

Original Research Article

## Reflections on National Integration in Nigerian Film: an Example of *Up North*

Habsat Joyce Imhanobe<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Author: Habsat Joyce Imhanobe  
Department of Mass Communication, Igbinedion University, Okada, Edo State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Cinema as a medium of communication is an influential source or enhancer of national unity. Like other media of communication, films can shape behaviours negatively or positively, which is achieved through the texts, images and portrayals of characters that make up the content of films. The study discussed the reflection of national integration in Nigeria through films. Anchored on the theory of Hermeneutic, the study adopted the content analysis method. To this end, the movie *Up North* was critically appraised to ascertain to which it encourages national integration in Nigeria. Findings showed that the movie portrayed the Nigerian culture positively significantly encouraged national integration through focus on good morals, mutual respect among individuals, promotion of hard-work, and respect for and tolerance of our cultural diversity. The study concluded that films is a veritable means of social reengineering and nation building, and suggested that through greater synergy between the stakeholders in the culture industry, Nigerian films should be made to reflect mainly the positive cultural ethos of the nation while promoting peace in the society as depicted in the movie *Up North*.

**Keywords:** Consciousness, Films, Integration, National, Nollywood, Reflections.

## INTRODUCTION

Film, which could also be called or known as motion pictures or better still movie, is series of still photographs on film, projected in rapid succession onto a screen by means of light. It is important to state here that what gives the picture the illusions of actual, smooth, and continuous movement are dependent on the optical phenomenon known as persistence of vision. In the portrayal of drama, film is an important tool especially as regards catharsis which is the purgation of emotions. This art form which emerged at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has become one of the most popular and influential media of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. One of the major attributes of film is serving as commercial ventures. It achieves this by offering fictional narratives to large audiences in theatre houses and cinemas. This makes film perhaps the first truly mass form of entertainment especially through the cinemas which emerged as the most alluring and expensive communications medium of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Baran, 51). No other art form has been disseminated so effectively, or has appeared to transcend so many national and cultural boundaries than films.

Motion pictures are so much a part of our lives that it is hard to imagine a world without them. We enjoy film or movies in the theatres, at home, in offices, in cars and buses, and on airplanes. We carry films with us in our laptops, tablets, and cell phones. As (Bordwell and Thompson 2) observe, “films communicate information and ideas; they show us places and ways of life we might not otherwise know, offers us ways of seeing and feelings that we find deeply acceptable...” Film is a unique means of communication; its visual bias gives it a universal appeal and impact as it plays important roles in the development and unity of any group of people, ethnicity, and race. It is a veritable tool of national development and purveyor of culture.

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The contemporary Nigerian film industry was born at about the third quarter of the twentieth century (Emeagwali, 13). This was triggered by the establishment of Colonial Film Unit in 1947, but until the 1960's little more than documentaries were produced followed by Nigeria's first film production companies Latola Film and Calpeny Nigeria Ltd (Ekwuazi, 23). These Nigerian films acted in the native languages are translated into English and French languages which accounted for their wide spread and universal appeal in Europe, America, West Africa and other African countries (Fayomi, 3). Furthermore, the direct-to-video (VHS, VCD and DVD) distribution system which is a hallmark of Nigerian movies started in 1992 with the film "living in Bondage", as the first popularly acknowledged movie shot -to-video. The movie marked the start of a new era of Nigerian movie making, lowering barriers to entry for many talented filmmakers (Oyewole and Oyewole, 21). From this beginning at the twilight of the 20th century, Nigerian film industry has grown profoundly, producing on average 1500 films per year. This makes it the largest film industry in Africa and globally, second only to Bollywood of India. Nigerian films have become very popular with Africans especially with Nigerians living abroad and a growing number of people of African descent.

With the foregoing, this paper sets out to examine the roles played by Nigerian films in the reflection and promotion of national integration. It will therefore focus on the film medium in Nigeria, its capacity to foster both authentic and synthetic values that enhance national integration, and suggest ways through which the promotion of these positive values could bring desired unity by reflecting the positives portrayed by the film *Up North* especially in maintaining national consciousness.

### **The Nigerian Film Industry**

The Nigerian audiences' first experience in film screening was in 1903 at the Glover Memorial Hall, (Uchegbu, 5). Even though film was introduced by a European merchant, it took the combined efforts of the colonial administration and the church to sustain the industry (Ekwuazi and Onookome, 3). The content of such films can be easily discerned. The British colonialists used it for their "civilizing" mission as well as to indicate the blessedness of being colonized. The church, as their involvement in education and the media industry has shown, used films for spreading the gospel. Nollywood is the name of Nigeria's movie industry. By definition, it is Nigeria's movie industry by Nigerian production teams for the Nigerian people. Nollywood has over the years become a world phenomenon, as its movies are being sold in Ghana, Togo, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa as well as Jamaica, USA and the UK to name a few. The popularity of Nigerian films now stretches to far beyond the country's borders.

Nollywood actors are welcomed as stars virtually throughout the African continent. Uganda dreams of having its own Uganda wood, and Ghana is threatening to close its market to the cascade of Nigerian movies for fear that its own productions will drown in the rush. Even international -festivals in Montreal, Berlin, Rotterdam and Cannes have made room for Nollywood. The first Nollywood production ever to be introduced on the American DVD market, *Joshua*, by Adim Williams, came in late December 2005. Now the name itself had caused a bit of a protest in the earlier days, as a lot of Nigerians felt it was imported and derived from Hollywood and Bollywood (Not really a bad feat as -these are the two heavy weights in the movie industry internationally). There was also that little issue of the name being coined by a foreigner, some did not like it, but the good thing is that Nollywood as a name has moved far beyond these earlier hiccups; no-one actually thinks twice about the origin of the name today. It has become accepted that Nollywood applies to the Nigerian Movie Industry. Nollywood today ranks third in the movie industry after Hollywood (USA) and Bollywood (India) in terms of volume of production. It has been able to hold its own despite so many deterrents, which to name a few, include expensive technical tools of the trade, piracy, inconsistent supply of electricity and the horrible traffic jam conditions which can lead to extreme lateness in production times.

Movies on a general scale fascinate people, as they seek various gratifications from them, ranging from education to entertainment. According to (Simpson and Utterson 18), film refers to a, "cinema, as an extension of the aesthetic manifestation practiced by all peoples: music, poetry, agriculture, sculpture and painting". Despite this natural attraction people have towards motion pictures, their level of attraction varies from diverse kinds of movies-such as the Nigerian movies industry (Nollywood), the American movie industry (Hollywood), the Chinese movie industry and the Indian movie industry; majorly Hindu (Bollywood). These movie industries are embedded with diverse characteristics that mark their industries peculiar from one another thereby creating division in the viewing of movies, depending on the interest of the audience and how the film satisfies the need of the audience per time, reinforcing the already held belief of the viewer and displaying whatever culture is embedded in it.

The Nigerian movie industry, also known as Nollywood, is not only one of the major movie industries in the world but also according to UNESCO (2009), Nollywood is the second largest global producer of films after India's Bollywood. In Nigeria and other countries throughout sub-Saharan Africa, it has overshadowed Hollywood, Bollywood, a move that had caused complaints of oversaturation of local screens in some smaller sub-Saharan African countries (Ondego, 10). Unlike Hollywood and Bollywood films, Nollywood films were not to be shown on a big screen in

theaters; instead, they were produced for and mostly traded in physical home movie format (VCD and DVD). They are however shown on terrestrial and satellite/cable television in all small screen movies.

Also (Osei Hwere and Osei Hwere 4) noted that the popularity of Nigerian video films transcend the borders of Nigeria to other countries in Africa, Europe and North America, making it one of the country's fastest growing cultural exports. It also makes Nigeria an important digital media content producer on the African continent. These video films, especially the ones in English are popular in other African countries because they tend to focus on themes relevant to other Africans on the continent and Africans living in Diaspora (Osei Hwere & Osei Hwere, 4). The wide appeal of these video films to African audiences and international audiences may be attributed to the hybridization of Africa and Western cultures that are endemic to many past colonial African urban societies.

According to (Abah 9) their commercial nature might make the video-films appear apolitical and grounded in an unapologetic commercial culture and seem quite indifferent to the social responsibility agenda of contemporary cinema, several examples of popular entertainment media still serve social responsibility functions. Adesokan 15) noted that their treatment of political themes reflect a basic concern for good governance and ethical conduct in civil matters.

### **Reflections on Nollywood films efforts at Promoting National Integration**

According to Ighighogho (29), "It is no exaggeration to state that all modern agents of socialization, the home movies and cable satellite are the greatest influence on moral and social development of our youth, especially in our urban area". He further says, "Through movies, food habit, fashion and other social habits including vices are taken from the movies straight into our streets". Through the home video most debased social vices prostitution, violence, crime, rape, murder, armed robbery and secret cultism are transmitted to the people and they consciously or unconsciously imbibe these vices. Some of them are conveyed not in their activities to the people, but through movie tricks and super imposition. Yet children and adults take them as realities and are influenced by them.

The negative influence appears when wrong viewer is viewing it. For instance, the movie "BlackBerry Babes" (2011) appeared to give a seal of approval to vices such as violence, greed, jealousy, theft, prostitution and dissatisfaction. This movie has many negative themes which children are not meant to watch, because of the likelihood of them imitating it. All the costumes used are foreign wears, which are not part of the Nigerian moral teachings, (Kirkwood, 5) supported this view when he said, "children who behave aggressively have increased preference for, and relatively to violence". This goes to show that those negative characters embodied in the movie would negatively influence the attitude and behaviour of people who watch these Nigerian home videos.

In a study,(Alawode and Uduakobong 12) content analyzed fifty Nigerian Video films to investigate the portrayals and representations of Nigeria and its people in order to ascertain the reality of Nigerian image through the video film perspectives. The study shows that films effectively reveal Nigerians as religious and traditional people but scanty attention was paid to economic and investment potentials of the nation. The nation's symbols like flags, coat of arms, currencies and so on were scantily portrayed. Negative attitudes of get rich quick, get rich at all cost, witchcraft and fetish practices, violence, hooliganism and ritualism among other vices were exaggerated. The video films have misrepresentations, overrepresentations and under- representations of the nation's image.

Similarly, Alawode (10) studied the portrayals of the Nigerian environment in video films through a content analysis and discovers that very little is depicted of the natural environment while homes, markets and religious institutions in urban location had the largest portrayals in the films. The films portrayed locales, places, weather, buildings, moods, sanitation, population, relationships, transactions, occupations and institutions as part of the Nigeria environment; it portrayed Nigerians as triangular beings shuttling between the home, market and religious places; portrayed Nigerians as homely, industrious and religious. Nigeria was portrayed as environment of freedom, orderliness, lawfulness and friendliness. Nigerian environment is usually clean and tidy. The study posits emphatically that Nigerian films did not pay attention to natural environments and national symbols, and as a result were not intended as corporate items for image selling and tourism promotion as seen in Tope Oshin's Up North, the Portrayal of Durban Festival and Yankari resort as viable tourist sites in Nigeria.

In a related study, (Alawode 10) investigated the depiction from the perspective of images captured in entertainment offerings within Nigeria. He found that the Nigerian environment was largely portrayed in terms of filmic and dramatic lines and that very little is reported about the natural environment and national symbols, and therefore calls for deliberately evolved films to promote Nigerian image and locate the Nigerian tourism industry on the global map. Furthermore, (Alawode and Sunday 13) analyzed the showcasing of Nigeria through portrayals and representations in the home videos and found that film producers extensively project the nation's traditional societies, cultures, beliefs, lifestyles, values, norms, dressings and languages. Religiosity and urbane lifestyles were portrayed with exaggerations of flamboyance, affluence and elegance. The exaggeration extends to portrayal of witchcraft, occultism, and fetishism. They

reported that very little is done to showcase the nation's natural resources, agricultural produce, mineral resources, monuments and historical centres, tourist sites as well as national symbols.

The prevalence of negative contexts in Nigeria video films has prompted some critics to describe the medium as a vast wasteland. These critics argue that these video films could serve as an important tool to educate domestic and foreign consumers about the country. They contend that video films could be used to highlight Nigerian cultural values in a positive light and to promote socio-economic development in order to raise the welfare of the masses. Defenders of the industry on other hand point out that largely, Nigerian video films do a fair job of representing the current contexts of corruption, social ills, religions hypocrisy and political violence in the country. Although some of these depictions can be seen as an exaggeration, they can be attributed to how people relate to the themes and the way people deal with the issues (Osei-Hwere & Osei-Hwere, 9).

What the above analysis shows is that Nollywood filmmakers have not made significant effort to promote narratives that will foster national integration and unity among the vast peoples and cultures in Nigeria. It is in this regard that the efforts of the movie – *Up North* – become significant.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation it originates with Friedrich Schleiermacher, a German Philosopher and Bible Scholar, Hermeneutics plays a role in a number of disciplines whose subject matter demands interpretative approaches, characteristically, because the disciplinary subject matter concerns the meaning of human intentions, beliefs, and actions, or the meaning of human experience as it is preserved in the arts and literature, historical testimony, and other artifacts.

Hermeneutics" means the theory of interpretation, i.e. the theory of achieving an understanding of texts, utterances, (Dilthey, 19). Its philosophy as a theory of interpretation of experience emphasizes how we cope in the world and come to understand objects and subjects. While its origins focus on the study of biblical texts and later, ancient and classical cultures, Hermeneutics as a philosophy offers a way of understanding the process of interpretation. Its influence today extends to organization studies, where scholars studying culture, identity, sense making, and learning draw on the philosophical tenets of hermeneutics to explain human action, intentionality, and meaning in the context of organizations.

However, Hermeneutics has a long history, reaching back at least as far as ancient Greece. New focus was brought to bear on it in the modern period, in the wake of the Reformation with its displacement of responsibility for interpreting the Bible from the Church to individual Christians generally. This new focus on hermeneutics occurred especially in Germany.

In Greek mythology, Hermes was the Olympian god who was the primary boundary crosser. The patron of travelers, orators, athletes, and thieves, he was known as the one who brought messages from the gods to mortals and as one not above a bit of trickery in the process. Crossing the boundaries between the gods and mortals required interpreting messages as well as conveying them. As mortals became interested in interpretation of what other people said and did, often recorded in "texts," they borrowed Hermes' name for their work, calling it Hermeneutics.

Two fairly common but competing pictures of the course of modern Hermeneutics in Germany are that it began with a fumbling germination in the eighteenth century and then flowered in the systematic hermeneutics of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century, or that it began with a fumbling germination in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and then eventually flowered in the philosophical Hermeneutics of Martin Heidegger and Hans-George Gadamer in the twentieth century (hence the very word "Hermeneutics" is today often treated as virtually synonymous with "Gadamer's philosophy" (Dilthey, 61).

Hermeneutics theory is concerned also with the intricacies surrounding film audiences and total apprehension and 'enjoyment' of a film narrative produced in the society in question understandably by film directors and scriptwriters of the same.

Ideally, the theatre situation under which a typical film audience member is subjected to from the beginning of the reel to the end does not permit the kind of digression a reader of a novel want to hence, hermeneutics insist on the best possible conditions that are enabling for total apprehension.

It must then become apparent therefore that while plot is a critic's oriented notion, Hermeneutics is film maker/script writer' oriented notion. This theory is significant to this study because it introduces a new vista for appraising Nollywood narratives as conscious instruments of promoting national integration as we find with the movie *Up North*.

## METHOD

The study adopts the qualitative method of analysis since the research is essentially qualitative in nature; that is, it is purely text-based. Content analysis of our selected movie –*Up North* will focus on the extent at which the movie portrays images and situations that make national integration in Nigeria desirable.

### UP NORTH

*Up North* is a 2018 Nigerian movie directed by Tope Oshin-Ogun and written by Chinaza Onuzo and Bunmi Ajakaiye based on a true story by Editi Effiong. The movie's plot sees a controlling billionaire father (Kanayo O Kanayo) get fed up with his independent minded son Bassey (Banky W) and as punishment for Bassey's rebellion sends him off to Bauchi in the North for his national youth service. *Up North* follows Bassey's journey to self-discovery as he navigates life, love and friendship.

*Up North* highlights critical issues as girl child education and the empowerment of girls within local northern Nigeria communities. The movie also stars Rahama Sadau, Michelle Dede, Adesua Etomi-Wellington, Ibrahim Suleiman, and Tokumbo T-Boss Idowu, among others.

At a time when people are skeptical of engaging with the Northern part of Nigeria due to the non-ending violence that threatens to consume the once-peaceful people of that region, *Up North* reflects the North in a way the media barely shows it. The film is boldly nationalistic.

One thing a movie exposes you to whilst telling a story, is usually the social-cultural context of the event. Sometimes such feat of audio - visual narrative leaves an imprint of the beauty of the place, and how things are done there. This is what Tope Oshin (the director) and Bunmi Ajakaiye the screenwriter achieved with *Up North*, a romantic comedy about a Lagos based Youth Corp member, Bassey (Banky W.) who is forced to serve in Bauchi but ends up not just falling in love with a school teacher, Mariam (Rahama Sadau) but also creates a bunch of female athlete champions, who under a wrong perception of their religion, would never have ventured into sports.

This film is a beautiful representation of what Nigeria should be about, different cultures coming together in mutual respect. *Up North* portrays our northern culture, from a whole new positive perspective. It highlights the beautiful landscape, hospitality and tolerance of the region in a way that it has never been done before.

According to Bankole Wellington (Banky W) when speaking to journalists: "Living in Lagos and growing in that part of the country, the North almost feels like another country. It gave me the opportunity to see the beauty and live with the people for a month. In fact, one of my favourite moments was when we went to Yankari game reserve and I got to see giraffes and other animals I didn't know were in the country. Seeing the festival (Durbar) was another experience." *Up North* in essence promotes all that is good about the North's culture and environment, generally downplaying the general insecurity with which it is couched in the mainstream media.

Cinema being an art form is a non-threatening medium through which human values can be communicated; values like "selflessness, unconditional love, love for enemies, reconciliation, and care for the underprivileged" it can be communicated through films and cinema. All these we find in the movie *Up North*. In addition to these values like stewardship, transparency and accountability, honesty and truthfulness, "non-violence, tolerance, love and peace" are communicated in manner that makes it desirable for the audience to in the north and among northern peoples.

Another important value of *Up North* is that it promotes some salient positive aspects of northern environment and cultures such as "beautiful and breathtaking landscapes and sights, marriage, costumes, dressing, music, burial practices" and their predisposition to positive change. The latter is reflected through the young school girls and how the youth Corp member, Bassey helped them to excel in their studies as well as becoming good and courageous athletes,

## CONCLUSION

Primarily, we have attempted to identify and ascertain how Nollywood films reflect national cultural issues that mainly tend to discourage integration. We have equally highlighted how *up North* takes a different path, focusing instead on those things that unite and make us stronger as a nation. *Up North* thus gives more prominence to integration and developmental issues that reflect those things that unite us.

Consequent upon our observation from the film analysis, the study suggests greater synergy between Nollywood directors, writers and Nigerian cultural protection agencies to see how filmmakers can be better encouraged to make movies that will promote our cultures and foster integration and unity. This will go a long way in boosting not just the cultural value of the films but will also enhance the internal and external tourism potentials of the country.

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