

# **MEDIA CRITICISM, CULTURE AND NOLLYWOOD: TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA**

Ugulah Bright

Department of Theatre Arts, Niger Delta University,  
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

brightugulah@yahoo.com

brightugulah@gmail.com

08035517380

**Abstract:** *Entertainment has often been treated as a veritable source of expressing feelings and emotions which transcends cultural tranquility and individual relationships in the society. In Nigeria, the deserved peace in fostering national security remains a major challenge to the social, political and economic advancement of the country. It is against this backdrop that this article examines the utilization of Nollywood as a platform for re-addressing issues of cultural communication, rejuvenation and re-articulation of Nigeria's economic policies. More so, it is noteworthy that what has led to the success of Nollywood hinges on the strong demand for Nigerian films/home videos around the world. The reason is due to its popularity being exercised through mass media criticisms and publicity which tendencies are tilted towards achieving a new political order in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Media, Publicity, Culture, Nollywood, National Security and Sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

The mass media as a purveyor and transmitter of information to the heterogeneous society remains the most essential medium of expression of feelings, ideals and other cultural promotions in the world. It is based on this relevance that keen and astute observers of the effects of the media on the masses have the assumption that it has enormous influence on people's lives, beliefs and opinions and its' critical views shape the socio-cultural and political environment.

A great deal of the media's influence, often times, is displayed through the quality of films and home videos produced at Nollywood. Nollywood is the colloquial name for the Nigerian movie industry. The name was coined from Hollywood which is the American motion picture industry (Emeka, 2015). However, it is an acknowledged fact that Nollywood and Hollywood exist are of different ethnology and typography yet both of them have common characteristics and similarities which are shared between them. Just as Hollywood has become a foremost economic pace setter in America, Nollywood has equally become not only the bearer of African culture, but performs a leading role in the Nigerian economy. These are evident in employment generation, wealth creation; deluge of entertainments and enhancement of development in the country among others.

The concern of this article is to identify areas of mass media criticisms about African films in relation to critical issues of culture, mostly in Nigerian home videos and drama. The aim is to articulate on the use of films and home videos to highlight criminalities and promote peace and sustainable security measures in order to foster viable policies of government and provide an equitable means of communicating positive behavioural messages that foster growth and tranquility; enhance tourism development, political stability and socio-economic advancement in the country.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The media can induce panic and reduce tension created by other sources, especially during the period of insecurity. It has been known to play crucial roles in reassuring, calming and in specific instances, directing people to areas of safety. It is on this background that the theoretical foundation of this article is predicated on the spiral of silence theory and the play theory of mass media. These theories are significant to studies such as this and thus, are endowed with the capacity of ensuring a peaceful atmosphere for humanity as both consists in media effects theories of mass communication.

The spiral of silence theory of the mass media was postulated by Elizabeth Noelle – Neumann whose initiative was predicated upon the ability of the mass media to influence public opinions in matters of public interest. According to Aina (2003), the media can shape public opinion distribution by creating the impression that some of the opinions are not good for public consumption since those expressions and activities could lead to conflicts in human society. In order words, the resolve by individuals to comment on certain issues depends largely on the prevailing climate of opinions. Page | 3

The usefulness of this theory is that the mass media criticizes the disdained behaviours which has negative influence on culture. However, one critical aspect of cultural transmission is manifest through dramas and films which tendencies are displayed towards ensuring a politically democratic order in which lives and properties are protected.

The play theory propounded by William Stephenson focuses on audience members' feelings about the mass media on issues of crucial importance. It posits that many people use the media messages more for pleasure and relaxation (Aina, 2003). Therefore the media have swiftly shifted in news packaging and dissemination, but have been active in promoting cultural values through dramas and films. Also, many media organizations strategically set entertainment programmes to prepare the way for hard non-entertainment ones because of popular appeal. Now there is a blend of information and entertainment programmes (infotainment) or education and entertainment programmes (edutainment) in the electronic media. This mixture makes radio and television programmes didactic and they are strategies to exploit people's desire for pleasure.

This development sometimes makes critics say that in developing nations the electronic media are used more for entertainment than for developmental purposes. For example, radio, which is adjudged the true mass medium in developing nations, is said to attract wide listenership more for its entertainment programmes than for its educative ones. In Nigeria, commercialization of government-owned electronic media has caused wedding and obituary to feature in news bulletins for a fee. Some Nigerian television stations have entertainment news segment in their evening news bulletin. These are experiential confirmations of Stephenson's play theory (Aina, 2003).

## **NOLLYWOOD'S IMPACT ON CULTURE AND CHALLENGES**

The growing waves of media watch and the transmission of cultural values goes beyond mere renaissance resurgence. The reason for this sporadic development may be attributed to information accessibility through the mass media. It is on this backdrop, Ate (2008) observes that "television and films have enormous influence on how people think. The messages on the world's screens often come out of Hollywood (in this case, Nollywood), the world's principal factory on make belief". The values that this vast entertainment industry reflects is often articulated in the issues of

materialism, violence, immorality and insecurity which are seriously fought in order to promote local cultures and denounce those alien to local cultures. Nevertheless, government, educators and parents invariably find it impossible to hold back the tide because of its influence in human society.

The fundamentals of what has led to the success of Nollywood are the strong demand for Nigerian films and home videos around the world. The demand among other factors is attributed to its content which is mainly tilted towards dignifying the reach cultures and traditions of African societies. More so, Nigerian films serve useful purposes in the growing context of information globalization (Fakrogha, 2013).

Gone are the days when movies in Nigeria were primarily produced by European trained film makers, funded by European granting agencies and targeted towards a largely non-African film-festival audience.

The fact remains Nollywood has killed hegemonic media and fundamental opportunities in cultural exhibitions, make-ups, costumes and settings or locale for tourism, other investment areas and so forth. More so, in a situation where the consumers are no longer passive recipients of communication but active participants in shaping their communication realities in contemporary society.

Another area in which Nollywood has demonstrated some levels of cultural impact is in the aspect of sounds and images. According to Nwafor (2015) film can be ascribed to be the marriage between image and sound as both play complimentary roles, and at the same time are interdependent on each other. The role of sound in film production is to enhance the action while the actions equally provide meanings to the sound in return. Of course, it is worthy to note that since the dynamics of Nollywood came into existence; it has produced thousands of films and home videos that reflect the traditional African society or settings. This view was further explained by Atiah-Etuk, (2007) that even though Nollywood may not have attained the best quality of film production in the world, the industry has continued to play a significant role in shaping the society; correcting some misconceptions about the cultures and tradition of Africa society through sounds and images.

According to Ozuem, Hawell and Lancaster (2014), a major account of the successes and breakthroughs of Nollywood anchors on its transition from monolithic medium to hyper electronic market place integration which equally affects the delivery methods of information as expressed in Nigerian films and home videos. These communicative modes of translating the message contents of a typical Nigerian or Africa cultural environment creates the atmosphere which necessitates serious impact of cultures in Africa. It is against this backdrop that Ozuem, Howell and Lancaster uphold the view that the integration of various conventional and hegemonic media productions such as films, heralds a new vista of development towards achieving peace and security through Nollywood.

Aside the huge successes reckoned in the area of cultural promotion and tourism attractions, some astute and critical observers of the development of Nollywood have had some reservations. For instance, Jonathan Kiefer, a freelance film critic who reports for arts and culture magazine in Montreal, Canada comments on Nollywood thus:

Page | 5

One problem with Nollywood is how frequently they suck. It doesn't take a film critic to recognize their differences. Many people liken them to B movies, but some could count them as unqualified Cs and Ds. The reason is because they are made entirely without government support. Nollywood budgets stay as low as \$15,000 US (Dollars) or 11,600 Euros which is about average and it shows on the quality of productions; its characterized with bad acting and bad sound that often render the dialogue unintelligible; directing tends to consist of making sure the camera is on. Dramatization is poor and subtext non-existent. Sets look conspicuously bare and poorly lit. Nothing makes much sense. Nollywood characters don't develop, but stay bluntly who they are, rioting against their soap opera like cliffhanger scandals. Consider the teaser for the movie *Onye-Eze: He killed his brother and blamed it on a chimpanzee*, e why? (Innocent 7-8).

The most perturbing aspects of the comment as depicted above, reflects not quite the nature of expectations from Nollywood in contemporary times. Though it may be far from perfection, but the industry has restructured the way and manner video films are produced even as some bland and greedy directors, play-wrights and characters indulge in these unwholesomely mis-guided productions.

A major challenge to Nollywood was explained in an empirical review on the formation of independent cinema in Nigeria. A film analysis, Ukadike clearly points out that independent cinema in Nigeria are not geared towards the vital aspect of national development but rather culminates in the imitation of Western model of representation and profiteering. The Nigerian film industry must not be allowed to tow this line at the expense of our culture, national image and development. The challenges faced by Nigerian cinema/film producers are isolation and autonomy, inaccessibility of the Nigerian films to reach the international market/language barrier and financial/economic constraints, which led to the direct use of videos as an alternative (Okome & Haynes 1 - 41). However, it is pertinent for a country to have a form of cinema as a national signifier than to have none (Enahoro 29).

The concept of public relations as a tool for image building establishes that the practice of public relations is not the same as publicity, lobbying, press agency and propaganda, rather PR, is the philosophy and function of management which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organization with the public interest and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Okon 90-110). Hence if Nigeria is to build a positive image for herself, it is imperative that the tenets of the profession should be followed to the letter. Therefore, the Nigerian government should be fully involved in any information dissemination tool (such as NVFs), in order to ensure that the messages disseminated are such that will bring about positive perception of the country.

The Nigerian government has made efforts towards achieving a positive image such as the introduction of mass communication and cultural policy. The policy summarily aims at establishing a virile profit oriented film industry that will serve as a vital instrument for national integration, unity and the building of an international image (Ekwuazi, 1987). The Heart of African Project and ICPC Act are tools used by the Nigerian government to checkmate negative acts in order to launder the image of Nigeria and Nigerians (*Daily Champion*, February 3, 2006. p. 27). Although these efforts are worthy of recommendation, the Nigerian government should consider the use of NVFs as a vital tool in her struggle to portray a positive national image. Page | 6

### **MEDIA CRITICISMS, CULTURE AND NOLLYWOOD: A PARADIGM FOR NATIONAL SECURITY SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA**

Movies and television have become the most powerful media of mass communication because of their aesthetic elements. The combination of sight, sound and motion by film and television make their representation of reality very vivid to the audience (Ayakoroma, 2014). Perhaps, this may be one of the reasons why the mass media is critical about the quality of Nollywood production and other theatrical performance in Nigeria.

Media criticisms and influence on Nollywood productions may be long term, indirect and sometimes, difficult to uncover. The influence of Nollywood can better be explained in terms of the modeling of behaviour and shaping of meanings that are significant to both individuals and groups. According to (DeFleur, 1994), modeling theory holds that people may adopt behaviours that they have seen depicted in the media. This is one key area that is critical for assessment by the mass media. The reason according to (Yusuf, 2015), is that the media helps to shape those aspects of our culture that are autochthonous and as depicted in the home videos and films especially, in areas of language, art, dressing and kinship. Nothing interests the people so much like seeing their local activities reported in the media. More so, the moment different ethnic groups in Nigeria begin to appreciate their various cultures, the more they receive massive media publicity and coverage through the dramatic exposure of Nollywood.

The film industry in Nigeria has experienced a number of technological changes. These changes have affected the quality of pictorial scenes, sound tracks and effects, artistic impressions, scripting, directing and other aesthetic forms of creativity in the production of home videos and films by Nollywood. Already as noted by an astute mass media pundit, (Bitner 1989), “some have spurred the film industry forward as sound did, moving the industry out of silence and into the “talkies”. Other technologies, such as television, added a new way to distribute programmes which enhance the competition for theatre audiences”. The remarkable aspect of the innovative changes brought about in the development of films in Nigeria was attributed to the criticisms from the mass media on improving Nollywood productions.

The issue of distribution, reproduction, especially occasioned by the frailty of laws and enforcement polices titled in protection video films remains a major challenge for artists, play-wrights, producers and directors of films in the movie industry. Although, “video revolution” has resulted in new ways to distribute visual art forms and the consumer’s increasingly demands for home video clips, have necessitated the utilization of proliferating productions, the act of piracy negates the quality of Nollywood films’ production and distribution. Often times, media criticism becomes critical, as the enabling economic environment remains a hydra-headed phenomenon for the survival and sustainability of the movie industry in Nigeria. The government at both federal and state levels must ensure that the rights and privileges of artists and artistic productions are well protected. This in-turn brings into the film industry trust and the ability to ensure quality in film production and distribution within and outside the country.

One key area of media criticism is copiously reflected on the issue of racial discrimination, even in most Nollywood productions, the role characterization of actors always depict the typical African as a servant to the whites, especially in scenes were a foreigner is involved. This act of inferiority negates the principle of civil rights, just as it was the case of Hollywood being accused of stereotypes. In discussing social issues on the diversity in Hollywood, Dominick (262) remarked “African Americans have generally found themselves either stereotyped or ignored altogether by motion picture studies. In those rare times that African Americans did appear in any Hollywood production during the studio years, they were generally shown as servants or entertainers; the concern here is that Nollywood producers, actors and directors should not promote inferiority for any reason.

To make one a good film-maker, there is the need for more and more exposure to the reality of things. More so, the reality of film lies in the task of selecting and welding together bits and pieces of information in a logical sequence through the aid of montage, which in turn must equally make the subject visually understandable to the audience. According to King (1996), this aspect is crucial to Nollywood films, because they serve as a means of communication and transmission of social and cultural values from one generation to another. The main objective of film is to actually reflect people’s self consciousness and self expression as rooted in reality of the society. A good film must therefore clearly fulfill its functions as future historical reference.

## **THE WAY FORWARD**

The increase in violent crimes, criminality and militia activities has become common feature that threatens the sustainability of the political, social and economic environment all over the world. In Nigeria, home grown terrorism by the Islamic Boko Haram Jihadists remains a big threat to peace in the country. Although, in an effort to curb this insurgency, the Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the strive-torn states like Yobe, Adamawa and Borno respectively, including massive

deployment of security forces and law enforcement agents, still there seems no end in sight for the insurgency (Ugulah 19).

The aforementioned question necessitates a critical examination of the security situation in order to justify the roles of the Nigerian mass media in contributing to the sustainability of peace and social order through Nollywood where dramatic expressions promote not only our cultural values and norms, but advocate positive behavioural patterns in the younger generations and the citizenry at large. Page | 8

In articulating the need to utilize Nollywood as a platform for re-addressing national security issues and the promotion of peace, Ayakoroma in his book titled, 'Trends in Nollywood; A Study of Selected Genres', observed that the visual image makes a deeper impression than the verbal or aural image. He explicates further "in this small country (Perhaps Nigeria) 30,000,000 people see films every week. They absorb large amount of the message or propaganda behind them".

The dramatic expressions, language, style and forms of characterizations in Nollywood of movies (either home videos or films) play crucial roles in helping to shape the behavioral patterns of our youths. The whole idea about film making borders on entertainment, education and ensuring the sustainability of acceptable standards in human society which requires proper education and the utilization of opportunities devoid of anti-social behaviours that are vicariously susceptible to the tranquility and serenity of the political, social and economic environment of Nigeria.

Ensuring the sustainability of violent free society and continuous advocacy for national security in Nigeria requires the collective efforts of all (both the government and the governed). It equally requires not only the deployment of forces with the needed strategies in dismantling the strongholds of the dissident rebels by the government, but also support from internal and external bodies in the case of institutional contributions, media platforms and ancillaries such as Nollywood which can be very vital in the fight against insecurity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The Nigerian film industry has been adjudged as the third largest producer of films and home videos in the world. It provides robust employment opportunities for both old and younger generations and has the capacity to churn out an average of about 1000 – 1,200 movies yearly that is worth over 200 million (dollars) (Shimsenge & Agar, 2013). Films by their nature convey messages and serve as the platform for cultural rejuvenation and entertainment of the Nigerian citizenry and African film audience all over the world.

A major challenge to the achievements as explicated above through Nollywood remains elusive due to the quantum of killings and destruction of properties been perpetrated

by the obnoxious dreaded sect “Boko Haram” on the citizenry and environment. These barbaric and nefarious acts have almost truncated the social, political and economic advancement of the nation. The Nigerian mass media which orthodox functions aside information searching, collating, packaging and dissemination, equally enhances the transmission of cultural heritage through ancillary platforms, remain resolute about its criticisms regarding Nollywood films so as to ensure effective utilization in order to re-address issues of national security in Nigeria. Page | 9

## REFERENCES

- Aina, S. (2003). *Anatomy of Communication*. Abeokuta: Julian Publishers.
- Ate, A. A. (2008). *Mass Media and Society*. Lagos: National Open University of Nigeria.
- Atiah-Etuk, I. (2007) “Nollywood: Success and Challenges” Seminar Presentation at the International Institute of Journalism Garki – Abuja, June, 2007 P.3
- Ayakoroma, F. B. (2014). *Trends in Nollywood; A Study of Selected Genres*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Limited. 2014.
- Bittner R. J. (1989) *Mass Communication: An introduction* (5<sup>th</sup> Edition). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- DeFleur, D. (1994) *Understanding Mass Communication* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Dominick, R. J. (1999) *The Dynamics of Mass Communication* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). Boston: McGraw Hill College.
- Emeka, C. (2015) “Replicating Nollywood’s Success in Computer Programming” *Daily Sun* Friday May 8, 2015. p. 21
- Ekwuazi H (1987). *Film in Nigeria*. Jos: Nigerian Film Corporation.
- Enahoro, A. (2002). *Cinema Discourse* Jos: Positive Education Publishers.
- Fakrogha D. O. (2009) “Nigerian Video Films and National Image: A survey of Yenagoa Audiences in Bayelsa State”. A Ph.D Seminar at the Department of Linguistics and Communication Studies. University of Port Harcourt. p.3
- King, J. (1996.) *A Producer’s Guide to Radio, T.V and Film Production Techniques*. Calabar: Modern Business Press Ltd.

Nwafor, O. (2013) "Soung Track and Quality Assurance in Nigerian Video Films: A Study of Selected Films". Markudi: *SONTA Conference Proceedings*, P. 243.

Okome, O. & Haynes J. (1995). *Cinema and Social Change in West Africa*. Jos: Nigerian Film Institute. 1995

Page | 10

Okon, G. Bassey (1996) *Basic Dimensions in Mass Communication*. Lagos: Hdx Communications Limited.

Ozuen Wilson, Howell Kerry and Lancaster Geoff (2014). "From Monolithic Model to Ominidirectional Model: A Revolution in Interaction" in Biakolo E, et al, *Journalism and New Media Technologies in Africa*. Lagos: Concept Publications Limited.

Shimsenge Aga Ephraim and Agav El-Ngugar (2013). *Improving Film in Nollywood Through the Introduction of Filmmaking Studies in Theatre Arts Departments*. In *SONTA Conference Proceedings*, Markudi, P. 318

Ukadike, N.F. Black. (1994) *African Cinema*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Ugulah, B. (2015) "The Mass Media and Anti-terrorism in Nigeria". Ibadan: S.H Publishers (Nig) Limited.

Ugulah, B. (2015) "Communication for Behavioural Change Through Entertainment Education" in International Policy Brief Series. *Education and Science Journal of Policy Review and Curriculum Development*. Volume 5, No 1, p 90 – 98.

Yusuff J.B. (2005) *Culture and the Media in Nigeria*. Abuja: National Institute for Cultural Orientation.