unconscious, etc. The masquerade is very important in Igbo traditional society; it is performed by secret societies which re-enact the spirits of the living-dead and the ancestors.

The expression “Thou Shall Call Twice” featured in the sub-title above is a cultural marker; the astute watcher of Nigerian films notices that when people are calling someone, once is never enough; most of the time, the person has to be called twice—sometimes more than twice—before the person answers. This marker belongs to the domain of oral culture. More cultural markers will be brought into the fray of our discussion further below. For now, it suffices to say that many writers and anthropologists consider Igbo society as being a “stateless” one or a non-stratified society, namely an acephalous society which is a society which lacks political leaders or hierarchies. Other specialists maintain an opposite line of argumentation. When reading about the history and past of Nigeria, one comes across general remarks, namely, that, in pre-colonial Igbo society—like in most parts of Africa—people lived in villages where the main activities were subsistence farming (yam being the main crop), fishing, and hunting. The Igbos had shrines run by priests, also known as kings of the spirits (*Ezemo*); thus, in the absence of chiefs, the priests played that role. However, in most Nollywood Igbo films, there are kings (called *Igwe*) which fact runs counter to the idea that Igbo society was stateless. Is the Nollywood king just an invented fictional character?

What can explain this craving for royalty? Has kingdom arrived into Igbo society much later, after European colonization and after the Igbos came into contact, as it were, with the Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani or the nearby Benin kingdom? All the aforementioned kingdoms had a more structured type of State run by kings and, occasionally, queens. It is a possibility that the Igbos borrowed the concept of kingdom but the debate goes on. To come back briefly to the *Igwe* as featured in film, he usually has a Prime Minister who is at the head of his Cabinet; the *Igwe* chooses himself the Prime Minister. One can often see very comical scenes of shouting matches among the Cabinet members and it looks like the one who shouts loudest and drowns the voice of his opponent automatically asserts his authority, power, and manhood vis-à-vis his enemy or adversary. Boldness is a sure sign of virility.

At the opposite end of this male virility and, in contradistinction, it is important to consider gender issues, most notably the representation and perception of women in Nollywood movies. We have two

prototypes of women: The first one is strong, ambitious, opinionated, smart—sometimes stubborn and domineering—who knows how to stand her ground against male bullies; she also knows how to use her feminine charms and endowments in order to push her way through and obtain what she wants; this type of woman is illustrated by the character of Mama G (played by Patience Ozokwor). The second female prototype is a submissive, dominated, “traditional” woman. In front of the *Igwe* or during the deliberations of the Council of the Elders, this type of woman must speak only when spoken to; she must apologize when she speaks out of turn and is, occasionally, scolded by the male-only august assembly. It is obvious that the second type of woman portrays an inferior status of womanhood.

To come back to the priest, when people committed crimes or were accused of having done so, they swore or took an oath in front of the priest. In case of serious crimes (such as murders), the culprit was banished to the Evil Forest. The priest was also a healer and a soothsayer for, when people were sick; they came to the priest in order to be cured. In Nollywood Igbo films, death is never innocent or natural; it is always caused by a foreign agent or an enemy. This conception of death harks back to pre-colonial mentality when people were in symbiosis with nature and modern medicine was not known; thus, most diseases were not known or diagnosed correctly even though one must acknowledge that pharmacopoeia was well known, i.e., that the science of plants, trees, roots, and leaves was recognized and traditional medicine relied on natural remedies in order to heal sicknesses.

Along the same lines, the oracles were of the utmost importance; people consulted the oracles in order to know what the future holds for them, whether their wives will give birth to a boy or girl for example; fertility issues were very important, etc. Thus, divination was a prime choice for the people; the priest (*Ezemo*) who performs divination usually uses cowry shells; the latter enable him to indicate the sacrifices that must be performed by the person who comes for consultation: cows, cocks, goats, tubers of yam, cola nuts, hot drink (liquor being choice number one), cloth, etc.

When it comes to social structures, Igbo society adopted the lineage system which was linked to clans, each clan having a family head or a patriarch. This system rested on gerontocracy in which the older the person, the wiser he or she was supposed to be. Speaking of old age, I must make a small digression by invoking the famous saying assigned to Hampaté Bâ: “In Africa, an old man who dies is like a library that burns”; actually, this quote is wrong. Here’s the correct quote: “In Africa, an initiated old man who dies is like a library that burns”. It goes without saying that not all old men were initiated. What I find amazing is that so many people are wrongly quoting the African writer and oral history specialist; better yet, people are quoting him by leaving out the most important word, namely “initiated”.

To come back to the Igbo royal court, the Council of Elders is always invoked in Nollywood films as the court where problems are judged and settled. In oral cultures (traditional Igbo society was entirely oral); texts are communal properties as argued by I. Okpewho: “Since the texts of the oral tradition had

passed from one mouth to another and from one generation to another, we could no longer speak of one author or creator for any one of them. We could only see each text as the common property of the community and as a product of joint or communal authorship” (*African Oral Literature*, pp. 5-6). Thus, many other cultural markers which belong to Igbo traditional society are featured in films, the most pre-eminent ones being proverbs and sayings. These proverbs serve as pedagogical and educational tools since there was no formal schooling. Children and various age groups were educated thanks to tools such as proverbs which contain enough wisdom and lessons. These proverbs, which belong to tradition, are still preserved in the contemporary age and passed on from generation to generation. However, as we shall see in the next section, the advent of the European brand of modernity is going to upset that tradition; modernity goes to the extent of radically altering the tenets of tradition. In my book *Oralité africaine*, I have amply discussed the dyptich modernity/tradition, in addition to highlighting the relation that it has with writing, the new technologies, modern education, so on and so forth.

To briefly come back to the concept of tradition, the way the latter is treated in Nollywood film generally echoes the way it is concretely considered and lived at large in society, namely the usage of the concept in order to justify the most backward aspects of the prevailing culture; one often hears in the movies a character proclaim: “This is our tradition, this is how we do things, this is how our ancestor used to do things, etc.” Obviously, tradition is invoked whenever it is convenient and it is used to justify the unjustifiable. This fact is well illustrated by the 16<sup>th</sup> century French writer Etienne de La Boétie who asserts that “the first reason of servility is custom (tradition)” (*Discours de la servitude volontaire*, p. 50). Needless to say, tradition has positive aspects and the latter must be cultivated, encouraged, and practiced.

One last remark: In his book titled *Le cinéma africain; des origines à 1973*, P. Vieyra makes a slight differentiation between French-speaking Africans (Francophones) on the one hand, and English-speaking Africans (Anglophones), on the other. Most importantly, the author highlights the way in which British and French colonial methods differ when it comes to assimilating their respective subjects. He writes: “The so-called English-speaking Africans penetrated very little into the English mental chain, while French-speaking Africans penetrated more deeply into the French mental chain. What created among the elites of the former less cultural alienation than in the latter” (p. 254). In other words, during the colonial period, Anglophone Africans were less assimilated into British culture for the simple reason that the English considered that they were the superior race; already, inside the British Isles there was—and there are still remnants, to some extent—a racial dichotomy in which the Englishman considered himself way above the Scot, the Irish, and the Welsh. How one thinks that the Englishman will consider the Black Negro man, the latter being, additionally, the colonially dominated subject of the former? In my opinion, the answer is clear and emphatic, meaning that in the Englishman’s racial scale, the black man is at the very bottom of the rung.

## 2. In Search of a Viable Model: American Popular Culture and Film

Actually, all the discussions above and below bearing on Igbo culture, are meant to showcase the intrinsic qualities, aspects, and values of that culture; moreover, the same discussions are done in order to highlight the contrast between a specific African culture (Igbo) and its counterpart, i.e., American culture as featured in film. As I wrote in the preceding section, traditional culture was very strong in pre-colonial Igbo society. However, with the encroachment of British/European values, world views, and lifestyle, that traditional world vanishes and is being gradually replaced by a modern structure. However, it is important to remark that the European encroachment was not deep as mentioned above by Vieyra. All in all, the European/Western dominance still prevails as asserted by R. Armes: “Just as the continuity of (European/Western) imperial dominance from nineteenth to twentieth century (though now with a new dominating power and an added range of victims) is undeniable, so too is the Hollywood film’s role as successor to the European novel as purveyor of the kind of narratives we so crave” (*Postcolonial Images: Studies in North African Film*, p. 3).

Another interesting domain to scrutinize is music, in particular musical scores as featured in Nollywood films. To that end, one must take stock of the two-pronged reality of tradition and modernity and how the interplay of the two heavily influences the presence of music in film. Thus, in order to illustrate the point just raised above, L. Malkmus and R. Armes write: “Common to most African musicians is the concern to rework traditional rhythms for electric instruments and the recording studio, so that tradition and modernity become inextricably entwined” (*Arab & African Film Making*, pp. 45-46). In Nollywood Igbo films, there is an array of traditional musical instruments that are featured such as: *Ekwe* (slit-drum), *Ogene* (gong), *Igba* (cylinder drum), *Oja* (flute), *Udu* (pottery drum), *Ichaka* (for rattling sounds), *Okike* (made from elephant tusk), *Ubo* (thumb piano), etc. Thus, besides proverbs and sayings, the utmost symbol of Igbo authentic culture, as featured in film, is the traditional musical instrument. As for the presence of modern music in Nollywood film, we are spoiled for choices with the presence of various Western and European styles: classical music, in addition to America-influenced genres: Jazz, Soul, Pop, Rock, *gangsta* rap, rap music, etc., along with the instruments (electric guitar, piano, organ, trumpet, trombone, saxophone, guitar bass, violin, drums, etc.), and, of course, voice and soprano. Starting in the 1950s, the synthesis/composition of traditional and modern musical styles gave birth to brand-new musical styles such as *high life* (Ghana) or *palm-wine music* (Liberia and Sierra-Leone).

When it comes to the search for a viable model in Nigerian film, there are two trends: In the first trend, there is an effort to be as close as possible to Igbo culture (cultural difference) thanks, for instance, to the usage and adaptation of cultural traits borrowed from the tradition; however, this trend is in the minority. The most prevalent trait is the second trend, namely the adaption of Western and American popular cultural icons and their avatars (culture contact). Thus, the two trends are pitched and compete



against each other: culture difference and culture contact.

In effect, the Americanization of the world is a verifiable certainty and this is done through Hollywood as rightly claimed above by R. Armes. As far back as 1975, P. Vieyra noticed that the Americanization process was in full swing: “The world is becoming Americanized and the United States is attracting more and more the intellectual elite of other nations of the world thanks to the exceptional material conditions that they offer them for the pursuit of their research. We see the process of the cultural affirmation of a language (English) by the economic power of the nation that speaks it, without this language having more than others a specific richness” (op. cit., pp. 256-257). What attracts our attention in the passage above, in addition to being relevant to the topic of this paper, is the language question; namely the usage of English.

English, by extension, means “white” (race). The perception of the white man and his land is ever-present in Nollywood movies. The term *Oyinbo* is a Nigerian word used in Yoruba, Igbo, and Nigerian Pidgin to refer to white people (In Senegal and Gambia the Wolof expression “*Toubab*” is used to refer to white people). Added to *Oyinbo*, is *Obodo Oyinbo* meaning the land of the white man (usually Europe and America), a land of honey and milk, a paradise on earth where one can become quickly rich. No wonder so many people—specially the youth—all dream of traveling to the land of the white man in order to make it.

I have already emphasized the idea that, Nigeria being in the past a British colony, the English language came to the country thanks to the colonial canal. Since the same language is spoken in the USA—albeit with a few dialectal and regional variations—it is not a surprise that American cultural values feature in Nollywood films. However, film only reflects reality. Of particular interest is the fact that Nigerians went from the British model to the American one. The similarities between Nigeria and the USA are at once numerous and striking: both are federations composed of States; both have a President and a Vice-President, a Senate, a Congress, etc. However, it is fair to point out that it is the USA which inspired Nigeria and, in turn, both countries are inspired by the ancient Roman model of statecraft. The US dollar is widely used in Nigeria, concomitantly with the Naira, the national currency. After World War II, many Nigerians started enrolling at American universities, the most notable example being that of the Igbo Statesman Nnamdi Azikwe (Columbia University, Howard University, and University of Pennsylvania). Thus, it is important to consider the intertwining of film (fiction) and culture (reality).

In order to have a better understanding of the many ways in which Igbo film appropriates American culture and icons, one can take into account the remarks made by M. Krings in his book titled *African Appropriations: Cultural Difference, Mimesis, and Media*: “A **single** cultural product may be appropriated that is, interpreted, reworked, and adapted to suit new social contexts, interests, and media environments once it has entered transnational media circuits” (author’s emphasis, p. 2). I concur with P. Loukides when he writes: “Immense amount of cultural information is to be gained by examining

narrative conventions in American popular film” (*Beyond the Stars: Studies in American Popular Film*, p. 2).

In light of Loukides’ remark above, it is no surprise that many Hollywoodian narrative conventions are adapted onto the Nollywood screen. Here is a good example as provided by the film “Show Bobo” (subtitled “the American boys”) and, as explained by N. Tsika in his book titled *Nollywood Stars: Media and Migration in West Africa and the Diaspora* (pp. 251-252). Here’s a short summary of the author’s passage: In the film “Show Bobo”, Ikedieze and IHEME play two twelve-year old boys who, born in America to Nigerian parents, fly to Lagos for a month “vacation”. Staying with their aunt, the boys grow bored almost immediately upon arriving in Nigeria; their sense of cultural estrangement is inseparable from a general disgust with the activities of daily life, which here include eating a soup whose name (*egusi*) they cannot pronounce and whose taste they reject as “shitty” meant for goats and not for human beings. The boys’ allegiance goes to American brands, from Converse to Kellogg’s and the boys themselves consistently call attention to the American style that they far prefer to whatever Nigerian cultural traditions they witness.

After reading this passage, one asks the question whether we are in presence of alienation or assimilation, or both. In the passage above, Igbo cuisine is hardly mentioned for it is considered by the two boys as sub-standard when compared to America’s. Yet, Igbo cuisine and food are culturally significant; for example, the palm kernel is held in high esteem for it produces palm oil. A drink closely associated with the palm tree is, of course, palm wine, which drink has a huge cultural meaning for it is served at weddings and parties, in addition to being highly appreciated in bars and homes. To come back to Igbo cuisine, soup is a main staple, served with yam. There is a whole array of soups: *Oha*, *Onugbu*, *Ogbono*, *Egwusi*, *Nsala*, etc. These soups usually contain leaves. All in all, what is highlighted in the passage concerning the two returnee kids from the USA, as described in Tsika’s book, is the culinary transition and transformation that many urban African societies are currently experiencing whereby fast food and junk food (American?) are gradually replacing the healthier traditional diet like the soups described above. The new diet, i.e., junk food, is full of food coloring, fat, salt, and sugar and is conducive to the advent of modern diseases such as cancer, high blood pressure, strokes, diabetes, etc.

When we compare Hollywood to Nollywood, the former dwarfs the latter in terms of technical and financial means. Needless to say, Hollywood has a long history and has it all: scriptwriters, famous directors and producers, world-famous actors and actresses, in addition to massive logistics such as modern movie theaters across America. At the opposite end, Nollywood is young, about 30 years old and adopted Hollywood as a model that must be copied. However, it is fair to say that Nollywood has gotten better and has made huge technical/technological progress and strides since the 1990s. Witness the recent well-made sub-genre films bearing on social commentary such as *Lionheart* (Director:

Genevieve Nnaji, 2018), *The Bling Lagosians* (Director: Bolanle Austen-Peters, 2019). Quite a few films are shot in the Igbo language (as well as in Yoruba and Hausa) but these films are for local consumption and for Nigerians abroad who understand the language. Otherwise, most of the Nollywood film production is shot in English in order to reach a wider world audience.

The two movies cited above (and many more) are featured on international pay-per-view satellite TV channels such as NETFLIX and Canal+ (rights are bought from Nigerian movie channels such as Nolly TV and IROKO TV), with excellent actors, usually highlighting the successful Nigerian entrepreneurs, business people, and a savvy, sophisticated, highly educated local bourgeoisie. At this juncture, one notices an overarching message, namely that, it is possible to succeed in Nigeria (and Africa); many people do succeed at home; thus, one does not always have to go abroad (usually Europe or America) in order to be successful, wealthy, and rich. In Nigeria the name that usually comes to mind and which is oft quoted, the poster boy, so to speak, is the billionaire, self-made man Aliko Dangote. There is a good skewer of millionaires and billionaires in Nigeria. However, there is the other side of the coin, namely, in the same breath, these films showcase the corrupt and decadent lifestyle of the urban bourgeoisie and coastal aristocracy of Lagos which speak queen's English, goes on vacation to London, Bahamas, Spain and send their children to study at Oxford, London, and Cambridge.

In order to understand the rise of the Americanization of Nigeria as seen through the lenses of film, we must revisit the past 100 or so years of Nigeria's history. Two important periods must be taken into account: After World War I up to the 1970s and from the 1970s to the present. From the 1920s to the 1970s, the country was divided into three main economic and political zones, each having a staple crop which served as engine driver for the economy, in addition to enabling low-scale industrialization and the creation of factories. The North had groundnuts, thus producing oil and soap. The West had cocoa whose revenues enabled the lawyer, politician, and statesman Obafemi Awolowo to set up free primary education and free health care, in addition to creating the first television channel in sub-Saharan Africa in 1959. The East had palm oil in abundance. Other economic activities existed besides the ones listed above; for instance the North had livestock which provided meat and dairy products to the rest of the country whereas both the West and East had subsistence farming with a staple crop such as yam, in addition to fishing in the numerous inland ponds and rivers. Thus, on the eve of independence, Nigeria was on a hopeful bright path with such a balanced geographical economic layout.

All of that changed in the early 1970s and the country itself changed course for the worse at a 380 degree turn with the discovery of crude oil in the Niger River delta region, in the East. The exploitation of crude oil caused the Civil War (1967-1970) when the East wanted to secede and proclaimed the creation of a new country called Biafra. Thus, oil became a double curse: it created a war and destroyed the environment. Agriculture was abandoned and, instead, Nigeria started importing foodstuffs in great quantity. Corruption became rampant; the political and military elites, who were running the country,

stole the huge money proceeds obtained from oil exploitation and placed them in foreign bank accounts (here comes to mind the famous dictator president Sani Abacha who stashed away billions of dollars in Swiss bank accounts). Environmental catastrophe ensued, a tragedy which caused the pollution of waterways, ponds, and rivers, in addition to destroying the local fisheries and mangroves. One must add that the eastern part of Nigeria has lush and green forests, a canopy that covers the whole region, extending to Cameroon and, beyond, to the Congo Equatorial forest. We may recall the execution of the Nigerian Ogoni writer and activist Ken Sarowiwa by the Abacha regime of tyranny. Sarowiwa was executed for protesting the exploitation and pollution caused by oil companies such as SHELL and others.

All in all, the local communities did not benefit from the oil manna; they were short-changed and became poorer; their traditional way of life was destroyed. In those poor communities, people see the toys of modernity (cars, TV sets, telephones, etc.) but cannot fully benefit from them, much less have access to them. In the 1990s, there was a new development, namely the birth of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Many disenfranchised youths started enrolling in communities of pirates hiding in the mangroves and creeks, attacking the ships in the high seas, off the coast; the area that these pirates assail covers the whole region of the Bight of Benin. Many Nollywood films celebrate pirates' and ghetto life; the pirates' actions, which are akin—and assimilated—to Robin hood types of wealth redistribution (taking from the rich and giving to the poor), are featured in films such as *Once upon a time in Niger Delta* (2017) and *Delta Blood* (2019).

If we come back to the Americanization process of Nigeria, another turning point is the early 1980s with the screening on TV of the American series *Dallas*, a saga that pitches oil-rich families and their characters: J. R. Ewing, Bobby Ewing, Sue Ellen Ewing, Miss Ellie Ewing, Cliff Barnes, etc. Thanks to *Dallas*, many Nigerians discovered Texas (Dallas, Houston, Fort Worth, El Paso, Austin, Galveston, etc.). The state of Texas has the largest Nigerian population of all states in the USA. The organic link between oil in Texas and oil in the Niger delta is quickly established. One can also cite the example of Hakeem Abdul Olajuwon, formerly a Nigerian-American professional basketball player. From 1984 to 2002, he played the center position in the National Basketball Association for the Houston Rockets. Without a shred of a doubt, Hakeem has greatly contributed in putting Nigeria on the Texan and American map.

Likewise, this new phase of the Americanization process was made into a movie. In 2014, the film *30 Days in Atlanta* (Director: Robert Peters) came out. The plot is a simple one: Akposa, the main character, won a 30 days holiday for two to Atlanta, Georgia in the USA and decided to take his cousin Richard with him on vacation. Akposa experiences a culture shock, in addition to sampling the many facets of American culture. Along the same lines, the concept of gigantism was born in Nigeria: houses, cars, Chiefs, people, etc. Everything is considered in the superlative mode. The expression *Oga* which

means “Senior” or “Boss” is a well-known expression and is very much in vogue in Nigerian parlance. Of course, at parties, funerals, and weddings the *Oga* is expected to shower people with gifts and money in order to show off and live up to his “*Oga-ness*”.

Linked to gigantism is the concept of wealth acquisition. In turn, the two are closely associated with the dichotomy Rural vs. Urban. In many films, the city is described as a place of opportunity (but can also be a fleeting mirage) where villagers go in search of greener pastures. Many characters who go to the city originate from villages and the countryside where there is no opportunity. Thus, the exile to the city is a prevailing theme in Nollywood. Igbos are known as famous traders; however, when watching the films, one has the impression that trade is the only profession that exists, in particular the importation of goods from Europe and USA: containers of clothing, electronics, furniture, cars, etc. What happened to the celebration of knowledge and intellect? Where are the great writers: Chinua Achebe, Ben Okri, Wole Soyinka, Buchi Emecheta, Cyprian Ekwensi, and others?

Thus, the local products are undervalued if not shone aside, a sure form of alienation. A corollary to the theme of wealth acquisition is the feud and competition that this race to wealth creates. The youths’ own parents shame them by telling them how the son of so and so had left the village just a few years ago; now he is back with luxury cars and money and is even building mansions. In the meanwhile, you (my son) are here in the village being useless and idle. Without a doubt, there is a willful encouragement towards get-quick-rich schemes by parents and the community at large. Pressure is put on the youth to migrate. Often, people do not enquire about the source of the wealth of an individual, except in the case of mysterious deaths; for instance when a husband is accused of sacrificing his wife in order to be rich and, conversely, when a wife stands accused of having sacrificed her husband or brother, etc.

Besides human sacrifices, there is the trade of illicit drugs which is a major theme in Nollywood movies. At this juncture, it is important to mark a pause and reflect a little on other aspects of wealth acquisition and how these aspects are featured on screen. We have the characters of sugar daddies and sugar mummies (rich, single, or divorced or widowed men and women giving money to a young woman or man for sexual satisfaction). The sugar daddy is usually an older, rich man who exploits poor young girls and this borders on pedophilia. Along the same lines, there are forced marriages when parents pressure their daughter to marry a rich man without even checking on the origin of his wealth. Another common character is a man or woman who becomes rich overnight thanks to occultic means or human sacrifices; usually, at the end of the film, there are two choices: he either dies or redeems himself. When the second choice is made, the man loses all his ill-gotten wealth, and is saved by a Catholic priest or an Evangelical pastor; after that, our saved man becomes a preacher, talking to people in the streets and at marketplaces, Bible in hand, enjoining them to leave their crooked ways and come back to God’s way, back to Christ. Thus, the theme of redemption is an important one and is highly

cherished by Nollywood filmmakers. Redemption and forgiveness are usually associated with being given a second chance in life.

### 3. Conclusion

In a final conclusion, I concur with P. Ebewo when he writes: “With the global world united under the sway of visual culture, the emergence of the video film in Nigeria is timely and crucial as it serves as the voice of its people and responds to the drudgery of a social and economic existence characterized by high unemployment and dwindling opportunities” (op. cit., p. ix).

The sharp watcher of Nollywood movies will notice a device that is often used by the scriptwriters and directors, namely the concept of verisimilitude, which consists in projecting the appearance of an event or fact as being true or real. In other words, when fiction imitates reality, plus the dramatization of real events. All things considered, what is being highlighted in these movies is a dialectics predicated on pairings: positive and negative, light and dark, beautiful and ugly, good and bad, etc. In fact, a universal norm; just like all human societies, Igbo society is not an exception.

In my closing argument, an important question must be asked and is the following: How long will the USA serve as a model for Nigerians and Nollywood? How long is it possible to sustain the outward gaze toward the USA? It is hard to provide a straight answer. However, if we consider that the US model is being challenged by others (here comes to mind the Chinese/Asian model for instance), in addition to the fact that America is increasingly being hostile to dark-skinned immigrants (the rate of deportations has never be higher than under the Presidency of Donald Trump), then, one can contemplate the US model running out of steam. It is usually acknowledged that the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an American century; however, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not projected as being a continuation of the 20<sup>th</sup>. We are increasingly witnessing the birth of a multipolar world and the rise of other economic powers such as the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). In the meantime, Europe is aging and is experiencing a drastic deindustrialization process, in addition to becoming hostile to immigration (mostly of color), xenophobic, nationalist, populist, scared of tomorrow (withdrawal syndrome). As for Africa, it has (for now) a demographic dividend, namely a young population; however, the youths must be educated, trained, and jobs provided to them. Needless to say, that is an enormous challenge.

Can an endogenous, native, authentic, original, and *sui generis* model be conceived? In other words, will Nigerians and Africans create their own models instead of always looking far away and copy others, such as the borrowing of an American model as amply demonstrated above? Nigerians and Africans are invited to have their own dreams, worship their own heroes, and show self-confidence in order to build a prosper society and a developed continent.

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