

# ***Nollywood* Films and the Cultural Imperialism Hypothesis**

**Eno Akpabio<sup>a</sup> and Kayode Mustapha-Lambe<sup>b</sup>**

a) Department of Media Studies, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Email: akpabio@mopipi.ub.bw

b) Mass Communication, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria

---

## **Abstract**

From the viewpoint of the cultural imperialism hypothesis and its complications, the overall aim of this study was to find out if foreign films still had a stranglehold on Nigerian audience members. The findings indicate that a majority of respondents watch and have a favorable attitude towards Nigerian home video films. However, in terms of preference between local and foreign films, a small percentage indicated preference for the former. The study concludes that the high quality of production of American films accounts for the favorable views held by respondents, even though it is apparent that these and other foreign productions no longer have a captive market in Nigeria.

## **Keywords**

Nollywood, imperialism, home videos, film, Nigeria

## **Introduction**

There can be no discussion of cultural imperialism without some mention of the more pervading imperialism that was the situation of Nigerians and other hapless people. The British had taken control of the territories that now form part of modern Nigeria—the northern and southern protectorates and the colony of Lagos. In its imperial wisdom, the British Colonialists went ahead to merge these disparate groups into one entity. That this marriage of strange bedfellows has been at—the root of some of the crises of the Nigerian state has been canvassed severally, but this need not detain us here.

Suffice to say that the British surveying the landscape truly believed that they had done a good job of civilizing the *natives*. And there was no better way than to stamp this belief on celluloid. In fact, one of the objectives of the Colonial Film Unit (CFU) was to showcase the “excellent work being done in

the heathen parts under the aegis of the Union Jack” (Ekwuazi 1987:2). Eventually the British succumbed to agitation for self-rule and films took on some other coloration.

So long as Nigerians used celluloid to make films so also was the resulting paltry harvest. One reason for this state of affairs was the high cost of production (Adesanya 1987:15). Soon enough, moviemakers hit on the idea of utilizing the videocassette format. This marked a watershed in the history of Nigerian films. The new form circumvented the complicated and more expensive process of using celluloid. Nigerian moviemakers began to churn out films, and from 1994 to 2001, the National Film and Video Censors Board had recorded 3381 films.<sup>1</sup> This figure is quite significant when compared to movie-making using celluloid. In the 1980s, there was an average of four feature films per year and the picture in the early 1990s was dismal: 1990—nil; 1991—4; 1993—3; and 1994—1 (Adesanya 1997). However, foreign films from the United States, China, and India were quite popular at cinemas and television stations, as the locally produced films could not satisfy the yearning of audience members for entertainment. Landler could not have put it better:

First technology, privatization, and economic growth vastly expand the distribution channels for media. Then because local economies are not yet big enough to finance home-grown programming, America moves in to fill the void. But as the market mature [sic] ... local producers are able to make better and more ambitious shows. (Cited in Croteau and Hoynes 1997:310)

Although Landler was referring to television, his views, with equal force, do apply to the film industry, as will become apparent.

In the particular case of Nigeria, it was actually the business class that first discovered that the film industry was a gold mine waiting to be tapped. Kenneth Nnebue, then an electronic dealer, produced the first film using the videocassette format titled *Aje Ni Iya Mi* in 1992 (Haynes and Okome 1992). Instead of relying on a low budget, which was the bane of Yoruba language productions, the new video movies “draw from the wealth of the business class. They may be backed by big merchants from Onitsha or Aba or else-

where, and the properties used to represent the lavish lifestyles which are a normal feature of these videos come through business networks of fashion houses, real estate brokers, car dealerships and firms which are often eager to provide sponsorship for the publicity value” (Haynes and Okome 1992:29).

Some questions naturally arise, given the economic empowerment of the industry: Would it be safe to assume that American and other foreign films would have lost market share? Would audience members have a greater appreciation of local productions that would naturally have a greater appeal? In other words, have Nigerian home video productions added to the complications as regards the cultural imperialism thesis? Perhaps a more detailed examination of the thesis will help.

### **Cultural Imperialism Hypothesis**

Just as there were many benefits of colonialism, there were also many evils. The introduction of Western education and improvement in health care delivery, among others, assisted the colonized people tremendously. The reverse side, for example, was the plundering of national treasures and the decimation of whole populations who dared to oppose the onslaught of the colonialists. But beyond the physical attacks and subjugation, the virtual colonization has sometimes outlived the physical disengagement from the occupied territories, hence, the relevance of the term “colonial mentality”—a state where one is completely taken in by the propaganda of the former colonial rulers, resulting in a larger-than-life image in the minds of those so afflicted. Uche (1996) relates this malady to cultural products when he opined that “There is a symptomatic *addiction* [emphasis his] to the foreign cultural products in the host country, which is always itself changing as a result of the underlying levels of familiarization and the added cultural norms and content are, by this last stage in the process, no longer simply imposed on people as the features of economic and political co-orientation once were” (p. 55). In other words, unlike the colonial enterprise that was imposed in many instances by force of arms, cultural imperialism is subtle until it gets to the critical stage of addiction.

While Uche attributes the acceptance of cultural products to familiarization, MacBride et al. (1980) see it as occasioned by industrialized countries that are powerful, richer, and have far better infrastructure than their developing counterparts. They hold the view that effects of intellectual and cultural dependence are as serious as those of political subjection or economic dependence.

But really, is the concern about cultural domination misplaced? This question is relevant because Croteau and Hoynes (1997) identify two key limitations: First, that exposure to these cultural products will not create people in the image of the originating country and, second, that the dominance is never total. In other words, American films, for instance, can be the genre enthralling audience members while local pop stars are preferred over and above their American counterparts.

## **Statement of the Problem**

There can be no doubt that foreign films used to dominate the Nigerian landscape. But in recent times, the filmmakers utilizing the video format have made impressive gains. It is an industry that produces 1,000 films, generates 300,000 jobs, and has a growth rate of 6% annually.<sup>2</sup>

The study was therefore interested in determining if the viewing pattern of audience members had shifted from foreign films to Nigerian productions. Accordingly, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the attitude of audience members towards Nigerian home video films?
2. To what extent do Nigerian home video films rate favorably or unfavorably with foreign films in terms of story treatment and technical quality?

## **Methodology**

Survey is a technique that is most commonly used by behavioral scientists (Sobowale 1983). And since this study aims at investigating behavior, and specifically attitude, the survey method was used. There are different approaches to survey research, including telephone and personal interview (Sobowale 1983; Manheim et al. 1986; Nachimas and Nachimas 1992). However, this study utilized the face-to-face interview because it guaranteed a much higher return rate (Sobowale 1983).

The population of this study is made up of the 7,877,809 million residents of Lagos State (National Population Data Sheet, 1991-2010). The study utilized multi-stage cluster sampling of Lagos residents. This sampling strategy was adopted because it is the most appropriate for sampling a geographically dispersed population (Burton 2000), as is the case with Lagos, which has many far-flung settlements. This sampling technique requires selecting a specific geographic area, narrowing it down progressively to a smaller unit, then houses and finally individuals (Wimmer and Dominick 2000).

Based on the foregoing, with the aid of a table of random numbers, the following areas were selected: Ikoyi, Onike/Akoka, and Bariga. All streets in each area were listed with the aid of the Lagos Street Finder in Multichoice Nigeria 2002 Diary. With the aid of a table of random numbers, ten streets were sub-



sequently selected from each residential area, thus making 30 streets in all. Forty-eight copies of the questionnaire were distributed and administered to the residents in each of the streets, thus making a total of 1440 respondents. Respondents for each street were picked, with the aid of the table of random numbers, from 30 houses or flats. One respondent was randomly picked from one house or flat (Wimmer and Dominick 2000).

For the purpose of determining residents' preferred home videos, Interviews were conducted with individuals who manned video rental shops located in the area of study. The home video rental shops were Video Class, 31 Awolowo Road, Ikoyi; AB Sapamart Onike, Yaba; and an unnamed video shop located at 13 Oloruntoyin Street, Bariga. The following films were quite popular: *Outcast 1 and 2*, *To Rise Again*, *Heaven Must Wait*, *Hot Secret* and *Sharon Stone*.

A pilot study was conducted for the purpose of collecting data necessary for the design of the final questionnaire used for this study. Consequently, a questionnaire was designed. During the pilot study, 15 copies of the questionnaire were given out to residents of Ikoyi, Akoka, and Bariga. Out of the 15 copies of the questionnaire administered, 14 were retrieved, thus giving a return rate of 93%.

During the pilot study, a number of problems were noticed. The home video films selected for the study had not been watched by some of the respondents. Also, many of the respondents were not familiar with the ranking option accompanying some questions. In addition, questions that should have enabled respondents to show their level of agreement constrained respondents to pick either "yes" or "no." These problem questions were corrected during the validation of the instrument.

The development of the final questionnaire took into consideration the observations of experts<sup>3</sup> as well as the result of the pilot study. The questionnaire was amended to reflect observed problems. This was done to achieve standardization of research instrument and reliability of data gathered. In validating the questionnaire, effort was made to achieve the goals of easy comprehension, simplicity, and conciseness.

During the validation, the researcher simplified the questions and made allowance for open-ended questions and levels of agreements using dichotomous and Likert scales as well as rank—ordering techniques. A provision was also made for respondents who had not watched the films selected for this study so that they could indicate such and fill in the names of the films they had watched.

A reliability test was also conducted. As Wimmer and Dominick (2000) see it, reliability consists of stability, internal consistency, and equivalency. The second component of reliability—internal consistency—is of primary concern to this study, as it involves examining the consistency of performance among the items that make up a scale. The split-half technique was adopted in scoring the pilot study questionnaire in order to determine the reliability of the study instrument. The questionnaire items were split into two: odd-numbered items were categorized as x, while the even-numbered items were categorized as y. The correlation coefficient was computed as follows:

	X	X <sup>2</sup>	Y	Y <sup>2</sup>	XY
1	14	196	23	529	322
2	53	2809	28	784	1484
3	39	1521	22	484	858
4	37	1369	44	1936	1628
5	48	2304	16	256	768
6	14	196	17	289	238
7	17	289	32	1024	544
8	31	961	18	324	558
9	34	1156	31	961	1054

$$\begin{aligned}
 &= \frac{(9)(7454) - (287)(231)}{\sqrt{[(9)(1080) - (82369)][(9)(6587) - 53361]}} \\
 &= \frac{789}{\sqrt{(14840)(5922)}} = \frac{789}{\sqrt{(121.81)(76.95)}} \\
 &= \frac{789}{9373.27} = 0.084 \\
 r_{XX} &= \frac{2(0.084)}{1 + 0.084} \\
 &= \frac{0.168}{1.084} \\
 &= 0.15
 \end{aligned}$$

Since the result would naturally apply to half the test, it was corrected using the following formula:

$$r_{XX} = \frac{2(\text{roc})}{1 + \text{roc}}$$

The result obtained was 0.15. And since the result is positive, as opposed to negative, the instrument was considered dependable and suitable (Wimmer and Dominick 2000:280).

### Findings

Of the 1440 copies of the questionnaire distributed for this study, 1431 were retrieved, giving a response rate of 99.3%.

**Table 1**  
Summary of Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristics	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	Total
Age	Below 15 years (5.0)	16-25 years (43.3)	26-35 years (30.9)	36-45 years (13.6)	46-55 years (4.9)	56 years (2.3)		100
Sex	Male (60.0)	Female (40.0)	–	–	–	–		100
Highest Level of Education	Primary 6 (7.0)	School Cert. (25.5)	HSC/A Levels (13.8)	OND (12.2)	NCE (3.2)	HND B.Sc (28.5)	Higher Degrees (2.9)	100
Yearly Estimated Income (N)	Below N100,000 (49.0)	100,001-300,000 (18.8)	300001-500000 (14.5)	500001-700000 (6.7)	100001 above (11.0)	–		100
Occupation	Civil Servant (19.1)	Student (43.4)	Business (29.7)	Others (7.8)				100
Religion	Christian (73.7)	Muslim (24.3)	Traditional (1.9)	Others (0.1)	–	–		100
Area	Ikoyi (33.7)	Akoka/Onike (33.1)	Bariga (33.2)	–	–	–		100

The sample for this study was drawn from Ikoyi (33.7%), representing upper class; Akoka/Onike (33.1%), representing middle class; and Bariga (33.2%), representing lower class. The majority of respondents were between the ages of 16-25 years (43.3%). This age range was followed by those between 26-35 years (30.9%), 36-45 years (13.6%), below 15 years (5.0%), 46-55 years (4.9%), and 56 years and above (2.3%), respectively. There were more male respondents (60%) than female respondents (40%). Respondents' levels of education were as follows: Primary Six Certificate (7.0%), School Certificate (25.5%), HSC/A Levels (13.8%), OND (12.2%) NCE (3.2%), HND/BSc (28.5%), while respondents with higher degrees accounted for 9.9%. Yearly estimated incomes of respondents were as follows. Below ₦100,000 (49.0%); ₦100,001-₦300,000 (18.8%); ₦300,001-₦500,001 (14.5%); ₦500,000-₦700,000 (6.7%); and ₦700,001 and above (11.0%). The majority of respondents were students (43.4%), followed by those in business (29.7%), civil servants (19.1%), while other occupations accounted for 7.8%. In terms of religious affiliation, Christian respondents accounted for 73.7%, Moslems 24.3%, traditional religion adherents (1.9%), and others 0.1% (see Table 1 above).

**Table 2**  
Respondents' Viewership of the Home Video Films

Viewership of Home Video Films	Frequency	%
Yes	1270	88.7
No	138	9.6
Missing Cases	23	1.6
Total	1431	100

Table 2 clearly indicates that an overwhelming majority of respondents (88.7%) watch Nigerian home video films. This finding tallies with the findings of the National Film and Video Censors Board (1998), in its survey on the attitude of adolescents in Lagos State towards Nigerian home video films.

The study revealed that 78.9% of the respondents watched these films. It is also in line with Vivian's (1995) view that human beings have had an enduring fascination with movies right from the invention of the technology that made it possible. The finding of this study is also in agreement with Adesanya's (1997) postulation that what the films using the celluloid format could not achieve, *videographers* have accomplished with ease—acceptance of Nigerian films.

**Table 3**

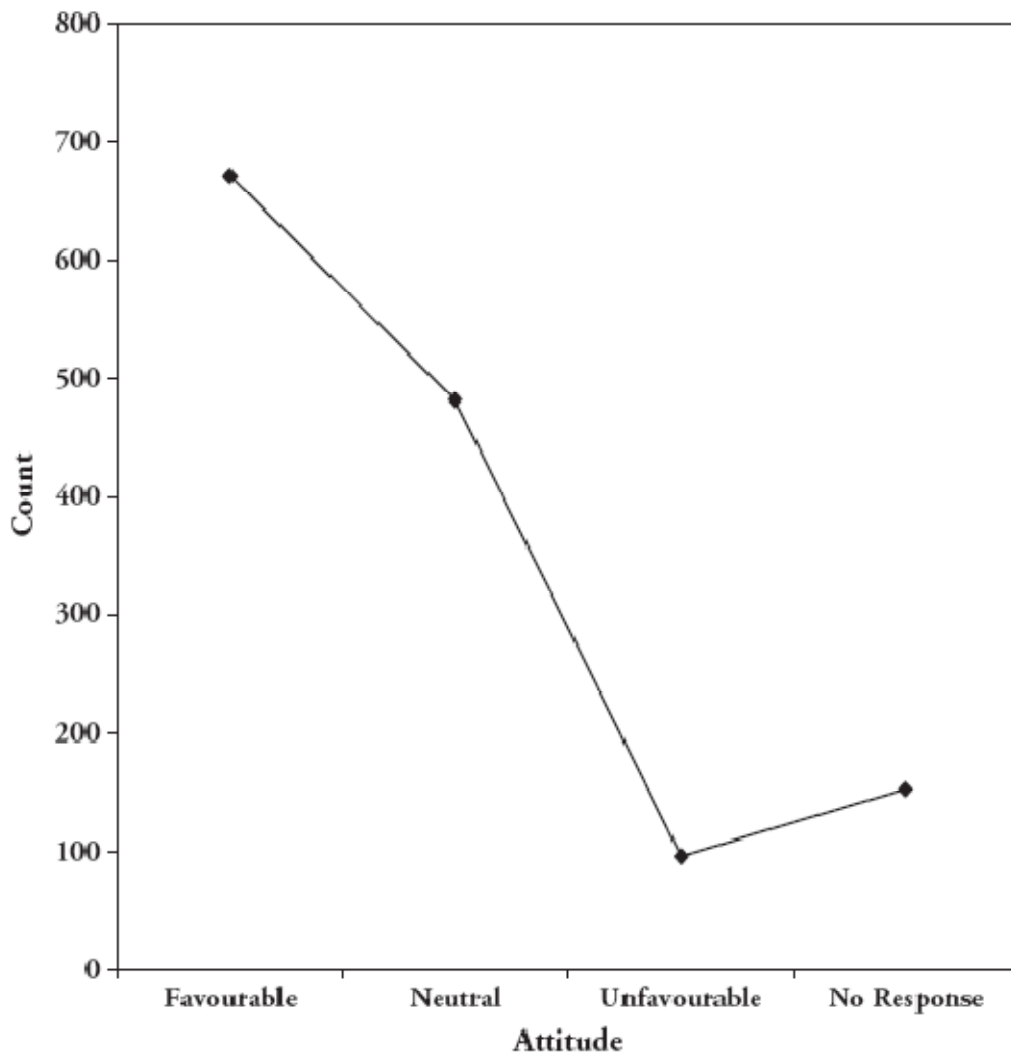
Chi-square Test on Respondents' Attitude Towards  
Nigerian Home Video Films

	Attitude Group	Observed (n)	Expected (n)	Residual
How would you describe your attitude to Nigerian home video films?	Favourable	672	416.7	255.3
	Neutral	482	416.7	65.3
	Unfavourable	96	416.7	-320.7
	Total	1250		

Chi-square test

Value	Df	Assymp. Sig
413.498	2	.000

**Figure 1 Graph Showing Repondents' Attitude to Nigerian Home Video Films**



From Table 3, it is clear that a majority of respondents (672) have a favourable attitude towards Nigerian home video films, with a very small number of respondents (96) indicating an unfavourable attitude. Four hundred and eighty-two respondents expressed neutrality. The calculated chi-square value of 413.498 with 2 df is significant with P value of  $.000 < .05$ . This finding is underscored by NFVCB's (2000; 2002) findings that there is a boom in the home video industry. The Censors Board recorded 1,035 films in 2001, up from 3 in 1994.

**Table 4**  
Choice Between Local and Foreign Films

Types of Film	1	2	3	M
Foreign Films	267 (18.7%)	154 (10.8%)	685 (47.9%)	325 (22.7%)
Local films in English	185 (12.9%)	373 (26.1%)	567 (39.6%)	306 (21.4%)
Local film in Local Languages	407 (28.4%)	215 (15.0%)	413 (28.9%)	396 (27.7%)

Key: 1—Least liked  
3—most liked  
M—Missing cases

Respondents expressed a preference for foreign films (47.9%) over and above local films in English (39.6%) and local films in local languages (28.9%). However, a combination of the percentages indicating a liking for local films generally is greater than the percentage recorded for liking foreign films. This finding is thus in tandem with that of the NFVCB study (1998), where respondents expressed a preference for local films.



## Conclusion

The findings of the study clearly indicates that the majority of respondents watch Nigerian home video films and also have a favourable attitude towards these productions. However, when it comes to preference between local and foreign films, only a small percentage of respondents prefer local home videos to foreign films.

One reason for this is undoubtedly the quality of production of American films that tend to have substantial budgets resulting in very slick and attractive production values. The Hollywood blockbuster relies on dramatically photographed scenes, pyrotechnics and gripping chase sequences to hold audience's

attention. All these things are very expensive to produce—more expensive than most non-US production studios can afford.

The kind of money that goes into these productions makes them a compelling watch. A notable example is *Titanic* that cost a whopping \$200 million, just about \$1 million for each minute of screen time (Croteau and Hoynes 2001). Nigerian productions even with the money coming from the business class do not come near to having this kind of money by any stretch of the imagination. In fact, the outcry against the poor quality of local films, according to Adesanya (1997), led to escalation of budgets from N50,000 to N250,000 and then to a few million Naira. Considering the exchange rate, these increases are really a pittance compared to the production cost of American films. And there is usually a strong link between a high budget and the recruitment of talents that will make productions a huge success.

More significant is the fact that Nigerian home video films have become a footnote to the complications of the cultural imperialism thesis itemized by Croteau and Hoynes (1997:308 -309) as follows:

- Brazilian preference for *telenovelas* over the American soap opera *Dallas*;
- In Britain, infatuation with American programming was replaced in the 1980s with home-grown fare;
- India has the most productive movie industry in the world;
- Despite the influence of American artists, local music stars account for three-quarters of Japanese record sales;
- And Nigerian movie industry has come into its own and is preferred by the majority of Lagos residents and, by extension, Nigerians.

The natural conclusion is that the run of American and foreign films in Nigeria is slowing considerably because the local population increasingly prefers locally-produced programs that reflect their local culture.

## References

- Adesanya, Afolabi. 1997. "From Film to Video." Pp. 13-20 in *Nigerian Video Films.*, edited by Jonathan Haynes. Lagos: Kraft Books Limited.
- Burton, Dawn. 2000. "Design Issues in Survey Research." Pp. 167-178 in *Research Training for Social Scientists*, edited by Dawn Burton. London: Sage Publication.
- Croteau, David and William Hoynes. 1997. *Media/Society: Image, Industries and Audiences.* Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press.
- . 2001. *The Business of Media: Corporate Media and the Public Interest.* Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press.
- Ekwuazi, Hyginus. 1987. *Film in Nigeria.* Ibadan: Moonlight Publishers.

- Frankfort-Nachimas Chava and David Nachimas, 1992. *Research Methods in the Social Sciences*. London: Edward Arnold.
- MacBride, Sean et al. 1980. *Many Voices, One World*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Manheim, Jarol. and Richard Rich. 1986. *Empirical Political Analysis: Research Methods in Political Science*. New York: Longman.
- National Population Data Sheet. 1991-2010.
- National Film and Video Censors Board. 1998. *The Impact of Video Films on Children and Adolescents in Lagos State*. Abuja: National Film and Video Censors Board.
- . 2000. *6-Year Report: 1994-2000*. Lagos: George Print.
- Sobowale, Idowu. 1983. *Scientific Journalism*. Lagos: John West Publications.
- Uche, Luke. 1996. "Cultural Imperialism Hypothesis Revisited". Pp. 49-58 in *North-South Information Culture Trends in Global Communication and Research Paradigm*, edited Luke Uka Uche. Lagos: Longman.
- Vivian, John. 1995. *The Media of Mass Communication (Third Edition)*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Wimmer, Roger and Joseph Dominick. 2000. *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Inc.