

# From Nollywood to the World: A Cultural Studies and Critical Discourse Analysis of Nollywood Films on Netflix

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**Abstract:** This study examines the transnationalization of the Nollywood industry in the rise of streaming platforms like Netflix. As nonwestern film industries begin to find global audiences beyond their local space, ideological underpinnings of these industries also continue to shift and become more apparent. The need to compete for global capital while retaining the cultural flavor of the South has been a major challenge of many transnational media industries. Taking Nollywood as a case study, this study argues that the production of Nollywood films on Netflix goes beyond the quest to find global market, instead economic interest, the need to appeal to global audience by producing multicultural relevant content and promulgating a Nigerian identity that non-African audience can understand are important areas that should be considered. Contextualized within the theories of cultural studies and political economy and the method of critical discourse analysis, the study accentuates the changing discourse of the new Nollywood cinema and what it means for critical cultural scholarship of media and communication, especially in the Global South.

**Keywords:** Nollywood, Nigeria, Cultural Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis, Netflix.

## INTRODUCTION

From Bombay to Korea to Nigeria, non-western film industries have continued to rise and cultural identities of people who occupy these geographical locations are being subtly reconstructed. In addition to the rise of these industries, the simultaneous increases in streaming platforms have also allowed many nonwestern films to go across the globe. Streaming platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV+ among others have changed the dynamics of film distribution and viewership in the US and abroad and these changes seem to be more preponderant during the COVID-19 pandemic as more people began to stream online (see Herbert *et al*, 2018; Changsong *et al*, 2021). As these new nonwestern industries begin to find global audiences beyond their immediate geographical environment, ideological underpinnings of cultural productions of these industries also continue to shift and become more apparent. While the fact remains that Hollywood and other western media networks are still positioned at the core of global media power, markets, and culture (Thussu 2007; Chen and Shen, 2011) the spread of these nonwestern films across transnational boundaries also triggers a serious inquiry in the scholarship of global communication and critical cultural studies about how identities are being modified, transformed, and reinvented. Does the rise of streaming platforms create a new space for subaltern peoples to mainstream their identities or do these

platforms impose a model of conformity in which nonwestern film industries are trying to 'fit in' into the western model of modernism or globalization?

In other words, because streaming platforms are accessible in different parts of the world and nonwestern film industries are also fighting for their share of the global capital of the film industry (Jin 2011, 2012) nonwestern film industries often find themselves at the nexus of maintaining their indigenous identities while also trying to make their culture go global. Therefore, beyond the economic pursuit of gaining global currency, there is also an inherent ideological pursuit of mainstreaming indigenous values, however in a more 'refined' or transformed way. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine an important and critical shift in Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry. The study takes Nollywood as a case study for other nonwestern film industries that are trying to penetrate the global media market but who might also struggle with retaining the cultural flavor of their local communities. Many Nollywood films now stream on Netflix which, on one hand, is an advancement for the industry to push its productions into global market space. However, this also opens discussion on how Nollywood films are becoming more culturally disintegrated from local realities while appealing more to international audiences. The kind of glocal formation that appears in Nollywood films on Netflix subtly valorizes western universalism and creates an equation in which Africa is better understood if it is aesthetically exported into foreign cultures. Thus, this study argues that the production of Nollywood films on Netflix goes beyond the quest to find global market, instead economic interest, the need to appeal to global

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audience by producing multicultural relevant content and promulgating a Nigerian identity that non-African audience can understand are important areas that should be considered and contested.

The study is situated within the political economy and cultural studies theoretical frameworks (Kellner 1995; Peck 2006). These theories provide dialectical perspectives for understanding how culture moves across the world, especially those coming from developing nations and in this case, Nollywood films. Kellner (1995) argued that cultural production is bound within the social, political, and economic configurations of the society which thus, make the subject of ideology an important focus. According to the author, culture defines our identities. From television to radio to print media, we are constantly engaging in identity defining moments when we engage with cultural materials. Therefore, to fully be able to critique cultural and media productions, scholars must utilize a comprehensive analytical framework that unveils how culture is produced and operates across the three dimensions of audience, text, and politics. By doing cultural analysis within a political economic framework, we can understand how ideological underpinnings of cultural producers influence the meanings of text. Textual analysis on the other hand shows how “cultural meaning” is coded into genre, style, and other linguistics tools. Lastly, by doing a reception analysis, cultural studies is able to discover how audiences of different types (that is across gender, sex, class and race) interact with texts and understand the “political effects” that culture has on the audience. Peck (2006), on the other hand, argued that cultural studies and political economy are intrinsically interwoven and the intellectual contention about the topics is because scholars try to separate the two. She argued that the philosophical thoughts of binarism that has engulfed western scholarship is problematic because it limits us to see the world from two opposing standpoints such as good/bad, male/female, “nature/society, “material/mental” (p.93) and that this epistemological foundation lends to cultural studies scholars whereby some agree that cultural production revolves round political economy structure while others think it does not. However, Peck suggests that for scholarship on cultural studies to move beyond dichotomization and be able to see the world from more a more complex perspective, new theoretical inquiries must embrace the “materialist theory of signification” (p.111), that is a more nuanced approach to cultural studies that connects the material aspect to the symbolic and vice

versa. The symbolic or mental such as signs and other forms of significations is a form of social material needed in the production process, hence forming the superstructure.

Understanding how these theoretical concepts shape cultural production can provide a more robust framework for understanding the connection between culture, economy, politics, and society. To think that the quest for nonwestern cultures to go global is just an economic or cultural pursuit is to ignore other similarly important aspects of the flow that may not be explicit. Therefore, by examining the political economy of Nollywood films on Netflix and the discourse that have been symbolically coded into the production, this study is able to explore both ideological and cultural values that follow Nigerian films when they flow abroad. First, the study grounds Nigerian films within a broader political economy framework of Nigeria’s geopolitical realities on the global stage and engages with the notion of soft power (Nye, 2004) and second, the analysis of Nigerian films on Netflix through a critical approach offer a complex way of understanding the transnational flow nonwestern media productions. The result from this study shows that cultural analysis should reflect a multidimensional approach that allows scholars to explore how different factors shape how people interact with media products across the world.

### **GLOBAL AFRICA? THE CHALLENGES OF NOLLYWOOD IN TRANSNATIONAL SPACE**

Nollywood is the Nigerian film industry. It is the second largest film industry in the world producing about 1,500 films yearly, which moves it above Hollywood and only second to Indian Bollywood and grossing about \$2 million in box office in 2019, (Box Office Mojo, 2019). It is also the major media product that flows from Africa to other parts of the world, as most other African media networks are still very much local in their audience reach. The film industry began in the early 1990s as a response to the British dominated cultural scene in Nigeria which often reflected colonial ideologies and portrayed the country in “poverty porn” images. Thus, the challenge to begin documenting original stories whereby consumers became storytellers, (Witt, 2017) led to Nollywood’s productions which now produces films in more than 300 languages,

(Flock, 2017) However, the English language is still the dominant Nollywood language, unlike Bollywood which produces in Hindi, thereby limiting the audience’s interactions with the spoken word of the characters. In

providing a critical analysis of why Nollywood is still marginal in global media flow, scholars (Miller 2012; Jedlowski, 2013) addressed the issue of economic and structural layout of Nollywood industry and the transnationalism of the industry. Miller (2012) argued that Nollywood lives in an “an alternative media capital” that makes it on one hand, disconnected from the networks that shape many of the dominant cultural flows like Hollywood films and on the other hand, makes its dominance in global markets less possible. The article examined the production and distribution process of Nollywood films and found that many of Nollywood films are poorly produced because of lack of huge capital investment from the industry. Many Nollywood films can be made within a month and already out for sale. The findings further corroborate the powerlessness of African media in the global market; that is the lack of economic resources that moves culture fast into foreign spaces.

This lack of economic power makes it difficult for Nollywood films to “co-opt” (Nye, 2004) international audience in its film production. However, a more recent study by Ryan (2015) suggested that Nollywood producers might be experimenting with other aesthetic forms to be able to appeal to an international audience. The new style of production and distribution which Ryan (2015) referred to as “New Nollywood” involves the inclusion of metropolitan places and objects and “multiplex cinemas” that allows the films to promote a kind of modernity and appeal sensually to global audiences while by-passing the “grassroots markets”. This new aesthetic also includes the use of “trendy technology, high fashion, global pop culture and luxury goods” (p.55) and distribution now features in in-flight screens, theaters, and DVD productions. The distinction between the “New Nollywood” and traditional Nollywood which still produces culture that resonates with local audiences explicates the changing social and economic lifestyle of Lagos, the home of Nollywood and many of Nigerian transnational corporations (TNCs). A similar aesthetic adopted by many Nollywood producers is the glocal identity perspective. That is, the blend of foreign settings with African narratives and characters. Investigating the use of affective and melodramatic techniques in two Nollywood films, Arthur (2017) argued that the combination of the global and local in Nollywood films allow for a kind of transnational identity where the themes, characters and culture operate in a “borderless space” and reflect synergies and interdependence (p.13). Arthur also added that although these films are

set in diasporic and foreign settings, they continue to hold the culture-conscious message of African identity and may even become therapeutic to the idea that when African immigrants are in the West, like the United States, they are likely to forget the collectivist life embraced at home and instead pursue individualism. Thus, the notion of transnationalism for Arthur is the ability of Nollywood to glocalize its messages while maintaining its ancestral link to Africa.

Other scholars (Ebelebe, 2019; Anyawu and Sylvanus, 2022) have also argued that the change in the Nigerian film industry over the last few decades can also be linked to globalization. As more Nigerians in Diaspora and other international business investors like China continue to dominate the Nigerian media space, new forms of Nollywood production continue to emerge to project Nigeria as a global film industry. The quest to keep in touch with their home roots make foreign investors like Netflix, StarTimes, MultiChoice, IROKOTV among others to begin exploring new ways of making Nollywood films available globally which in turn influences how producers are making their films. For example, Agina (2021) noted that the incursion of Netflix into the Nigerian media space and partnering with Nigerian filmmakers might provide opportunities for Nigerian filmmakers to begin addressing “controversial or vexed subjects' ' that might not have been told in the country. According to Agina, bypassing the National Film and Video Censors Board in Nigeria allows Netflix to help bring to limelight hidden social issues such as human trafficking, corruption, illegal immigration among others that is ravaging the African continent without being told not to produce such films. The literature on Nollywood in the transnational space shows a burgeoning argument for a case of transnationalism fueled by new technologies and globalization. The idea of glocalism mentioned by some of these studies might be practically engaging and useful but theoretically, it raises the credibility of the very essence of why there needs to be alternative productions from nonwestern nations. This is not to say that themes that reflect how African Diasporas or foreigners live counter the plausibility of contraflow of Nollywood films, but mainly setting the films in the diaspora raises an ideological question of whether the film is directing audience to interact with Nigerian culture on the African continent or providing a new breed of African culture which is diluted with foreign life that global audience can easily relate with. It feels the latter weighs a little more, because the global audience might easily associate with an African parent who goes

on vacation with their kids to Disneyland than if the same parents had visited the Ikogosi Warm Springs, in southwest Nigeria or the Etosha National Park in Namibia.

The point here is that the question of Nollywood and global Africa problematizes the political and economic incapability of the Nigerian film industry to travel beyond its regional markets on one hand, and the ideological framework that shapes many of the so-called new Nollywood films, on the other. Also, although many Nollywood films are produced in English, their transnational impact has not been felt as much as it is in the current Netflix era. Unlike Hollywood, Nigeria does not yet enjoy the political and economic prowess that United States enjoys in international politics, thereby making it difficult for many Nollywood films to enjoy and attract global prominence and discourse (see Abdulkareem, 2018; Adejumobi, 2014; Ezeonu, 2013). Therefore, the coming on Netflix into Nigerian film space provided an opportunity for Nigerian filmmakers to contend for global relevance and mainstream the Nigerian culture and identity. Since the pandemic initially closed cinema doors in 2020, Netflix started gaining more market share in Nigeria and many Nigerian audiences are beginning to depend more on streaming services to get their films (Adeleke, 2022). The audiences already know that Nigerian filmmakers will sell their films to Netflix a few months after its release and so would often wait to stream instead of going to cinemas. This transition to digital life means that Nollywood Netflix is beginning to have a huge impact on Nigerian culture, hence the need to understand how this new space influences the cultural perception of the film industry. Therefore, this study extends the scholarship on Nollywood and transnationalism by providing a deeper and more complex way of understanding Nollywood films on Netflix. The study does not assume that a causal or coincidental relationship exists between Nollywood and Netflix but provides a critical scrutiny of how global platforms like Netflix can influence the cultural productions of a society.

## **METHOD**

This study used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify patterns of representation in Nigerian films on Netflix. The Critical Discourse Analysis used is grounded in the works of Fairclough, (1989; 1995; 2003) and van Dijk (1993, 1996, 2008). The choice of CDA is based on the relationship between text and society. CDA emphasizes that texts are

representations of the larger socio-cultural order and can provide a unique methodological approach for understanding how text shapes production, distribution and consumption of culture. By understanding, that text does not function in isolation, but gets its meaning from the broader society where the text operates, critical discourse analysts can understand the role that texts play in redefining identities, positioning a discourse as more important or powerful and the how language is systematically employed to represent ideologies and practices. By using CDA to analyze the films in this study, the study shows how language and multimodal texts function as emissaries of larger political economy practice within the new Nollywood industry.

Specifically, Fairclough (2003) approach to critical analysis of media discourse and van Dijk's (2008) socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis were employed in analyzing the films for this study. Fairclough stipulates that CDA involves "an alternation between twin, complementary focus' ' (p.310), that is the communicative events and the order of discourse, and this twin focus should be simultaneously addressed in any discourse analysis work. The communicative event includes the specific text that is being analyzed, the discourse practice that shapes the production and consumption of the text and the sociocultural practice- the larger social framework in which the text is a part of. Fairclough argues that by analyzing these three dimensions of the communicative event, CDA analysts can generate a complex and multi-layered analysis that goes beyond a superficial reading of the text. On the other hand, the order of discourse examines how the genre and overall structure of the discourse being examined shifts and relates to "other socially adjacent orders of discourse" (p.315). In other words, how does the genre configuration of a communicative event (text, discourse practice and social practice) influence how such discourse is being perceived in the larger discursive practice that make up the overall social structure in which the text functions. In other words, every institution within a society has a set of conventions or practices associated with these groups. These conventions are often set and predetermined and everyone who finds themselves in these institutions becomes socially aware of these conventions and automatically becomes a part of it.

However, in these institutions, there are social actors who occupy different positions within the institutions, thereby exhibiting different degrees of power (see Leeuwen, 2008). Therefore, actors who

hold the higher power (for instance parents in a family setting), often dictate or control how the discourse in that particular social space is being shaped, thereby influencing the order of discourse of that institution. By simultaneously analyzing the order of discourse, Fairclough argues that CDA can understand how the communicative event fits into the larger order of discourse and how such event shapes the larger social order and vice-versa. What Fairclough argues in his work is similar to van Dijk's (2015) socio-cognitive approach to discourse analysis which stipulates that there is a mediating force to how discourse operates in the society. That is, discourse is not just shaped by the text alone but also the cognitive component that surrounds the text production and consumption. These cognitive components can be memory, mental models and/or the social cognition that form a superstructure in the production and consumption of the text. Without paying attention to these cognitive components of the text, discourse analysts will assign a perfunctory role to text and see text production as merely an outcome of linguistic and semiotic structures.

Therefore, Dijk argues that the mediating force, that is the cognitive component, of the text must be recognized and accounted for when doing a critical discourse analysis. What is common to Fairclough and Dijk's work is that both scholars agree that discourse is a product of linguistic process as well as a mediating power which can either be the cognitive structures or discourse practice. Considering this layer of the text more analytical rigor to the work of CDA, thereby yielding results that are more socially and politically pragmatic for social change. Also, both Fairclough and Dijk argue generally that a text is part of a larger social discourse and so it is difficult to fully unpack the discourse in a text without understanding the larger social, political, and economic realities that make up the text. This also lends to Peck's "materialist theory of signification" discussed earlier in this paper. That is, the notion that the text as a symbolic element is bound up within the larger factors that shape its production. Therefore, these two versions of CDA were used in the analysis of the films.

Two Nigerian films were chosen, *The Wedding Party (parts 1 and 2, 2016 and 2017)* and *Lion Heart (2019)*. These films were chosen because of their high viewership and popularity among Nigerian films on Netflix. *The Wedding Party* was the first Nigerian film to pass the 400million naira (around \$1.3 million) mark and spent seven weeks at the top of the box office" (Vourlias, 2017). *LionHeart*, on the other hand is

Netflix's "first original Nigerian film and Nigeria's first submission for the Oscar's best international film (Buckley, 2019). Both films are considered as some of the hit productions of Nollywood to make it to Netflix's platform. The analysis focused on three levels- the communicative event, order of discourse and socio-cultural practice as identified by Fairclough (2000; 2003). Also van Dijk (2008) approach on understanding the relationship between text and society was also employed. The films were broadly coded under semiotics, genre and sociocultural context but each level of analysis as discussed below, that is the communicative event, order of discourse and socio-cultural practice, provides more details about how that level was coded and analyzed.

### Synopsis of the Wedding Party and Lion Heart

*The Wedding Party* is a story of a wedding between Dinni Coker (played by Adesuwa Etomi) and Dozie Onwuka (played by Banky Wellington), a popular Nigerian musician. The film shows the tension that occurs in inter-tribal marriage and the conflicts between the two families. Dinni represents the southwestern part of Nigeria, which is predominantly the Yorubas, while her husband Dozie is from the Igbo speaking region which is in the southeastern part of the country. The plot of the film revolves around this conflict and trying to persuade the Dozie's mother to be happy for the couple. She had previously removed Dinni's mother's picture from the magazine announcement she made for the wedding because of the cultural and class difference between the two families. Dozie is from a very wealthy family while Dinni is more of a middle-class lady. The feud between the two families stems from this difference with Dozie's mother, in particular, opposing the marriage. However, Dozie and Dinni were determined to continue the marital journey against all odds. The second part 2 of the film tries to show that the conflict between the two families is now resolved and they now go on vacation together as one big family. However, another layer of conflict was introduced when Dozie's brother, Nonso (played by Enyinna Nwigwe) was in a love relationship with a White lady, Dearde, (played by Daniella Down). The conflict in this part of the film was more tense because of the interracial marriage and although Dearde has been in the picture from the part one of the film, so well-known to Dozie's family, the idea met the family as a surprise and created more tension in the film.

*Lion Heart* was produced by Chinny Onwugbenu in 2018 and directed by Genevieve Nnaji, a star

Nollywood actress who has been in the film industry for about 25 years (Udeh, 2022). The film became available for streaming on Netflix on January 4, 2019 (Netflix 2023).

The plot of the film revolves around a family transportation business run by Adaeze (played by Genevieve Nnaji). Adaeze's father, who is the founder of the company, suddenly became sick and needed someone else to temporarily take over his position in the company. Prior to this time, Adaeze has been working in his father's, Chief Ernest Obiagu (played by Pete Edochie), company as the father's deputy. Adaeze had thought that she would automatically assume her father's role since she had been assisting him. However, shockingly to Adaeze, her father sent for his younger brother from his village to come and temporarily assist in running the company. Since it is the practice of the Igbo family to transfer business leadership to the eldest male child (Nworah, 2011) and since Adaeze is the first born and Adaeze's younger brother, has decided to choose a career in the music industry, Adaeze's father thought that the best option was to invite the uncle to take over the control of the business. Adaeze became very sad and thought the father was incapable because she is a woman. Eventually Adaeze and her uncle had to work together and when Adaeze's father recovered, he retired and asked Adaeze to take over the leadership of the

company. Thus, the story highlights the theme of women's subservience and the male savior in helping Adaeze become her best in running her father's business. It also shows Adaeze's boldness and courage to step up to a managerial position after her father's retirement, a practice that is uncommon for a woman in that part of the country. Also, because the transportation business is a common business in the southeastern part of Nigeria (Adi 2012; Ajaegbo, 2013). Lion heart reveals some of the battles and complexities that happens in many Igbo families in running this business.

## ANALYSIS

### The Communicative Event

The first layer of analysis is the communicative event which includes the text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice of the event. Since the text deals mainly with the basic linguistic layout of the communicative event (semiotics, syntax, semantics, and other relevant linguistic categories), I examine the semiotics content of the films and their relationship to the overall message of the films. In both films I coded the signs and symbols and what they represent in the films. This includes the dressing, music, greetings, food, language spoken and food. These categories were coded because they represent how cultures were displayed in the films. The two films put emphasis on

**Table 1: The Wedding Party (1 and 2)**

Categories	Signifiers	Signified
Dressing and other outward appearances	Western	Exoticism, Expensive, Class
Music	Igbo/ English	Nigeria
Greetings	Nigerian	Igbo culture
Food	Nigerian	Igbo culture
Languages spoken	English/Igbo	Educated, Enlightened, Exotic, Localness
Places	Lagos, Kano, Aba	Nigeria

**Table 2: Lion Heart**

Categories	Signifiers	Signified
Dressing and other outward appearances	Western	Exoticism, Expensive, Class
Music	Igbo/ English	Nigeria
<i>Greetings</i>	Nigerian	Igbo culture
<i>Food</i>	Nigerian	Igbo culture
Languages spoken	English/Igbo	Educated, Enlightened, Exotic, Localness
Places	Lagos, Kano, Aba	Nigeria

the appearances of the casts, the languages they spoke, the foods that were served and the places they visited. The categories were coded if they appeared throughout the films.

In semiotics, the focus is on the use of signs to communicate meanings (Berger, 2000). Signs can take different forms including music and sound effects, material culture like dressing, hairstyle, and general outward appearance, and non-verbal clues such as gestures, facial expression among others. These signs are what semioticians refer to as "signifiers" and the meaning they are associated with are the "signified". Thus, to analyze *The Wedding Party* and *Lion Heart* as a text, the study examined the signifiers that are coded into the films and their corresponding associated meanings. These meanings are culturally assigned, hence, the need for both linguistic and cultural understanding of the text. To do this analysis, I developed a codebook consisting of different categories of signs in the films. Each category then has all relevant signifiers and corresponding signified in the films. These signifiers/signified are further discussed below.

In terms of dressing and other appearances, most of the dressing in *The Wedding Party* were traditional Nigerian wears reflecting the cultures of the two families represented in the film. Since the film was mostly set on the wedding day, most of the guests were dressed in the Nigerian party wears including 'wrapper', 'hat' (*fila*), 'head-tie' (*gele*). Few of the guests were in western dressing like dress and suits. In contrast, in *Lion Heart*, Adaeze the lead character was mostly seen in office English wears. She is either in a short dress or skirts suit and she rarely wore any Nigerian dress in the film. Adaeze's father and her uncle though were often seen in traditional wears. This difference in Adaeze and her father's and uncle style of dressing might also indicate generational shift and the influence of globalization whereby the younger generation wants to fit into a more global culture of westernization. In terms of music, most of the music in both films were in English. Even the music Adaeze's brother produced for his father's retirement in *Lion Heart* was a hip-hop genre with taints of local languages. There were a few scenes with traditional songs in both films. For example, at the wedding scene in *The Wedding Party*. The food category provides an interesting mix, especially in *The Wedding Party*. Dozie's parents hired their own caterer to serve exotic meals including while Dunni's parents hired a local caterer to provide *Amala* (a local Nigerian meal

made from yam or plantain flour) to their own guests. There was a clash at this scene in the film where the Dunni's guests showed that they enjoy the *Amala* and even make fun of those eating the exotic meals. Some of those who ate the exotic meals were shown throwing up and wished they had what Dunni's guests had.

However, in part 2 of the film, most of the foods served were foreign dishes which shows the class and exposure of the families.

In both films, English was the dominant language and there were very few occasions with Yoruba and Igbo languages. So, although these films are classified as international on Netflix, they do not really reflect international languages and the audience may find it difficult to categorize the films in any of the Nigerian languages. In terms of places, the two films were mostly set in Nigeria except *The Wedding Party* (part 2) that was predominantly set in Dubai and London. Also in both films, exoticism and class were prominent 'signified' which shows the distinction between the upper and lower classes in Nigerian society. It also shows that certain lifestyle choices are only available to people who can afford them. The second category of analysis under the communicative event is the discourse practice. According to Fairclough (2000), discourse practice "involves various aspects of the processes of text production and consumption" (p.213). This can be the "institutional processes" or the "discourse processes." The institutional processes speak to the "character" of the institution producing the text while the discourse processes speak to narrower discursive practices that allow the audience to process the meanings that have been coded into the text. This can include how they interact with the text, the use of socio-cognitive skills and other forms of mental representations. In both practice types, CDA is concerned with how the overall formations of this practice influence how the text is produced, and the meanings derived from such production. Also, Fairclough adds that although the socio-cultural practice shapes the text, it does so by way of "shaping the nature of the discourse practice" (p.313). Therefore, the discourse practice is the mediating force between the text and the sociocultural practice. In other words, the ideological content that is coded into the text comes from the sociocultural practice but mediated by how the text is produced and consumed, that is the discourse practice.

Now, in examining the discourse practice of *The Wedding Party* first from an institutional perspective, the film is produced by ELFIKE Film Collective, a

partnership between leading film industries in the country. The idea of collaboration was to combine their resources to produce a film that features high-profile actors and actresses in the film industry. Compared to many other Nollywood films, *The Wedding Party* projects a higher level of affluence and modernity and represents top class weddings in Nigeria. Also, the film was first premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2016 and Dubai's Department of Tourism and Commerce.

Marketing also partnered with ELFIKE Film Collective for a world premiere of the movie in Victoria Island, Lagos in 2016 (Vanguard, 2016). The Dubai department also offered several incentives for Nigerians who attend the premiere including a helicopter ride and luxury accommodation in Dubai, a place which is a major destination for Nigerians going on vacation (Vanguard, 2016). From this premiere culture, the film producer shows a keen interest to involve the international community. By first having to premiere in Toronto, before Lagos, there is a global discourse that is included in the consumption process of the film. The producer wants the audience to see the relatability of the film to those outside of Nigeria and invites them to interact with the issues presented in the film. Similarly, *Lion Heart* also premiered at Toronto.

International Film Festival in 2018 before it was acquired by Netflix the same year. The film was also submitted for the Oscar award but was disqualified "because the movie was predominantly shot in Nigeria's official language — English." (Buckley, 2019). Although the film falls under the 'international feature film' category of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, by producing the film in mainly English shows that the film does not reflect so much about the cultural authenticity of Nigerian society. While language is just one aspect of culture and in fact English might be more appropriate considering the multiethnic composition of Nigeria, an Igbo film subtitled in English may be a better alternative especially considering that the film is really about the transport industry among the Igbo. Aside from the language factor, *Lion Heart* also presents similar concerns as *The Wedding Party* in terms of its distribution and consumption as further discussed below.

For both films, their availability on Netflix suggests that the film is not only meant for audience in Nigeria. Most Nigerians at home watch movies on cable networks like DSTV, GoTV and StartTimes or DVD. However, for many Nigerians in the Diaspora, Netflix is

becoming a major site for streaming Nollywood movies. With more Nigerian films becoming available on Netflix, there is a mediating power shift from a local institution to an international one. The idea of the films' presence on Netflix might suggest to Nigerians outside Nigeria that the film has international relevance or elements of westernization that makes it Netflix suitable. On the other hand, Netflix does not have a thorough description of what constitutes an international film except that the film should be from a country outside the US which makes it difficult to conceptualize these films as completely local or international. From a cognitive perspective, the availability of the film on Netflix could help Nigerians in Diaspora share memories of weddings in Nigeria but also connect them with their immediate environment of exoticism, luxury and. The representation of western values such as music, places, dressing makes it look like those in Diaspora are not necessarily missing a lot from their past cultural life and that there is a remixing of that life that is now made available through Netflix. Thus, Netflix here goes beyond just an institutional mediating force but a cognitive collocation of old/new, past/present, past/future, etc. Here Nigerians abroad are not just interacting with the memory of the life they left behind in Nigeria but a remix of that life in a way that imbues into their present world. For non-Nigerian audiences, this is similar. The audiences are invited to cognitively think of Nigeria as a site of modernity, power, influence, money etc. These may not reflect the true picture of the Nigerians at home who face the harsh economic life and political instability. For example, when Adaeze wakes up every 5am to do her morning run before going to work, Nigerians abroad may find this interesting but audiences in Nigeria may find it a bit unrealistic considering the insecurity, high unemployment rate and the larger economic distress that the people battle every day. How does Adaeze's morning run with her driver driving behind her fit into the political and economic reality of Nigeria? Thus, the discourse practice in both films creates a rose-tainted version of Nigerian realities and invites the audience to imagine a world that may be ideal but not at all real in the present situation.

### **Order of Discourse**

The second layer of analysis is the order of discourse. As discussed earlier, the order of discourse examines how the genre configuration of the communicative event relates to other socially adjacent discourses within the same order of discourse. The question to tackle in this layer of analysis is what does



the communicative event analyzed above indicate about the order of discourse? To answer this question, the study examined the genres of the films and how the content was presented. To determine the genre of the films, the study considered the broader stylistic structure of the films including characters, mood, plot, genre conventions and setting. While considering the larger order of discourse in the film, *The Wedding Party* is a romantic comedy film. The film tries to present a serious social issue, intertribal and interracial marriage, in a less serious form. *Lion Heart*, on the other hand, is a comedy movie with less focus on romantic relationships. Although both films are both comedy genres, the comic degree of the films are different. *The Wedding Party* is presented to the audience as an issue that should not really be a problem. Many Nollywood films often portray intertribal marriage as an issue that creates serious tension between both families and the couple may even find it difficult to proceed with the wedding if the two families do not agree. In this film, the families were able to resolve their conflict in a less chaotic way. There was a representation of how such issues are handled among the elites versus the non-elites in the society. The couple were shown as people who have the agency to choose their own lives irrespective of what their parents think. If the film were to be in another genre, this may not be so. In many other Nollywood drama movies, there is always the depiction of the wicked mother-in-law trope (the husband's mother), who will do everything possible to get the new wife out of his son's house and interracial marriage is often almost not seen on screen. Thus, the comic dimension of the film shifts the narratives of intertribal and interracial marriage from the often negative or tragic representation to a sweet ending.

Similarly, Adaeze's uncle is a star comic actor. His cast as Adaeze's uncle suggests to the audience that the film has comedy infused into it. Like *The Wedding Party*, the film helps to deflate another serious issue in Nigeria, that is the agency of the girl-child or women in the family. The film could have had a different storyline if it was not presented in a relatively comic form. It is important to highlight that this shift to comedy in portraying serious social issues in Nollywood is interesting. The shift shows that these issues should not always lead to tragic ends. There can still be a healthy and functional society if people are willing to walk together to fix it. Also, considering that both films are released on Netflix, the comic genre seems to resonate more with the global audience who may be

wondering what the severity of intertribal is. Interracial marriage looks like in Nigeria. By subtly, diverging from the typical Nollywood plot and genre, both films show the need to explore new themes, styles, and aesthetics in portraying Nigerian culture to people across the world.

### Sociocultural Practice

The third category is the sociocultural practice. Fairclough (2000) describes the sociocultural practices as the social context in which the communicative event operates. There are three categories of sociocultural practice that can be considered at this level of the analysis, and these are the social, political, and economic. Although Fairclough differentiates these three levels, van Dijk considers them as the overall social context that defines the text. Therefore, in analyzing the sociocultural context of the films, the study considers the overall social component of the films by discussing them within the sociocultural practice of the Nollywood and the Nigerian sociocultural environment. In other words, the study analyzed the sociocultural dimension of the films as it relates to Nigerian culture and practices.

*Lion Heart* is a film that tries to disrupt the enduring cultural practice of women marginalization in the southeastern part of Nigeria. Although the transport company has been a long-time business of the southeasterners, it has always been associated with the male gender. Adaeze tries to show through this film that it is time to challenge the ideology of male dominance in the sector and the family. The film is a both a critique of the subservience that women experience in the family and how that marginalization expresses itself outside the home. *The Wedding Party* on the other hand, tries to address the belligerent class culture between the upper and middle/lower class in Nigeria. It also addresses the tribal tension between the two of the dominant tribes in the country- Igbos and Yorubas in Nigeria. In terms of the cultural dimension of the films, the message of fixing a broken society and challenging dominant paradigms of oppression and marginalization is apparent. While it is true that class culture exists between the upper class and middle/lower class in the country, the representation of Danni absconding on her wedding day seems a bit hyperbolic. This representation seems like what international audience might relate with when watching love and romance picks on Netflix. This is an atypical case in the Nigerian sociocultural setting.

However, in terms of the economic dimension of the films, it was clear that the films were made with an international audience in mind. Both films premiered in Toronto before they became available to Nigerian homes. The choice of locations, music and culture displayed in both films were a mix of local and international, with *The Wedding Party(part 2)* gravitating towards the latter more. The quest to break into the international market has been a major drive for Nollywood producers in recent years and so, although they try to retain the cultural flavor of the film, it does not always co-occur well with global discourse that disconnects from local realities. Although, there is no apparent political dimension to these films, the premiering of the films in Toronto and their quick appearance on Netflix burrows into the issue of soft power raised earlier on in this paper. The film industry is a major cultural platform that helps push Nigerian culture to the global audience and so in a bid to do this, recent Nollywood films have been producing more hybridized films that tend to show a westernized version of Nigerian culture while also trying to retain connection with local audiences. Especially as Netflix started buying the ownership of some Nollywood films, the centering of non-Nigerian audiences who will be watching the film on Netflix becomes a central issue in recent productions. Thus, the political economy dimension of Nollywood in recent years shows a quest to penetrate the international market and contest for global capital while also trying to maintain connections to local issues.

## DISCUSSION

The analysis of these two films shed light on some of the complexities that accompany the flow of media products from the Global South to the other parts of the world. As these industries compete with established global media industries for global capital and audience, they run the risk of compromising their cultural originality to appeal to the global community. In the case of Nollywood, the analysis above reveals that there is a strategic shift going on in the industry and this shift indicates a political economy issue as well as a cultural one. First, the two films depart from the popular Nollywood plot and offer alternative ways of addressing serious social issues in the country. From a political economy standpoint, as Nollywood films begin to make themselves to Netflix, there is a gradual shift from the classical Nollywood style of representation. Although both films retain the local storyline, the introduction of different kinds of actors shows that the films are not just made for the Nigerian screen. Also

considering the premiering of the films in Toronto before seeing them in Nigeria, Nollywood producers continue to show the need to penetrate the international market. This new adventure creates a tension between representing local culture through a more familiar lens. Thus, the second perspective of cultural disjuncture is linked to this first point. There seems to be a struggle on how to share a local issue with a local audience. In other words, while the issues considered are not new to many Nigerian homes, the way the casts are represented is atypical. With many Nigerian films competing for international awards in recent times, the need to appeal to the international audience has been a major concern. Considering that many people around the world may not have a strong knowledge of Nigerian culture, Nollywood producers have begun to mix cultures to produce a westernized version of Nigerian realities.

Thus, analysis of the films shows the impact of new streaming platforms on the film industry. Netflix and similar platforms serve as emissaries of global culture but one that needs to be carefully considered. The fact that Netflix is an American industry and its interests in buying the exclusive rights to many films and shows makes it increasingly popular to find more nonwestern films on Netflix, albeit in a more culturally refined way. Now, producing films that disrupt existing social attitudes is not a bad idea. In fact, the platform allows marginalized communities to have opportunities to challenge dominant ideologies and mainstream their own stances, which may not be possible considering different local policies and regulations. Like the global #MeToo, the west has often provided the platform for those in nonwestern communities to also create cultures that are not traditionally possible in their local communities. However, in the case of Netflix, many of the Nollywood films continue to show what audiences outside of Nigeria will be able to relate with, thereby creating other forms of complexities.

Also, the analysis raises an important question in the study of media flow and contra flow and its connection to cultural studies. Although this is beyond the scope of this study, future research can consider the impact of this shift in Nollywood films and other nonwestern film industries on the identities of people who own the stories represented. In other words, how do these new perspectives presented in these films counter the cultural realities of the indigenous audiences and how do they react to these changes? These perspectives can bring in an audience-centered approach which can help to understand the latent

function of the analysis discussed above in a wider sociocultural dimension. In terms of methodology, the study shows that text performs a social function in society. As stated earlier, text does not operate in isolation and CDA provides a unique approach to dissect the multilayered functions of texts. The films analyzed above show the multidimensional ability of critical discourse analysis to help uncover hidden ideological perspectives in a text. CDA is different from other forms of textual analysis because the function of CDA is to understand how the text relates to other aspects that connect with the text. That is the economy, political and sociocultural practices. Thus, the analysis is not just limited to the text itself but how it produces meaning for the larger social discourse in which it operates. Through CDA, the study has been able to show how Nollywood connects with other practices within the film industry and what kind of discourses emerge when this level of interactions is analyzed.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as Nollywood films begin to move to streaming platforms, the film industry's representations of Nigerian cultural identities are being hybridized. Although Netflix has allowed many relatively known film industries to become more global and accessible, the risk of cultural compromise by these industries is also increased. The quest to reach the global audience is both political and cultural and oftentimes the former determines the latter. Politically speaking, Nollywood is not only reaching Nigerians in diaspora, but also mostly reaching Netflix audience which is a mix of different cultures. Thus, the film industry is competing for a global audience with cultural boundaries that are beyond that of Nigeria. This creates a new political economy dynamic for Nollywood to make movies that are culturally relevant. Also, while Nollywood is trying to introduce the Nigerian culture to the global audience, it has not been without a rose-tainted version of it. By creating a westernized cultural perspective, the film industry shows that Nigerian culture can only be understood if it is co-opted into other familiar western discourses. Although, the study makes the argument that Nollywood films on Netflix reflect a disconnection from Nigerian local realities, the study is limited in that it only looked at only Nollywood films. Perhaps future study can look beyond the individual country films on Netflix and examine the international films category on the streaming platform to identify any patterns of representation that are common across geographical boundaries among nonwestern film industries.

Lastly, as previous studies discussed earlier has stated (Ajani 2021; Arthur 2017), Netflix creates a new platform for allowing Nollywood to go global. However, this study extends that scholarship by examining the ideological nuances that accompany this breakthrough for Nollywood. While the non-Nigerian audiences can now watch Nollywood films on Netflix, what does this mean for Nigerian-based audiences who may sometimes have to switch between indigenous and westernized versions of their culture? More importantly, the study stresses the relationship between cultural production and broader political economy that shape the production thus, signifying the need for a more rigorous analysis of culture that includes how both the material and the symbolic interacts in shaping meanings.

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