ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Nollywood as a Soft Power Tool in The Rebranding Project of Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria is increasingly concerned about the way it is perceived by internal and external actors. The negative stories that emanate daily from the Nigerian 'socialsphere' such as sectarian violence, ethnic tension, election rigging, almost total absence of the rule of law and corruption, etc., have portrayed the country negatively. All these contradictions have affected Nigeria's development and its reputation at home and abroad. Abuja has to realise the potential of soft power by embracing, nurturing and using cultural capital as a driving force to counter this bad omen. The use of Nollywood, one of Nigeria's key creative industries, is fundamental to rearranging the philosophy of the country in the minds of people. We argue that film can facilitate the transmission of social and political messages by injecting predetermined images into the minds of people while serving as an entertainment vehicle. The article hence looks at the rise of Nollywood and examines how Nollywood can contribute to a positive image of the country, using the example of Hollywood. The study notes amongst other things that Nigerian filmmakers have through their offerings showcased the nation's cultures, beliefs, dressing, food, music and languages. On the other hand, more attention has been paid to negativity than representing the country's positive side. It recommends that filmmakers should consciously offer better values and attitudes of Nigeria in its products.

Keywords: Soft power, Rebranding, Nollywood, Film, Culture.

Introduction

Nigeria's role on the continent of Africa at sub-regional, continental and the rest of the world cannot be relegated. Since 1960, Nigeria has always in its engagements with political and business counterparts deployed a number of strategies which would be key in achieving its foreign policy objectives. From its interaction with regional and external actors by exercising its hard power resources, economic and military might, it has become the largest economy in Africa and has tried to bring peace and stability, and enshrine democracy especially in the West African region which has seen more coups recently, fought for the independence of South Africa, São Tomé and Príncipe, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gambia, coupled with its peace diplomacy in conflict zones like Liberia and Sierra Leone. On the other hand, having a robust population of over 200 million people suggests a rich diverse, distinct and multicultural society that form its soft power currencies as well. Tella (2021) writes that Nigeria's soft power emanates from amongst other cultural sources including Nollywood, Nigerian music (Afrobeats), multinational corporations, mega churches, the diaspora, and its fashion industry.

Despite these positives, Nigeria's image has suffered greatly from a range of constraints which include a democracy deficit, corruption, illicit activities and terrorism. These limitations have combined in many ways to engender anti-Nigerian sentiment and an image crisis, which have manifested in dehumanisation, deportation, and killing of Nigerians across the globe. Ojo and Aghedo (2013) posit:

> Aside from being the most populous black nation in the world, with over 160 million people, Nigeria is also generously endowed with oil, gas, and other natural resources, making it strong ally in global economic relations. It ranks among the seventh largest oil exporters in the world. However, the hope that the country's enormous human and material capital would translate into considerable influence in international affairs has remained elusive largely because of its negative image.

Consequently, there has been increasing awareness

that the reputation of a country behaves rather like the brand image of a product or company and is crucial to its progress and prosperity (Anholt, 1998). For this reason, successive governments, since late 1970s have engaged in nation branding aimed principally at shedding the country's negative image domestically and internationally. Among the re-branding projects, that of Yar'Adua's (2007- 2010) administration was the most comprehensive and expensive initiative yet. It had the motto "Nigeria: Good People, Great Nation" and was aimed at "accelerating Nigeria's development through foreign investment and tourism" (Albert, 2009). Despite decades of re-branding efforts, Nigeria's image has remained "an insignia of dishonesty, dishonour, and disrespect" (Bamiduro & Aremu, 2012). Though "corruption and bad behaviour are not only domiciled in Nigeria and Nigerian blood but are pervasive all around the world" (Akunyili, 2009a). Around the world, in the United States, China, Australia, South Africa, Turkey, United Kingdom, and Russia, among other countries, gunrunning, mafia, prostitution and trafficking in persons, racketeering are also vices that abound (Foley, 2009). However, the State's response to step up security and social security measures to abate the crime have been the norm.

To enjoy international influence and increase authority, many countries have turned to film which is a purveyor of culture to cultivate new narratives fueled by imagination, satisfying a desire for creativity and self-expression. Like America's Hollywood and India's Bollywood, "Nollywood", acronym for Nigeria's film industry, has enjoyed an exponential rise, in just a brief period of time, to become a global sensation, putting Nigeria on global spotlight and fueling international socio-cultural and political debates over African cinema's potential to serve as soft power for African countries. Little wonder then when people strongly agree that "seeing is believing". This is because film has the potential to provide a lot of information into people's head; even if they do not see it as information and even if they are not really paying much attention, people get affected by the experiences somehow.

Nelmes (2005) opines that "the media represents information to its audience, who are encouraged by the mainstream media to see its output as a 'window on the world', as reflecting reality". Nollywood products can inform, educate, advertise, market, sell and rebrand Nigeria and all its concerns while also providing entertainment to its viewers. By providing exciting appeal and aesthetics, Akangbe (2008) informs us that drama is a recreation of society and a megaphone for projecting sentiments, aspirations, failings, attainments, history, changes, etc., of a society. Thus, he asserts that drama is a veritable medium of picturising a particular society with a view to educating, informing and entertaining the audience. Considering that different people watch Nigerian films from all over the world, it is pertinent that the Nigerian government, filmmakers and regulatory agencies pay attention to what all these people see.

Conceptual Clarification

Nollywood

The Nigerian film industry has emerged from the back stage to be a force to be reckoned with. Undoubtedly, film production in Nigeria has come a long way since its debut being Ade Ajiboye's *Soso Meji* (1988) and Moses Olaiya's *Agba Man* (1992). By sheer entrepreneurial might, Kenneth Nnebue's *Living in Bondage* (1992), a tale of greed and supernatural retribution though produced in Igbo language, but subtitled in English, was the first commercially successful video film. Nnebue's exponential success opened the floodgates to economic fortune for the many talented filmmakers who mostly with camcorders saw a "new world" conquerable with few resources thereby lowering the barriers to entry (Olayiwola, 2011). From there on, Nigerian entrepreneurs developed their creative voices through films, some of which were produced in indigenous languages (Schnell, 2017). This detail reveals the intrinsic connection between the Nigerian people and an unstructured industry which was not developed by government policy.

Demonstrating how the Nigerian film industry is uniquely a West African cultural product, it captures Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, traditions

and lifestyle derived from over 200 million people, 300 tribes and 500 languages. Divided mostly along ethnic lines, sectors of the cinema have come to be called by different names based on the language used like Nollywood (English) Kanywood (Hausa), Yollywood (Yoruba), Efiwood (Efik), among others (Ezepue, 2020). It is evident that the boundaries of the Nigerian film industry still remain undefined as it is unrepresentative of the entirety of the Nigerian national cinema. Yet, they offer colorful and entertaining stories that recount simple stories of daily life that resonate with Nigerians, as well as audiences across Africa and the African diaspora.

Nollywood has eclipsed Hollywood, producing the second largest number of titles, only next to Bollywood to dominate the film sector on a global scale (Miller, 2012). Madichie and Ibeh (2006), Oh (2014), and Omanufeme (2016) argue that Nollywood accounts for N853.9 billion ($7.2 billion), or 1.42 percent of Nigeria's GDP. It employs more than a million people directly or indirectly, after agriculture, to be the second highest revenue earner in the country. Based on the sheer quantity of films being made, economic observers consider Nollywood one of the major planks on which to diversify the Nigerian economy. The question then is – what picture of Nigeria are the home video producers making their viewers see? How does the home video showcase Nigeria?

Soft Power

Power refers to the capacity of an individual to influence the actions, beliefs, or conduct (behaviour) of others. It involves the ability to affect others, firstly through coercion or threat of force, and secondly through payment, or attraction and persuasion. The development and constructive delivery of foreign policy has over the years made various countries deploy several strategies in order to achieve its core obligation. The power matrix is a configuration of hard power and the soft power (Idowu & Ogunnubi, 2018). Hard power reflex is exercised through coercion, relying on tactics such as military intervention, coercive diplomacy, inducements of forceful payment, and economic sanctions. On the other hand, soft power is often defined as the "ability to affect others to obtain perceived better outcomes by the use of collaborative means of framing an encompassing agenda to the parties concern, the use of persuasion and positive progressive attraction". Many countries are now exploring their soft power to make them more attractive. This is a deviation from hard power foreign policy tools of carrot and stick. In simple terms, when power is coercively wielded, the repercussion will as well be coercive. Therefore, there is preference for a mild and subtle persuasion through the use of networks, developing compelling and attractive narratives, establishing international norms, building coalitions, and drawing on the key resources that is germane to one country or the other.

The term soft power as coined by Joseph Nye in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead.* In it he presented soft power as an analytic concept to fill a deficiency in the way analysts thought about power. Nye (2017) expresses that those countries with military and economic might resort to coercion and payments to get others to do their bidding or accept their viewpoints. He thus advocated for a rethink. He posited that people influence others by ideas and attraction that set the agenda for others or get them to want what you want. Then carrots and sticks are less necessary, or can be used more frugally because others see them as legitimate. With its universalistic values, open culture and vast popular cultural resources ranging from Nollywood to foundations and agriculture, Nigeria seems uniquely placed to affect how others view her and the world. In the process, the discussion of soft power is increasingly focused on identifying and exploiting potential soft power 'assets', be it Nollywood in Nigeria, Hollywood in America, Bollywood in India or China's ability to use its economic might to buy a piece of Hollywood's global influence (Cooke, 2016).

Nation Branding

Relative to the subject of branding, nation branding is concerned with a country's whole image on the international stage covering political, economic and cultural dimensions (Quelch & Jocz, 2004; Fan,

2006). As the effect of globalisation takes its toll at an accelerating rate, countries are engaged in fierce competition with each other for attention, inward investments, export markets, skilled labour and tourists. This has made governments to make the conscious political choice to utilise marketing techniques as a way to achieve various policy goals that range from boosting their economies to improving foreign relations. This ultimately affects their identity and reputation; who they are, who they do business with, how they conduct business, conditions on bargaining, and national prestige and foreign support, etc. Fan (2009) says a nation's identity refers to the essentially irrational psychological bond that binds fellow nationals together and which is supposed to constitute the essence of national identity. Image is what is projected to other while reputation is the feedback received from other (Whetten & Mackey, 2002).

Every country represents itself in its own unique way. This uniqueness are the images in the mind of people both inside and outside the country which is seen in its people, place, culture/language, history, food, fashion, famous faces (celebrities), global brands, etc. Therefore, the way a country conducts itself heralds its image to its international audience, be it strong or weak, clear or vague (Fan, 2006). When a country is losing stance in exerting its influence on others it begins a process of rebranding, shedding its skin to resuscitate its ailing attractiveness.

Nation branding can be considered a special type of place branding and has been practised by a number of states, including France, the United States, the United Kingdom, Japan, New Zealand, the United Arab Emirates, and more (Bisa, 2013). However, the concept failed to achieve meaningful results in African nations such as Nigeria, Tanzania, Rwanda, Zimbabwe to mention a few (Taylor & Francis, 2016; Aydemir, 2017). If implemented effectively and efficiently, it will position a country on the global market as an attractive destination for investment, knowledge, tourists and also promote exports and technology emanating from that country. This will in turn result in economic development for the country leading to improved quality of life and standard of living of its citizens.

Soft Power of Nigeria

The exchange of art, music and other cultural aspects as tributes from time immemorial has been an integral way of establishing as well as strengthening bonds and also projecting national interests beyond the shores of Nigeria. Its size, economy, natural resource endowment and influence in global affairs have continued to attract considerable attention. Developments in Nigeria suggest that the country has struggled to rise again from its 'cloned status' of a 'sleeping giant'. Although it has struggled in solidifying its place in global politicking, its influence as an important regional actor with hegemonic influence is expressed in its strong ideals for democracy on the African continent. After 54 years of military rule, the return to constitutional democracy in May 1999, Nigeria has enshrined its commitment to supporting democratic rule. Abuja has always been vocal in its decision on rejection of the unconstitutional overthrow of democratically elected governments, financial and technical aid to states in transition, demonstrating leadership and providing support to institutions that promote democratic values, and promoting peace and conflict resolution on the continent (Omotola, 2008). It is against this backdrop that the country is vocal in its support of the criminalisation of forceful seizure of power in Africa at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) summit in Algeria in 1999 (Omotola, 2008). Nigeria has demonstrated this through interventions in countries like Sierra Leon, Sao Tome and Principe, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Togo and Liberia in 2005, Guinea and Mali in 2012.

Nigeria may not have received the blessings of the powerful 'gate keepers' of the G-20 nations league but it is an emerging country that has shown potential for attaining global competitiveness based on their economic and demographic settings and foundations for reforms. In addition to this it has tried to build up its soft power on its own culture and values through its music and film industries. The Nigerian music industry has been the dominant one in Africa. Tella (2017) notes that given the ubiquity

and admiration of Nigerian movies and music in Africa, African entertainment arguably wears a made in Nigeria label. Nigerian music artists have dominated coveted awards such as MTV Africa Music Awards (MAMA), Soundcity MVP Awards, Music of Black Origin (MOBO) award, Black Entertainment Television (BET) and Grammy award (Norbrook, 2020). Through its music, international entertainment services including Deezer, iTunes, Shazam, Simfy, and YouTube to Nigeria (Ernst and Young, 2015) have shown interest in the Nigerian market. Collaborations have also put Nigerian music and artists on the global map. Nigerian artists such as Burna Boy, Wizkid, Davido, Tiwa Savage, Mr Eazi, Yemi Alade, and Tekno have collaborated with top American artists including Beyoncé, Chris Brown, Snoop Dog, Nicki Minaj, and Drake in performances that have received global commendation. Nigerian film stars like Kanayo O. Kanaya, Liz Benson, and Pete Edochie all contributed to the 'screen boom'. They were all loved and their performances were a joy to see.

Nigeria can also exert cultural soft power transmitted by its multinational corporations. Companies like the Dangote Group, Innoson, Globacom Group, First Bank, Jumia, Nasco, Zenith, and the United Bank for Africa are important in this regard (Brand Africa, 2020). Notable Nigerian figures in their trades have also promoted Nigeria's cultural attraction, some of which include Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Isreal Adesanya, Kamaru Usman, Chimamanda Adichie, Aliko Dangote, Kanu Nwankwo, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Goodluck Jonathan, Olusegun Obasanjo, Austin Okocha, Akinwumi Adesina, and Femi Otedola. On the religious angle, Christianity in Nigeria has paved way for religious tourism. The presence of mega churches has elevated the profile of pastors in the country. This has endeared so many foreigners who come seeking a "real presence with the Divine". Some of these Nigerian mega churches are the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Winners Chapel International, Christ Embassy, Living Faith Church Worldwide, Synagogue, and Dunamis, across Africa and beyond, elevating the status of popular Nigerian pastors such as Enoch Adeboye, David Oyedepo, Chris Oyakhilome, and Temitope Joshua (Ogunnubi & Isike, 2018). The popularity and ministrations of these pastors, who have huge followings across the continent, have the potential to win hearts and minds of citizens across Africa. Also, art and craft as well as tourism constitute sources of soft power displayed through Calabar Carnival and Obudu Cattle Ranch in Crossriver and Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi, not forgetting a teeming, vibrant and industrious youth population. The country has these soft power currencies which it can use in order to mold public opinion and boost its popularity. The main question then is, has its soft powers helped in forming or changing perception?

Nollywood as a Source of Soft Power of Nigeria

The rise of Nollywood is a testament of technological democratisation and ingenuity. Regardless of the intellectual deficit at the time, it has shown a purpose to express art. This is even more evident as Nollywood today is the biggest film industry in Africa and one of the leading film industries in the world only behind Bollywood, who like Nollywood takes the lead with respect to the number of films produced per year. It is estimated that Nollywood produces around 2,500 movies annually, and provides for more than 30 million followers across the world. The contribution of the movie industry to the Nigerian economy is fully appreciated as it generates $600 million each year. With revenue from cinema estimated to be around $22 million (Tella, 2021), it is presumably the nation's second-biggest source of jobs employing more than a million people directly or indirectly. As Nollywood matures, so also has the appetite for its content. It has become a global phenomenon with an indisputable influence in Africa, the Caribbean, United States, United Kingdom, Canada and to a lesser extent in Italy, Spain, and Germany (Miller, 2012).

The rebasing of the Nigerian economy in 2014 saw a massive boost in GDP from $285.5 billion in 2013 to $510 billion in 2014. The recalculation captured the service industries previously not

included in the GDP. The significant boost of the economy not only signaled it to be the biggest in Africa but also revealed that Nollywood contributed 1.42 percent of Nigeria's GDP in 2016 (Omanufeme, 2016). Nollywood has provided jobs to numerous people and has reduced crime rate in the country. It is envisaged that with the right commitment it can be the number one revenue earner. But before we get there, investment and investors are needed. In 2014, $9.85 million state fund was made available to support Nigeria's content distribution network. By the industry's accelerated growth, strategic synergy between the World Bank, Nigerian Copyright Commission, Nigerian Export Promotion Council, as well as National Film & Video Censors Board as a matter of urgency is much desired to stamp out the raid of piracy in the network. This is important especially as foreign governments like Spain, Germany and France and multi-billion-dollar corporations like Facebook and Google have shown interest in the industry through their support of the 11th and 12th editions of Zuma Film Festivals in Abuja.

What then is the secret ingredient of Nollywood? Nollywood has been able to touch the lives of its audience through a recreation of socio-political and cultural events. It appeals to the conscience of viewers who accept, recognise and identify with the everyday life of the African evinced in these movies as against the values, customs and traditions depicted in Hollywood and Bollywood films.

While film provides the line to spread cultural values across the world, it also has bullets to extinguish or maim life. Sadly in 2009, South African filmmaker Neil Blomkamp in his film *District 9* demonstrated the hate and cruelty of South Africa for other nationals. He showcased images of xenophobia and Nigerians as alien eating cannibals. This and many more ill treatments and killing of Nigerians have exacerbated the anti-Nigerian sentiment abroad. In addition, many foreign nationals by virtue of the news disseminated by their home media and international media corporations, oblivious of the true nature of Nigerians and Africa at large, have negative perceptions towards them. By debunking stereotypes, Nollywood can change these narratives by providing the platform for Nigerians to tell their own stories. Through this, Nollywood stars have become celebrities. The esteem of celebrities like Richard Mofe-Damijo, Funke Akindele, Ali Nuhu, Kate Henshaw, Gabriel Afolayan, Sani Muazu, Olu Jacobs, Mercy Johnson, Ramsey Nouah and lots more have provided avenue for celebrity diplomacy. Also, through linkages and co-productions while trying to get a slice of the American and African market, Nigerians have been featured in Hollywood films. All these have added in shaping the African culture, values and tradition. Many popular black US and British artists are of Nigerian origin, including movie artists like Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje, Yvonne Orji, Chiwetel Ejiofor, David Oyelowo, Caroline Chikezie, Hakeem Kae-Kazim, Nonso Anozie, Richard Ayoade, Sophie Okonedo, Cynthia Erivo, and John Boyega

While piracy and transnational informal circulation have hampered monetary returns and economic growth of the Nigerian film market, it has on the other hand promoted a brand of pan-Africanism on screen. TRUEAfrica.co estimates that for every legitimate copy sold, nine others are pirated. Becker (2013) in his study on the reception of Nigerian films points out that, "Nollywood has become a source of African identification…" Thus, as a second rated global output industry it has influence outside its territorial boundaries, aided by a large diaspora and has created possibilities of promoting Nigeria's public diplomacy and image.

Today Nollywood films are even made more popular on BEN-TV, OBE-TV, and Passion TV screen in the UK (Miller, 2012), ST Nollywood Plus channel in China (McBain, 2019) and DStv screen Nigerian films across Africa through four dedicated channels. To compete on the internet front, Nigerian-owned online platforms including iROKOtv and Afrinolly have enhanced the online presence of Nollywood films. iROKOtv has the largest online catalogue of these films, with viewers in 178 countries across the globe (Jewell, 2019). The film industry presents an opportunity for Nigeria to exercise cultural hegemony on the continent and

rise above its regional challengers like South Africa and Egypt and global competitors, including the United States, China, India, the UK, and France in this realm (Tella, 2017). Nigeria's reliance on South African multi-national cable television (DStv) to transmit its movies across Africa is a negative pointer. Thus, Nigeria through its space technology can establish its own satellite-based cable television or work with indigenous cable television providers such as TSTV to transmit Nollywood movies across the continent.

Negatives that Counter Nigeria's Exercise of Soft Power

The Nigerian image crisis is an old and persisting national problem which even after 62 years of independence, the fortunes of Nigeria rather than reverse has taken a slippery decline. For many writers on African development like Ake (1981), Rodney (1972), Nunn (2008), Falola and Wavnock (2007), and Nunn and Wantchekon (2010) the underdevelopment of Africa still persists due to the adverse effects of slavery and colonial rule on the people. They maintain that these factors gave birth to mistrust, systemic corruption, forced corruption and wanton lies in social institutions. Furtherance to this is the significant loss of over 3 million able bodied Africans to the cotton and sugarcane plantations of Europe and America, depriving Africa of a vibrant and active population. In addition, the imposition of western ideals in governance, criminalised, demonised and made alien the respect of traditional systems existing before the expedition of the white man on the African continent. These crimes against Nigeria and Africa as a whole has created enmity between tribesmen, states, regions and religions thereby being responsible for the present forms of misgovernance in Nigeria.

To say that the colonialists are the problem would be casting a stone on their necks and throwing them in the sea of conscience. While many hoped post-colonial Nigeria to be better with Nigerians ruling Nigerians, the seed of discord and mistrust as evidenced in the so many coup d'etats and civil war portrayed extreme negativity for the country. Nigeria was blacklisted, profiled, sidelined, and isolated. She became a pariah state in the international scene. A return to civil rule in 1999 radiated an opposite reaction under President Olusegun Obasanjo. Nigeria was able to exert its soft power through its involvement in peace keeping missions, contribution of troops and hardware to conflict countries, restoring peace to war torn African countries as well as negotiating and instilling democracy. These and many more well thought efforts were all billed to aid the country achieve its foreign policy and stem negativity which on the contrary has rather intensified in recent years.

Glaringly the "Giant of Africa" endowed with enormous human and natural resources have been caught in a web of potpourri. Cliches such as "very corrupt" (Transparency International, 2021) put Nigeria 146 out of 183 on Corruption Perception Index. Corruption has permeated every facet and institution of the country, from schools, offices, security agencies, businesses, sports, to religious houses. Nothing at the least is spared but for a few individuals who constantly battle their conscience on the catch phrase "if you cannot beat them join them". Other cliches like "pitfalls of national consciousness (Fanon, 1963) "failed development experience" and "the greatest single development tragedy in the world today" (Suberu, 2004) are all attributed to Nigeria. Brazingly some Nigerians, James Ibori ($153 million), Joshua Dariye (N1.6 billion), Lucky Igbenedion ($24 million), Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, James Bala Ngilari ($548,891), Orji Uzor Kalu (N7.65 billion) and Jolly Nyame (N1.64 billion) have orchestrated severe corrupt offences that have led to the freefall of the country. Others are Diezani Alison Madueke ($20 billion), Patrick Akpobolokemi (N12.9 billion), Sambo Dasuki ($2.1 billion), and Olisa Metuh (N400 million) (https://mobile.reuters.com/article/amp/idUSKBN1ZF1NB).

Aside from the country's high levels of corruption, other major contributors to Nigeria's deploring image include activities of Nigerian criminal networks that engage in illicit activities such as advance fee fraud, Internet scams, money laundering, drug trafficking, and human trafficking.

These harsh realities forced Adebola, Talabi and Lamidi (2012) to remark, "both national and international observers have likened Nigeria to the proverbial Nazareth from which nothing good can come". This moribund or sordid view of the country and its people has partly been enabled by the so-called Nigerian factor as well as by a kind of 'Nigerianophobia' prevailing in number of African countries (Endong, 2018).

Similarly, the reign of terror by Boko Haram, Fulani Herdsman, IPOB and marauding "unknown gunmen" have threatened Nigeria's territorial integrity and survival, undermining the country's image as a military force to be reckoned with in Africa. In the 2019 global terrorism index, Nigeria was ranked third, only behind Afghanistan and Iraq (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). Nigeria has the highest terrorism threat levels in the world with an index of 8.6 and the second largest number of deaths related to terrorism worldwide after Afghanistan (Statista, 2019). Nigeria's inability to tackle its insecurity problems have also threatened the sovereignty of other neighbouring countries especially Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The inability to provide for its citizens has also forced a lot of Nigerians to take their lives in their hands. Many have died while crossing the Mediterranean and Sahara Desert with many dying on the way. Those who happen to make it alive are welcomed with bitter realities from immigration officials, police, or smugglers who dehumanise them through harsh imprisonment, beatings, rape, slavery and organ theft (Ogunnubi, Onapajo, & Isike, 2017). This redounds to a declining soft power.

Remaking Modern Nigeria Through Nollywood

The success garnered by Nollywood in its almost thirty years of commercial debut is as a result of its remarkable way of telling African stories from the perspective of Africans. For a long time, America, China, Hong Kong and Indian movies permeated the Nigerian market with some depicting Africans as the "bastion of dangers and backwaters of human civilisation" (Akinola, 2019). That is why the decolonisation position of Nollywood is welcomed as a progressive step towards providing education for Africans about their heritage and culture.

However, thematic exposure and depiction of the Nigerian society in Nollywood films has been excessively exaggerated drawing wholesome criticism on the industry. Emphasis on economic returns has overshadowed its purpose of art. This is witnessed in its poor quality productions, poor scripting (revolving around diabolical practices, betrayal, love, infidelity and revenge), poor cinematography and lighting. On the issue of national identity, Nollywood as a soft power tool has promoted certain identities and images that aren't helpful. Among these are the images of a ritualistic and violent society that thrives on affluence and ebullience, poor portrayal of women especially widows, display of oligarchic society that live above the rule of law with little or no consequences. A photograph is just but a frame of film, yet it is worth a thousand words. How much more is the information in Nollywood films when summed by 24 frames/ second by the number of minutes in every film seen in our homes or the cinema. For most people around the world, The United States of America means power. They are mesmerised by the quality, technology and dialogue of a "Land of the Free" embedded in Hollywood films. Thus, merging American ideals in its cinema is one way of telling of America and it is seen as a foreign policy activity that represents the country's benefits.

Although Nollywood movies to some extent portray and expose the socio-cultural ills in the society, they have as well cultivated and subtly encouraged amoral and vile activities while also discouraging trust, investment and tourism. Like Nollywood, Hollywood movies after World War II made movies that went contrary to its foreign policies. Borrowing Gerbner's cultivation theory (1969), which holds that "the more people are exposed to the mass media, the more they will come to believe that the real world is like the one they observe (McQuail, 2005). Nwuneli (1993) and Okigbo (1995), in support, state that perception of social reality corresponds from various sources, of which the two most important are personal experience and mass media. For the reason, people's

perception of social reality structured by Nollywood, whose content is viewed all over the world, has mirrored Nigeria as a nation that 'reaps where it did not sow.' The United States Information Agency had to black list all films which portrayed images of The United States of America falsely or contrary to its foreign agenda.

Consequently, and in due consideration of the position of the Nigerian Film Industry, from 2010 a different class of film, filmmakers and filmmaking emerged in Nollywood "which tests the different approach of the film market (Jedlowski, 2013). Afolayan (2014) describes this new trend considered by many critics (Okome, 2014; Haynes, 2014; Adejunmobi, 2015) as new Nollywood as "a move away from the cinematic ebullience and mushrooming tendency of Nollywood towards a qualitative and aesthetic transformation of the industry." Bearing in mind the informal unstructured nature of the Nigerian film industry, the transformations brought about by the new Nollywood are indicative of a formalisation process that could either professionalise or gentrify the industry. Nigerian filmmakers can learn from the best to be the best not just in terms of productivity but also quality. Hollywood movies serve the United States. It does support social scale, empowers women, esteems liberal ideals, and tells what success, technology and etc. mean, combines social institutions and politics, carries the basis values like freedom, human rights and democracy and thus exalts the foreign policy imposing a form of metaphorical understanding (Aydemir, 2017).

There is a lot to learn from the relationship between Hollywood and Washington. From celebrities in California, Hollywood has been able to achieve the benefits of commerce while the US government gets its much-desired foreign approval. There seems to be a consensus between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The United States of America, CIA and other public institutions and Hollywood. Through this romance the US's entertainment export serves to the foreign politics of the United States. American institutions like the army, media, courts, schools, business and sports, etc. have all been a significant source of Hollywood movies. In defence of the war on terror, Hollywood and American army have continued their relations and relations are placed into secured basis. The relationship is even more thickened with global terrorism on the increase which is evident in films like Pirates of the Caribbean, Black Hawk Down, Pearl Harbor, Amazing Race and Cops (Winseck, 2008). Nollywood Producer Paul Apel in collaboration with the Nigerian Army made *Eagle Wings* (2021) on the lives of Nigerian soldiers who fight against terrorism. This lays credence that film creatively crafted can construct images that make the audience perceive the activities of a country as positive.

Conclusion

So far, no country in the world would deny of Nigeria's strong Afrocentric and pan-African foreign policy. It has contributed greatly in terns of human capital, finance and military resources in Africa and beyond. Many have hoped that its foreign policy approach would improve the quality of life of Nigeria, promote Nigeria's hegemonic claim, initiate practical economic agendas for growth of businesses and human capital development of its people and provide greater good for the African people. Contrary to this in relation to what it has given, Nigeria has achieved very little gains from its foreign policy interests in Africa. The lackluster behaviour of Nigerian leaders to the plight of its citizens, monumental religion of corruption by leaders, almost total failure in every sector, presence of terrorism and separatist movements are just some of the factors that have cast Nigeria in bad light. Despite many years and attempts of nation branding, no commensurate improvement has been witnessed to change this perception rather Nigerians have been further dehumanised, trafficked, sold or killed (https://edition.cnn.com/specials/africa/lybia-slave-auctions)

The substance of soft power to redirect Nigeria's position has been highly initiated in conversations. Nollywood, a source of soft power for Nigeria, appeals to people because it reflects the everyday life of Nigerians. Through its visual narrative it has the

potential to objectively reconstruct the perception and feelings of both internal and external actors by affirming that what if depicted in the films we see are true, thereby drawing in good measure for Nigeria's attractiveness. On the other hand, Abuja needs to realise that the bulk of nation branding cannot be advertised using soft power alone but also the attitude towards governance must change otherwise no gains will be derived from any nation branding efforts as witnessed so far. Hence, it is imperative that all sectors of the polity must turn a new leaf to exalt its image and form positive public opinion.

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