

Nollywood, Audiovisual Translation and the Dialectics of West African Subregional Security

Yong Marinus Samoh & Ngozi-Kris, Ogbodo & Eze Faith

Abstract

All over the world threat to human life and property has assumed an alarming proportion. Nations, organizations and communities have proffered solutions to curb this existential threat to humanity. The film industry has equally done its bit by producing films with thematic contents that address security issues. In this paper our intent is to examine the role of the film industry in the West African Subregion in ensuring peace and harmony. To effectively achieve this, we have discussed the following: cultural influence and mutual understanding encouraged by film production, translation and diffusion across West African subregional borders. The importance of audiovisual translation in this respect cannot be overemphasized. With its techniques that border on subtitling and dubbing, crosscultural understanding is assured in the zone under consideration. This serves as a stabilizing factor which no doubt dispels, to an extent, thoughts of mutual mistrust that can instigate armed conflict among nations of the Subregion. We have particularly drawn examples from Nigeria and Cameroon. Given that the goal is to encourage sociocultural stability among the nations concerned, some of which are already embroiled in internal conflicts, we relied on the cultural theory to drive home our submission.

Keywords: insecurity, cross-border conflict, Nollywood, audiovisual-translation, culture

Introduction

The advancement in technology has no doubt turned the world into a global village through its networking and connective ability. Nowadays, knowledge and information have been made very accessible, captivating and interesting through the development of audiovisual documents. Film production and audiovisual translation help to promote, preserve, transform, validate and propagate the cultural heritage and value system of a people like language, ideology, world view, etc. The evangelical dimension of film production and audiovisual translation has gone a long way in enhancing sociocultural integration there by acting as one of the interethnic and interstate conflict control strategies. The conflagration of wars and conflicts in contemporary Africa societies instigates fear and insecurity in most West Africa nations. One of the primary findings of a workshop report on Reducing insecurity in Africa written by Pimbo et al in April 2012 state that “stability is dependent upon the mutually con-

stitutive elements of security, governance, and development” (IV). Just as literature is the reflection of societal realities expressed in written form, film is also a reflection of societal realities expressed in audiovisual form. The audience that benefits from written works are so few when compared to the ones who derives esthetic, instructional and cultural satisfaction from watching films. There is a common expression and an insult to the African which is that if one wants to hide something from an African he should put it in a book. As cynical as this supposedly racist comment sounds, one cannot deny its veracity if one places the written work side by side its audiovisual equivalent.

Rather than write or act for beauty sake, West African film production, audiovisual translation and diffusion use humorous entertainment to communicate important truths and information to the society. As mentioned in one of the online courses of the National Open University on “African novels” developed by Oha, Anthony et al, “Indeed, an object is considered beautiful because of the truths it reveals and the communities it helps to build.” (2010). In most cases, the mixture of horrific and humorous events in West African film production depict its unique way of transposing the African sociohistoric realities thus constructively exposing the causes, the consequences and the possible antidotes for some atrocious acts and socio cultural, political and religious upheavals obtainable in our contemporary society.

Film industries through their audiovisual potentials and multilingual capacities entertain and educate people at all levels irrespective of language, culture, educational background etc. Like the storyteller, it holds the audience spellbound by the very beauty of the story line and the local colour it promotes, giving pleasure and also teaching morals and beliefs of the community, race or nation. Film industry has much in common with African oral tradition and other genres of Africa literature. It is therefore not an understatement if one avers that African oral tradition, novel and theatre find their renewal and full expression and diffusion in film productions and audiovisual translation. Many literary works have been acted, translated and reproduced in audiovisual formats. Yong and Kris-Ogbodo (109) have already noted this elsewhere:

Un certain nombre d'œuvres de prose et de théâtre nigériens ont été adaptés aux films. Le premier qui a été présenté lors du premier festival Negro Arts en avril 1966 était *Kongi Harvest* de Wole Soyinka. La deuxième qui a suivi avec le titre de *Bullfrog in the Sun* en 1972 était une adaptation de *Things Fall Apart* d'Achebe (1958) et *No Longer at Ease* (1960). Nous avons déjà noté la réponse négative de l'auteur et du grand public (Ugochukwu 2). Beaucoup d'autres qui ont suivi incluent: *Shaihu Umar* (1956), basé sur une his toire écrite par Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; *Bisi, Daughter of the River* (1977), adapté d'une pièce de théâtre avec le

même titre par Ladi Ladebo, Jab Adu et Kola Ogunnaike; *Aiye (The world)* 1979, basé sur une pièce de Hubert Ogunde; *Cry Freedom* (1981), adapté du roman de Meja Mwangi, *Carcass for Hounds*; *The Virgin* (1985) de Bayo Adebowale adaptée comme *The Narrow Path* en 2007; *Maami* par Femi Osofisan adapté en 2011. La deuxième adaptation de *Things Fall Apart* a été faite en 1987 par Adielà Onnyedibia et Emma Eleanya.

[A number of Nigerian prose and theatre works have been adapted to films. The first that was presented during the first Negro Festival of Arts was *Kongi Harvest* by Wole Soyinka. The second, titled *Bulfrog in the Sun* in 1972 was an adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *No Longer at Ease* (1960). We have already noted the negative response by the author and the general public (Ugochukwu 2). Many others that followed include: *Shaihu Umar* (1956), based on a story written by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; *Bisi, Daughter of the River* (1977), adapted from a drama text with the same title by Ladi Ladebo, Jab Adu et Kola Ogunnaike; *Aiye (The world)* 1979, based on a drama text by Hubert Ogunde; *Cry Freedom* (1981), adapted from a novel written by Meja Mwangi, *Carcass for Hounds*; *The Virgin* (1985) by Bayo Adebowale adapted as *The Narrow Path* en 2007; *Maami* by Femi Osofisan adapted in 2011. The second adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* was done in 1987 by Adielà Onnyedibia and Emma Eleanya.]

The ultimate goal of film production and audiovisual translation is embedded in socio cultural transformation and integration while retaining the best features of authentic African cultures. A good number of film writers, producers, actors and audiovisual translators have not lost sight of the transformative, constructive and diffusive potentials and mandate in their possession. This messianic mission is geared towards ethnic, national, international peace, harmony, mutual understanding as well as sociocultural stability in the West African Subregion. More importantly, every audiovisual production ought to show social realism, not mere fabrication of unrealistic stories purposely designed to distort or tarnish the historical image and dignity of a people.

In order to appreciate the indispensable role of Nollywood and audiovisual translation in strengthening socio cultural integration, stability, security and sustainable development in Africa we will first of all retrace the historical development of film production industries and audiovisual translation in Africa, secondly, we will give an appraisal of the Nollywood film production industry and audiovisual translation: “the strength and the weakness of the industries.” Strategic plans to maintain and encourage the growth of the company finally the conclusion.

Nollywood and the Cultural Theory

In order to successfully drive home our argument in this article we have decided to use the cultural theory. We shall therefore attempt to identify the nexus between it and the Nollywood phenomenon. According to Encyclopedia.com, cultural theory is a term that has been applied to diverse attempts to conceptualize and understand the dynamics of culture. Some of its major concerns border on culture and nature, culture and society, high and low culture, cultural tradition and cultural diversity. Quite broad in scope, cultural theory can be viewed from different theoretical prisms such as structuralism, Marxism, feminism, etc. Some theorists who have shaped the theory include Williams in *The Long Revolution* (1961), Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Althusser who related cultural theory to Marxism, Gramsci who charted new ways of conceptualizing the role of culture and cultural practices in class formations and Michel Foucault who shaped a more discursive understanding of cultural language and how power and representation work. The relation that exists between race, ethnicity and culture has also surfaced as a primary concern of cultural theory. Recently feminist arguments have greatly influenced cultural theory. This has elicited a lot of discussion about the “ways in which gender identities are formed within cultural languages and through cultural practices” (Encyclopedia.com). Tyson (297) talking about cultural criticism states that “while we are constrained within the limits set for us by our culture, we may struggle against those limits or transform them.”

The main connection between both concepts: Nollywood and Cultural theory as it relates to our work hinges on the premium the theory places on “dynamics of culture, culture and nature, culture and society, high and low culture, cultural tradition and cultural diversity.” How, in spite of our cultural diversity in the Subregion, we can still forge mutual understanding through the agency of Nollywood, is therefore enough justification of our reliance on the Cultural theory. In the same way the history of a people tells their culture, so does that of African films and Nollywood indicate signposts that have marked theirs.

History of African film and Nollywood

The conference review of the 2013 Berlin annual African film & Media Festival on “Africa on screen: through the eyes of Africa” made an attempt to retrace the history of African film industry. According to the review, the rise of the African film industry can be traced to the decolonization period of the African continent. It stipulates that despite the prior existence of such an industry under colonial rule, the African film industry did not reflect the accurate portrayal of the African image and culture. Most of the films produced during the colonial era, painted wrong pictures of the African societies and were explicitly racist in

nature. The African film industry as at that time suffered stereotypes and Africa was used as an exotic background for Western cinema. Furthermore, this stereotyped performance of African film industries was notably experienced by French colonies, whose local films received technical and financial aid from the French Ministry of Cooperation. Nevertheless, there was a significant change and autonomy during the 1960s when most African countries gained their independence. The progressive efforts of the African film industry to encourage and to ensure the integration of African film production as part of the sociocultural, political and economic development of the African continent have taken some commendable measures since the 1980s. Many African film directors used the act of film making as a fertile ground to restore and revalidate the image and the dignity of the African continent just like many African writers did through their literary works. Some of the African film industries have notably created opportunities for economic advancement, job creation, cultural affinities and other forms of entertainment. The unceasing growth of African film industries has led to the establishment of *Journal of African Cinema* and various Africa TV channels and also effective development of audiovisual translation.

On the other hand, the vastness and the cultural diversities of African countries are part of the unique constitutive elements of the African continent that, if positively appreciated, managed and explored will change the destiny of most African nations. Each country has its own specific cultural, geographical, political, educational, economical and religious backgrounds which are uniquely expressed by their own film industries. On this note and based on the conceptual scope of our study, we intend to give a brief appraisal of the historical development of the Nigerian film industry.

Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry whose name is coined after the American film industry, Hollywood, did not see the light of day in the 1990s as many are wont to think. According to Okome (2)

Before the emergence of the video film, there was a brief spell of what I have referred to elsewhere as “the Yoruba cinema.” It was brief, and its demise was instigated by the downturn of the economy of Nigeria in the mid-1980s. It came out of the practice of the now-famous Yoruba theatre troupes whose directors felt the crunch of the difficult economic problems at the time....Nollywood was born from this point on. But it was in 1992 that it was defined as an art form with a more serious social meaning and implication for Nigeria. The film that did that was *Living in Bondage 1 & 2*. It also started off the industry we now know as Nollywood.

Nollywood is one of the fastest growing international cinematic industries in

the world. In fact, according to Oluyemi (34) “is the third largest producer of feature films” after Hollywood and Bollywood, the Indian film industry. The conference review of the Berlin annual Africa film and media festival reveals that Nollywood produces over 1,000 films per year albeit low budgeted productions of between \$25,000 and \$70,000, its estimated annual revenue is \$590mn according to the same review. The Nigerian film industry is evidently diversifying the economy of the nation and is making some thriving efforts for the African film industries to achieve greater autonomy from western financial support which may be a stumbling block on their way to the world or global “stage.” These films have the general public especially the poor masses as their targeted audience and have tried to establish some level of socio cultural and linguistic affinities with other nations of Africa and the world at large. It has even created accessible distribution platforms for the films in television and other digital mobile targets. Digital Satellite Television (DSTV) should be particularly commended for championing the promotion of Nigerian and other African movies. According to Udomisor and Sonuga (29), “Africa Magic has grown from a channel that only broadcasts for a few hours daily in 2005 to the 24-hour channels available today, in five channels.” They are Africa Magic World (Channel 112), Africa Magic (Channel 114), Africa Magic Movies (Channel 115), Africa Magic Hausa (Channel 117) and Africa Magic Yoruba (Channel 118).

That Nollywood has become a household name in the West African Subregion and beyond is an incontestable fact. According to Oluyemi (35), “Nollywood films have gained wide acceptance because of its accessibility among the youth and adolescence in West Africa, and are gradually gaining wider acceptance among the African diasporas (sic) within the rest of the region in Africa and African diasporas (sic) in Europe, America and the Asian countries.” Other Africans connect with the themes espoused by Nollywood given the shared cultural heritage amongst member states of the Subregion. Maton (660) avers that “Nollywood has also helped in exporting Nigerian cultures across the globe, its music, comedy, fashion, religion, lifestyle and everything.” Agba (157) buttresses Maton’s point when he provides a list of themes that are seemingly as exhaustive as they are revealing:

Other themes of Nollywood films are indeed broad and covering Nigerian, African and universal issues:...scourge of Visio Virginal Fistula (VVF), female genital mutilation, evils of polygamy, extra marital affairs, elopement, different forms of rituals, cultism, betrayal, sibling rivalry, the activities of hired assassins and armed robbers, the spirit world, mermaids, witchcraft, work place rivalry, incest, hypocrisy of religious leaders, the world of twins, mother-in-law problems, parental match making, clash of Western and traditional cultures, conflicts, sexual

intercourse with housemaids, Christianity, Islam and traditional religion, landlords and tenants, sickle cell anemia, barrenness, challenges to love and lovers, widowhood practices, unemployment, street children, search for roots, abandonment of aged parents, teenage pregnancy, overemphasis on male children, “first lady syndrome”...

Such shared themes sometimes interpreted by actors from various countries especially Nigeria and Ghana serve as a unifying force. Some Ghanaian actors who have featured in Nigerian movies include Van Vicker, Jackie Appiah, Majid Michel, Yvonne Nelson, Nadia Buari. When viewers from various nations see actors from their countries featuring in the same movies, there is a subconscious acceptance of the other and consequently his nation. This is bound to foster peace and harmony in both nations. One of the ways Nigeria Nollywood tends to accomplish its socio cultural integration, goals and missions is through audiovisual translation. An examination of the influence of audiovisual translation is therefore very pertinent to our study.

Audiovisual Translation and Peace in the Subregion

In order to widen the Nollywood market beyond the shores of Nigeria, some video films have been translated into French. This, of course answers the question that seeks to know if the issue of language poses problems in the reception and appreciation of Nigeria films outside their linguistic and geographical shores. Countries that surround Nigeria: Chad, Niger, Benin and partly Cameroon which is bilingual, as well as many other African countries are francophone. If Nollywood must transcend beyond Nigeria to countries where French is spoken, audiovisual translation is therefore pertinent. It is our view that though this translation is being done mainly for economic gain, the benefit is also being felt on the sociocultural front thus ensuring peace and harmony in the Subregion.

Audiovisual translation which includes dubbing and subtitling is one of the fastest ways to ensure cultural and linguistic diffusion, propagation, posterity and mutual understanding encouraged by the film production industries in Africa. Diaz-Cintas (8) in his quest to outline the importance of audiovisual documents explains that:

Films and other audiovisual productions now represent one of the primary means of commonplaces, stereotypes and manipulated views about social categories [...] are conveyed: dubbing voice over and subtitling enable such views to be made accessible to wider audiences unfamiliar with the language of the original production.

Subtitling has been defined by Luyken⁽¹³⁾ as “The translation of the spoken (or written) source text of audiovisual products usually at the bottom of the screen.” Numerous analyses and studies have shown that subtitling is generally preferred by the European audience. This also applies in scenes where there is a code switch from an indigenous language to English. Nevertheless, subtitling is more affordable and when written clearly can help to transcend the ethnic and cultural barriers that the local languages impose in most African nations and in the world at large and still retain the local flavour and colour of the source language.

Notwithstanding, dubbing appears to be the better option for Nollywood films considering their targeted audience and knowing vividly the literacy level of most of the developing countries. For instance many Nollywood movies have been dubbed in some Nigerian and African local languages. Nigeria film makers also dub Nollywood films in French. A study based on the analysis of 19 films in English, French, Dutch, Igbo and Yoruba and on the three personal surveys and interviews presented by Françoise Ugochukwu in her article “Nollywood across languages: issue of dubbing and subtitling,” confirms that the true success of Nigeria films, whether subtitled or dubbed, will be measured in the way they cut across cultures, not just languages.

Though both techniques have their disadvantages and advantages, our focus in this paper is different. The main tenet of our submission vis-à-vis audiovisual translation of Nollywood films is based on the role they play in peace and harmony in the Subregion. It is obvious that understanding the culture of a people reduces greatly the tendency of misunderstanding and strife that may occur among them. It is therefore certain that Nollywood films translated into French for the consumption of francophone neighbours greatly contribute to peace.

The influence of the Nigerian culture as exhibited in Nollywood films is worthy of note. In some cultural settings in Cameroon we observed that brides and their maids dress like Nigerian brides especially those of Igbo extraction. For instance, traditional marriages that used to hold at night in Kom, a tribe in the North West region of Cameroon now hold mostly during the day. This is as a result of the brides’ insistence on being clearly seen in the Nollywood influenced Nigerian attire. This can be vice-versa. In addition, there are also films in Yoruba language where certain actors speak or behave like other neighbouring nationals. In Yoruba films, for example, some characters can speak Yoruba Ajase to demonstrate their background. We cannot, however, negate the influence too of the social media in this regard. The excited young brides definitely posts such an experience on Facebook, Instagram or WhatsApp.

Another influence the Nollywood home videos have also had on the Cam-

eroonian audience has to do with the introduction of some new lexical items such as *oga*, *okada*, *mugu*, *mumu*, *wahala*, *abi*, *419*, etc. It is our view that such linguistic acceptance has a direct correlation with the way the influenced culture regards the influencing culture. Little wonder the fight over the Bakassi Peninsula between Nigeria and Cameroon in the early nineties was considered more a military affair as the lives of nationals of both nations were hardly affected adversely.

Conclusion

In this paper our aim was to discuss the importance of Nollywood films and their translation especially into French for the benefit of francophone neighbours in the West African Subregion. The intention was to emphasize the nexus between Nollywood and audiovisual translation as a means of ensuring and assuring peace in the Subregion. Through the cultural theory whose main thrust of cultural diversity, and integration was selected for our submission, we have been able to prove that the influence of Nollywood films with its plethora of themes that are akin to those of other countries of the Subregion, can actually be an instrument of peace.

Nollywood, just like fashion industries are flexible and liable to change in order to meet up with the era, the society and the needs of the targeted audience. The movies should be creative, attractive and captivating enough to induce and retain the interest of both the local and international audience. The issue of interethnic, interstate and Interfirm collaboration is very important for easy funding and greater achievements. In the quest to meet up with the global requirement, the Nollywood should establish a mutual socio cultural balance, equity and stability in order to secure and preserve the color and the value of African cultural heritages. We therefore recommend that themes that foster interstate unity be developed, interpreted and translated. For instance, it would be very interesting to consider films in which the protagonist, a migrant from another African country, contributes positively in the growth and development of his host country. This would highly limit incidences of xenophobia like recently witnessed in South Africa.

We also recommend that more Nollywood films be translated into French. Experts too should be engaged so as to completely eradicate the errors noticed in some of the French versions. This point is especially important if one considers the fact that some jobs would be created for our graduates.

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