

Deconstructing Collywood: A Conceptual Discourse on the Anglophonisation and Nigerianisation of Cameroon’s Video Film Industry

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ABSTRACT

Since its inception in 2008, the Cameroonian video film industry (codenamed Collywood) has attracted a mitigated criticism from both Cameroonian and foreign commentators. This criticism has partly bordered on the “camerooness” versus the “foreignness” of Collywood. While a number of critics are of the persuasion that the above mentioned cinematic movement is not only nigerianised but one of the multiple vectors of the nigerianisation of the Cameroonian cinema industry, others instead think that, by copying the Nollywood model, Cameroonian cineastes may boost their film production and ultimately inundate the local market with movies that speak to local cultures and reflect the quotidian experiences of Cameroonians. Using three methods of data collection (namely secondary sources, unofficial interviews with cineastes and critical observations), this paper revisits the above mentioned debate and some of the thorny issues that have stemmed from the emergence, evolution and enculturation of Collywood. The paper aims specifically at examining the camerooness versus the nigerianess of the Collywood movement. The paper attains four principal objectives: in the first place, it critically examines the creation and vision of Collywood, as well as its representativeness of Cameroon’s socio-cultural dynamics. In the second place, it explores the extent to which Collywood may be said to capture the aspirations of Cameroonian cineastes. Thirdly, the paper critically examines the extent to which Collywood is a nigerianised movement and an agent of the Nollywoodisation of the Cameroonian film industry. In the last place, it shows how the idea of copying the Nollywood model may enable or has been enabling the success of Collywood. Among other findings, the paper argues that Collywood is majorly a Nollywoodised Anglophone movement. Its Nigerianisation is just an inevitable outcome of the globalisation/trans-nationalisation of the Nollywood model.

Keywords: Collywood, Nollywood, Transnational Cinema, Nationalism, Cameroon Film Industry

INTRODUCTION

The forces of globalisation and trans-nationalisation have these last decades, tremendously influenced many, if not all areas of the cultural landscape in Cameroon. From fashion through music to dance, religion and architecture, the Cameroonian culture, as a whole, has been very dynamic. This cultural landscape has been evolving under the influence of a complex mix of both internal and external factors. The above mentioned scenario is clearly evidenced by the emergence of various (post-) modern and modernising currents in the different sub-sectors of the Cameroonian

culture, notably popular music, fashion, religion and education among others. Some of these emerging currents include the Afro-zouk, Ganster rap, Hip-pop and RnB movements in the Cameroonian music industry and the un-natural coloured hairstyles and tattooing paradigm which now characterise popular cultures in Cameroon (Africultures 2006). Another evidence of foreign influences on the Cameroonian cultures is observed in the growing popularisation of Western architecture in most Cameroonian urban spaces; (Endong 2019) as well as the proliferation of postmodern currents such as the prosperity gospel (an American Pentecostal concept) and Nigerian Pentecostalism in various movements practicing Cameroonian Christianities (Mbe 2002).

In tandem with this cultural dynamism, the Cameroonian cinema industry has been profoundly touched by various forms of foreign influences. Part of these exogenous influences has come from neighbouring Nigeria, thanks partly to the trans-nationalisation of various Nollywood production paradigms. In effect, many Cameroonian filmmakers have sought to copy the Nollywood filmmaking model on the basis that such a model has remarkably worked for Nigerian cineastes and is therefore, bound to work for Cameroonian filmmakers. Part of this copying tendency has led to the birth in 2008, of a cinematic movement called Collywood. In theory, the Collywood cinematic movement engulfs cineastes who produce movies essentially on video format. Like Nigerian video films, these Cameroonian movies are shot with minute budgets, and within a very brief period of time – generally within weeks. Most Collywood cineastes are English speaking. They are hardly products of cinema or TV training colleges and mostly go through on-the-job training (Fai 2019; Keresztesi 2018; Tchouaffe 2006). They also visibly seek to copy Nollywood cinematic and business models as they tend to produce rapidly and cheaply. Additionally these Collywood filmmakers mainly seek to tailor their cinematic production according to the taste and preferences of the Cameroonian audiences. Their filmic productions are obviously essentially for materialistic purposes.

Since its inception, the Collywood movement has attracted a mitigated criticism that partly borders on its “camerooness” versus its “foreignness”. A number of critics – particularly Cameroonian commentators and scholars such as Zigotto (2012) and Kennedy (2014) – are of the persuasion that the movement is glaringly an offshoot of the Nigerian film industry, as well as a vector of the nigerianisation of the Cameroonian cinema industry; meanwhile, other commentators and cineastes (notably Ntedju cited in Maimounatou 2020) and Bertha (2002) think it is instead a valuable springboard for inundating the Cameroonian market with films that speak to local cultures and reflect the quotidian experiences of Cameroonians living in the country as well as in Diaspora. A number of Cameroonian scholars – notably Bertha (2002) – even argue that through the instrumentality of benchmarking, Cameroonian filmmakers could use the Nollywood model to revive the Cameroonian film industry.

Using secondary sources unofficial interviews with a handful of Collywood filmmakers and critical observations, this paper revisits some of the thorny debates that have stemmed from the emergence and evolution of the Collywood movement in the Cameroon cinema landscape. The paper specifically focuses on the camerooness versus the nigerianess of Collywood. It hinges on the belief that an honest and critical assessment of Collywood will go a long way to contribute to charting a better roadmap for the Cameroonian cinema industry in general and the Cameroonian video film production in particular.

In line with the above understanding, the paper seeks to attain four principal objectives. In the first place, the paper critically examines the creation and vision of Collywood, as well as its representativeness of Cameroon socio-cultural dynamics. In the second place, it explores the extent to which Collywood may be said to capture the aspirations of Cameroonian cineastes. In the third instance, the paper critically examines the extent to which Collywood is a nigerialised movement and an agent of the Nollywoodisation of the Cameroonian film industry. In the last place, it shows how the idea of copying the Nollywood model may enable or has been enabling the success of Collywood.

METHODOLOGY

This paper hinges on the descriptive research model. By definition, this design seeks to systematically describe the facts or characteristics of a phenomenon, a situation or a population under study (Rillo & Alieto 2018). It involves observing, examining and documenting the behaviour of a subject without influencing it in any way. It also involves the examination of views and opinions pertaining to the subject under study (De Lima 2011). According to Dulock (1993), studies that fall under the descriptive research model “provide an accurate portrayal or account of characteristics of a particular individual, situation or group. [They] are a means of discovering new meaning, describing what exists, determining the frequency with which something occurs and/or categorising information” (Dulock 1993: 154). In this study, the author sought particularly to examine the state of the Cameroonian video film industry. He explores and examines features of the “anglophonisation” and nigerianisation of the video film industry.

The paper deployed two principal methods of data collection namely a systematic exploitation of relevant secondary data (otherwise called documentary analysis) and the use of critical observations. The documentary analysis consisted in relying on a review of relevant journal articles, encyclopaedias, book chapters, edited volumes, online sources and other literary sources to collect recent/current data for the analyses presented in paper. The critical observation part of the methodology consisted in using senses and personal experience to collect relevant data and substantiate the ideas and arguments presented in the paper. The researcher also deployed unofficial unstructured interviews with a handful of Cameroonian video filmmakers from January to May 2022. These interviews enabled the researcher to triangulate the data collected through documentary analysis and critical observations.

The data collected through a review of secondary sources, critical observations and unofficial interviews were analysed through qualitative approaches. In effect, the data were organised according to subthemes related to the central topic/title of the paper that is the camerooness, foreignness and nigerianisation of the Cameroonian video film industry. These subthemes constitute or inform the different sub-sections of the subsequent part of this paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section addresses the four objectives of the paper. These objectives include (i) critically examine the creation and vision of Collywood, as well as its representativeness of

Cameroon socio-cultural dynamics; (ii) explore the extent to which Collywood may be said to capture the aspirations of Cameroonian cineastes; (iii) critically examines the extent to which Collywood is a nigerialised movement and an agent of the Nollywoodisation of the Cameroonian film industry; and (iv) show how the idea of copying the Nollywood model may enable or has been enabling the success of Collywood.

A BRIEF INCURSION INTO THE BIRTH AND STATE OF COLLYWOOD

It is hard to lay hands on credible literature that provides the exact date on which video filmmaking started in Cameroon. Most sources “speculate” that the production of films on video format in the country started in the last part of the 1990s (Voice of America 2009) or the early part of the 2000s. Such speculations follow from the observation that, a handful of mostly cross-cultural films were released during these two periods by Cameroonians (Kanjjo, 2010; Nalova 2016; Fai, 2019). According to the Voice of America (2009), the very first Cameroonian video film was produced in 1995. Titled *Love has Eyes*, this film was shot by Mfuh Ebenezer. Voice of America’s (2009) claim that the first Anglophone Cameroon video film was released in 1995 loses sight of some very early Cameroonian productions, notably Charles Enonchong’s *Witchdoctor of the Living Dead* which was released in 1985.

Other early video films produced by Cameroonians were released in the early 2000s. The Cameroon-based film production firm Splash Network, for instance supported the shooting of the film *Peace Offering* in Bafut (Cameroon) in 2003; meanwhile Anglophone Cameroonian Gilbert Agbor Ebot shot his *Before the Sunrise* in 2005. In spite of these early cinematic productions, the Collywood film movement is popularly said to have veritably sprung up in 2008 with the creation by both Anglophone and Francophone cineastes of a body called the “Cameroon Film Industry Incorporated” (CFI inc). This body evolved and became Collywood the year that followed (Ndogmo 2010; Robold 2017). From its creation, the movement sought to emulate the Nigerian video film industry, not only by adopting a name which very much resembles that of its Nigerian counterpart, but also by embracing “un-Hollywood” and non-conformist production and distribution paradigms. One of such non-conformist paradigms has been the culture of producing cheaply to sell fast (Balancing Act 2012, Zigoto, 2012).

The brains behind the creation of the Collywood movement include the likes of Gilbert Agbor Ebot – who has been a popular figure in the Nigerian film industry – and other prominent faces such as Waa Nkeng Musi, Otia Vitalis and Vugar Samson among others. However, the majority of the industry’s founding fathers are mere film enthusiasts and “guerrilla videastes” with little or no formal training in filmmaking, theatre, audio-visual production or mass communication. In a commentary article, Cameroon film director Zigoto (2012) describes the early human resources that pushed the Collywood concept. He uses a clearly derogatory tone in his description of these human resources. In effect, in this article, Zigoto depicts attendance at a 2009 meeting organised by Collywood’s founders, a meeting he personally attended. He says:

The meeting was made up of a mixture some young gossips and some English speaking Cameroonians whose understanding of filmmaking was far from ideological conceptions, theories as well as understanding [of] the history and evolution of world cinema and

Cameroon cinema. The young amateurs who had neither training nor qualification as filmmakers, but just may be because an aunt or an uncle had offered them camcorders from the Western world [thought] they [could now] go around shooting films difficult to view in Cameroon and International contexts. [This] puzzled me. (Zigoto 2012: 3)

The rareness of professionals and sufficiently trained hands in the movement right from inception seems to have favoured the proliferation and survival of many “un-cinematic”, amateurish and capitalistic practices in the industry. A case in point is the “guerrilla video filmmaking” paradigm which has characterised the movement from its inception till recently. In effect, even though veteran Cameroonian actor and Collywood icon Otia Vitalis (cited in Mbong 2016) claims the country’s video film industry has over the years improved in terms of quantity and quality of films released, Collywood productions have, in their majority, remained poorly rated by commentators. Balancing Act (2012) highlights this regrettable development in its assessment of production quality of most Collywood films. The observer pointedly remarks that:

[In the Cameroonian video film industry,] amateurism has made his bed. This is the kingdom of untrained men who make films financed with their own funds (usually medium-length films), with little means and in just a few days. Generally, they use volunteers recruited in their immediate surroundings. They film with camcorders. The better off use HDV or DVCAM cameras. The result is often films in French with bad stories, a [crappy] theatrical plot, bad actors and technical problems so numerous that it would be pointless to begin to identify them. Worse, films are often badly burned and provided on badly printed hard covers. The most economical players use a single sheet of paper stapled on the CD with minimal information: the film title and the director's name. (Balancing Act, 2012: 9-10)

It is difficult to obtain credible statistics on the prolificacy of the Collywood movement. However, commentators such as Ndogmo (2012) and Robold (2017) estimate that Collywood averagely produces 80 films per years. By 2010, the movement had churned out over 300 feature films, and pulled together over 150 film production firms. The movement is thus characterised by cineastes who rely on small budgets that range between 200,000 and 7,000 000 Francs CFA to shoot film on video (VCDs and DVDs) (Robold 2017; Gebah 2016). The main motives of these Collywood cineastes are to educate and entertain their audiences principally to achieve material profits (Santanerra 2016; 2019). In an interview granted Ndogmo (2012) a onetime national coordinator of the movement Waa Musi attempts to rationalise this materialistic orientation of Collywood cineastes. He explained that: “ *Dans un pays où on ne compte aucune salle de cinéma, l’avenir du cinéma est dans la home vidéo [...] nous avons voulu profiter de l’intérêt que les gens avaient déjà pour le cinéma nigérian, essentiellement basé sur le home vidéo.* [in a country where there is no cinema hall, the future of cinema is in the home video format [...] We wanted to capitalise on the interest people already had in the Nigerian cinema which is essentially based on the home video model] (My translation)” (cited in Dogmo 2012).

COLLYWOOD AS AN ANGLOPHONE-DOMINATED OR A STRICTLY ANGLOPHONE VIDEO FILM MOVEMENT

Since its inception, the Collywood cinematic movement has been Anglophone-dominated. A number of Francophone video filmmakers do claim to be members of the movement. Others - notably Zigoto - have even worked in close collaboration with their English-speaking counterparts. However, the movement has majorly been Anglophone, judging by the cultural origins of the heads that constitute the movement's guilds and of the cineastes that are active in the movement. When the movement sprang up in 2008, it adopted the name "Cameroon Film Industry Incorporated" (CFI Inc) and professed its vision/mantra to work for the interests of both Anglophone and Francophone video filmmakers in Cameroon. The website of the movement even bore a message stipulating that: "The Cameroon film industry (CFI) [...] saw the need to unite with their francophone brothers who came with a mutual understanding as artists with similar vision and let go their egos to join the CFI as one people with a common goal" (CFI Inc 2016).

However, in spite of these (meager and unclear) efforts at structuring the movement as an extremely inclusive force, Anglophone-Francophone rivalries have characterized Collywood in particular and the Cameroon film industry in general. An illustration of this issue was seen in 2016, when the Cameroonian Ministry of Arts and Culture chose to work with the Cameroon Film Federation (CFF), an organization created unofficially before the CFI Inc, and in which mainly Anglophones – including Collywood's president Agbor Gilbert – were executive members. The Ministry actually sought to use the CFF as selection committee for Cameroonian films to the Oscars. Many Francophone cineastes "pooh-poohed" the idea through mediated criticism and petitions. These actions were massively interpreted as Francophone cineastes' resistance to the Anglophones' domination of the administration of the country's film industry (Robold, 2017). For instance, Francophone film director Narcisse Wandji (2016) wrote a petition in which he called on the Ministry of Arts and Culture to revoke or revise the Cameroon Film Federation. Wandji's petition hinged among other things on the apparent clandestine status of the CFF and the fact that the film selected by the CFF to represent Cameroon wasn't actually Cameroonian in the strict sense of the word. The selected film in question was *Yaahan Ameena Bikti Hai*, which, in reality, was produced by Indian film director Kumar Raj. The film happened to have drawn the attention of the CFF only because it has a handful of scenes where Cameroonian actors feature. Francophone Cameroonian filmmakers saw the selection of the Indian film as an act which is not only to the detriment of purely Cameroonian films but a clear marker of the CFF's incompetence. Thus Francophone filmmakers viewed the whole scheme as a shame for Cameroon. However, international observers such as Robold (2017) have interpreted this sentiment as an evident resistance to Anglophone domination of the administration of the film industry in Cameroon. Robold (2017) also highlights other causes of apparent incompatibility and rivalries between Francophone and Anglophone cineastes in Collywood. These causes range from cultural, linguistic and historical differences to the types of aesthetics and cinematic styles preferred by the cineaste. She notes that:

What seems to define filmmaking in Anglophone Cameroon therefore is a similar model to the one of Nigeria, that is a system where movies are shot with very small budgets, over short periods of time, and with a star system which helps marketing the movies. When talking to Francophone filmmakers, they seem to insist more on the significance of the film and

on its aesthetic and artistic qualities; it thus seems that Anglophone cineastes are aiming at making popular films mainly for entertainment purposes, while Francophones see cinema in a more intellectual sense, and perhaps more influenced by French perceptions. We could assume that this difference of vision is what fosters disagreements between both sides, and prevents them from working closely together for the promotion of Cameroonian cinema as there is no consensus on what this national cinema should look like. (Robold 2017: 36-37)

It should however be highlighted that, by the above mentioned citation, Robold simply regurgitates the popular assumptions made about French speaking and English speaking cineastes in Africa as a whole. According to these assumptions, close dependence on French cultural institutions for finances and cultural/intellectual imperialism have caused most Francophone cineastes to be obsessed with exogenous film aesthetics which most often do not appeal to local film consumers (Adesokan 2008; Hayes 2011). The same assumptions stipulate that contrary to their Francophone counterparts, Anglophone cineastes in Africa are more inclined to producing popular films for commercial success (Sharon 1998, Bengar 2012). In the light of practices and popular production paradigms in contemporary Cameroon's video film industry, these assumptions do not really hold waters. As has been observed by Balancing Act (2017) on one hand and Ndogmo (2012) on the other hand, majority of Cameroonian video filmmakers tend to adopt the same non-conformist production paradigms, irrespective of their being Anglophone or Francophone. These production paradigms are replicas of various aspects of the Nollywood model, as will be illustrated in greater details in the subsequent parts of this paper.

In tandem with the above counter theory (the fact that both Francophone and Anglophone Cameroonian video filmmakers copy the Nollywood model), it will be faulty to ground any discourse on rivalries between Francophone and Anglophone in linguistic/cultural or aesthetical differences. As rightly observed by Fai (2020: 47), cinematic styles are not relevant parameters for differentiating Francophone from Anglophone Cameroonian video films. Fai further explains that "Despite [...] inherited colonial differences, contemporary movies in both [Anglophone and Francophone Cameroon] cinemas revealed a tendency towards symmetry by adopting the African storytelling cinematic approach, dominated by popular movies".

Anglophone-Francophone rivalries may rather be rationalised with the aid of what is commonly called the "Anglophone Problem". This problem stems partly from Cameroon's tri-cultural colonial background. In effect, the country was annexed in 1884 by Germany. However, following the defeat of Germany in the First World War and the signing of the Versailles Treaty, Cameroon was partitioned in two mandate territories: West Cameroon (that cover 20% of today's Cameroon territory) and East Cameroon which was over 80% of the territory. West Cameroon was administered as an integral part of neighboring Nigeria by Britain; while East Cameroon was administered by France as a colony separate from it French Central African Empire. The two territories (East and West Cameroons) were reunited upon independence in 1960, after a plebiscite in which Anglophone Cameroonians were asked to choose between joining Nigeria and reuniting with Cameroon as a step towards acquiring independence from Britain. This historical events account for the presence of Anglophone and francophone cultures in Cameroon. Anglophones constitute 20% of the present Cameroonian population while Francophones constitute the remaining 80%. They (Anglophones) have a national minority status in the country.

Anglophones' minority status has resulted in what is commonly called the Anglophone problem. This problem technically revolves around the age old tribal discriminations and social exclusion Anglophone communities claim to systemically suffer in the country as a result of their national minority status. This problem has had as one of its ramifications the "Anglophone complex". By this complex, some English Cameroonians remain extremely sensitive to cultural/tribal differences with their Francophone counterparts and tend to see the Francophone majority in the country as an oppressive force (Fai 2020). By the same complex, Anglophones most often feel they are second class citizens in Cameroon, contrary to their Francophone counterparts who exhibit consciousness of their majority status (Besong 2020). In tandem with this, there, has, in the popular Cameroonian imaginary, emerged a kind of subtle competition/rivalry opposing Anglophones and Francophones in various sectors of the Cameroonian economy (PeaceTech Lab 2020). The existence of tensions between Anglophone and Francophone filmmakers and the related Anglophone domination in the Collywood could, to some extent, be linked to this Francophone-Anglophone complex. Such a domination could also be seen as a visible manifestation of the Anglophone complex. Such complex is clearly legible in Cameroon Film Industry Incorporated's mantra mentioned on the organisation's website and in the earlier parts of this section. The mantra makes mention of "Francophone brothers" who decided to "let go their egos to join the CFI as one people" with their Anglophones brothers (CFI Inc 2016). This mention in itself indicates not only a complex but rivalries between Francophone and Anglophone cineastes in Collywood.

Anglophone domination of the Collywood movement has spurred many commentators into opining that the movement is essentially an Anglophone cultural current rather than an all-embracing film industry which is really representative of the Cameroonian socio-cultural dynamics. On this basis, critics such as Robold (2017) and Nalova (2015) think it wouldn't be appropriate to label it a Cameroonian/national film industry, but Anglophone video film industry. In line with this, many commentators and Cameroonian cineastes are of the persuasion that the movement represents neither the two main socio-cultural groups of Cameroon, nor the aspirations of all Cameroonian cineastes. In effect, not all Cameroonian filmmakers view Collywood as a genuine national symbol for Cameroon's cinema or a good image maker for Cameroonian cineastes (Vlad 2019; Keresztesi 2018; Africultures 2004). A number of filmmakers – particularly those trained in foreign academies – frown at the fact that the label (Collywood) which is visibly an imitation of "Nollywood" and "Hollywood", was adopted to refer to a national film industry. Film director Zigoto (2012) is of the persuasion that it would have been better to maintain the historical brand name of the Cameroon movie industry (CFI-Cameroon Film Industry), instead of adopting Collywood which to him is "an atrocious imitation of the ideology behind Hollywood".

CAMEROONNESS VS FOREIGNNESS OF COLLYWOOD

On paper, Collywood is born out of the ingenuity of a number of Cameroonian cineastes who have had intimate contact with the Nigerian film industry. The likes of Agbor Gilbert who are some of the founding fathers of the movement have acted in many Nollywood films. These prominent figures of the Cameroonian video film industry have also facilitated the shooting/production of various Nollywood films on Cameroonian soil. Also, many Collywood films have either starred Nollywood celebrities, or been set partly in Nigerian cities. This development has made early productions in Collywood and even many recent Cameroonian video

films to have Nigerian colours or accents. In effect, it is not uncommon to come across Cameroonian commentators who believe that, a typical Cameroonian video film is a “lazy” copy of one or many Nollywood films. In an interview granted Kennedy (2014: 3), the Cameroonian film director Eka succinctly observes that “In Cameroon, the film industry is still trying to find its feet, especially the English speaking section. Many filmmakers try to copy what Nollywood – the Nigerian film industry – is doing, which is mostly home videos for entertainment that don’t follow cinematic techniques”. In the same line of thought, a number of Collywood film critics notably Ndogmo (2010) and Nalova (2013) have lamented the fact that by the production paradigms that guide them, Collywood films tend to develop themes that are similar to those observed in Nollywood films. These films also star celebrities who, by their actorism, tend to scrupulously copy the Nigerian accent in speaking English or Pidgin English. Additionally, Collywood films visibly contain the same kinds of sound and special effects observed in Nollywood films. Ndogmo (2010) in particular notes the above thus:

Aujourd’hui encore, il n’y qu’à regarder quelques productions camerounaises en anglais pour comprendre tout l’impact et l’influence qu’a eu le succès de Nollywood sur Collywood : les genres sont les mêmes (drame, comédie romantique, polar, épique, historique, surnaturel) ; les films tournés souvent en deux, voire plusieurs parties ; les effets spéciaux et certains termes employés tels Hoga (patron, en français). La confusion est plus grande encore lorsque des acteurs nigériens à la réputation établie sont invités à jouer dans des productions camerounaises.

Today, one only needs to watch the video films produced by English speaking Cameroonians to measure the magnitude of the impact and influence of Nollywood success on Collywood: the film genres are virtually the same in Nollywood and Collywood (drama, comedy, romance, polar, epic, historical films and occultism); films are shot in two, nay, many parts; the special effects and some actors’ dictions are the same in Nollywood and Collywood films. For instance, Nigerian slangs and terms such as “*oga*” (meaning master in English) are commonly used by Collywood actors in film dialogue contexts. The confusion is even greater when Nollywood superstars are made to star Cameroonian filmic productions [My translation] (Ndogmo 2010: 6).

Nalova (2015) makes a similar observation when she notes that Collywood cineastes tend to scrupulously copy Nollywood style of scripting, screenwriting, acting, directing and post-production. According to her, such a tendency reduces or hampers originality and creativity in the Cameroonian Anglophone cinema industry. In effect, one has to consider the too many Anglophone video films titled, scripted or edited along Nigerianisms to vindicate Nalova (2015) on one hand and Ndogmo (2010) on the other hand. Good examples of such films with Nigerianisms include *China Wahala* and *America Wahala* among others. The word “Wahala” is a Nigerianism meaning “issue” or “problem”. They are used in the coinage of the names of the two above mentioned movies, visibly to capitalise on the interest Cameroonian audiences have for Nigerian films. Thus, many Anglophone Cameroonian cineastes have sought to Nigerianise their

films in spite of growing anti-Nigerian sentiments among many social and film critics in their country.

In effect, the apparent nigerianisation of the Anglophone video film industry is occurring in a context where various Nigerian popular cultures are literally dominating the Cameroonian market in spite of a growing anti-Nigerian sentiment exhibited by some social critics and social arbiters in the country. For instance, cultural movements such as Nigerian popular music, fashion and Nigerian Christianities have trans-nationalised to Cameroon and are tremendously embraced or avidly consumed by Cameroonians. Nigerian superstars and artistes such as Niara Marley, P-Square and Wizkid among others are so popular that they have, in specific occasions been invited to entertain dignitaries of the Biya regime. Similarly, many Nollywood superstars such as Genevieve Nnaji, Jim Yike, Ramsey Noah, Zack Orji and Patience Ozoko among others are role models not only to millions of Cameroonian audiences but also to many Collywood actors (Kanjo 2009, 2010; Kanyi 2016). In an interview granted the online tabloid *Africultures* (2006), Remi Atangana partly highlights Cameroonian public' positive reception of Nigerian cultural products and films thus:

Le public camerounais est très réceptif [des produits culturels d'autres pays africains aux cultures différentes], même si on lui reconnaît une certaine froideur, c'est un public de plus en plus exigeant, qui aime le beau et donc la qualité. Toutes les cultures ne peuvent que prendre angle avec un tel public. Cela est sans doute plus facile lorsqu'il s'agit des cultures africaines, dont on sait qu'elles abondent de similitudes. La percée au Cameroun des productions ghanéennes et nigérianes constitue à cet égard un exemple patent. (Cited in Africultures, 2006, p.17)

The Cameroonian public is so receptive [towards cultural products originating from African countries having cultures that are similar to its own]. Although critics use to view this Cameroonian public as being lukewarm *vis-à-vis* some foreign cultural products, Cameroonians are more and more attracted by what is aesthetically pleasing and of quality. All foreign cultures can only be positively received by such a public. This is particularly true to African cultures which share much in common with local ones. The avid consumption of cultural productions from Ghana and Nigeria clearly illustrates the above mentioned point. [My translation]

In the face of this perceptible nigerianisation of various sectors of the Cameroonian industry, local social critics such as Cy Poncho, Stanley Enow, Magasco and Wams Klassic have called on Cameroonian artistes, bloggers and other stakeholders of the Cameroonian cultural industry to boycott Nigerian concepts and cultural products. As observed by Mimi Mefo (2021), many of the above social critics claim that the nigerianisation and growing popularity of Nigerian popular culture in Cameroon has “helped in greatly stagnating the growth of Cameroonian artists as Nigerian stars are somehow always seen as superiors over Cameroonian artists no matter what they seem to do”.

Cameroonian Collywood film critics have similarly shown concern over the Nigerianisation of the Anglophone video film industry. However, there has persisted a paradox where Collywood films tailored according to Nollywood production paradigms enjoy better reception by the Cameroonian audiences. Nalova (2015) shares corollaries as she observes that Cameroonian audiences most often clamour for non-Nigerian influence in Collywood films; yet, it is Collywood films that are shot following Nollywood production paradigms that paradoxically work best among Cameroonian audiences.

If the Nigerianisation of Collywood is so obvious for the critics cited above, a number of Cameroonian video filmmakers claim the influence of Nollywood on Collywood is either a very minimal/insignificant issue, a myth or simply a phenomenon which is very innocuous to local Cameroonian cultures. A case in point is film director Mfuh Ebenezer who argues that although Nollywood's influence on Collywood has been considerable, the latter film industry has continued to present an authentic version of the Cameroonian culture. In his languages: "the influence [of Nollywood] has actually been quite great. [However] We're still virgin. [...] our ideas are still very new" (cited in Voice of America 2009).

Thus, one may plausibly argue that the issue of Nollywood's cultural imperialism on Collywood is subject to controversy. While many critics such as Nalova (2015) think Collywood is in many ways, a replica of Nollywood, others (notably Kennedy 2014) argue that the Nigerian film industry only inspires its Cameroonian counterparts without much influence. Many observers – notably film director Mfuh Ebenezer (cited in *Voice of America* 2009) – argue that, in spite of the Nigerian influence, Collywood remains for the most part, Cameroonian in terms of contents and philosophy of the arts. In spite of this controversy, there is a large body of evidence suggesting that Collywood is Nigerianised to some visible extent. This body of evidence – which include the name of the movement, the emphasis on voodoo, sensational themes and popular Nollywood genre as well as the use of the same Nigerianism and special effects deployed in Nollywood films – has amply been presented in the preceding parts of this essay.

A NIGERIALISED COLLYWOOD AS VECTOR OF THE PROMOTION OF CAMEROONIAN CULTURES

The idea of copying the Nollywood model has, to many Cameroonian social/cinema critics, been tantamount to making conditions favourable for a subtle nigerianisation of the Cameroonian film industry. However, it must be underlined that the tendency of viewing the adoption of the Nigerian model inherently as a vector of Nollywood's imperialism on the Cameroonian film industry is visibly myopic and questionable. According to a number of critics, such a tendency is even retrogressive and non-pragmatic. This follows from the truism that, in an era of cultural globalisation as the present epoch, it is virtually difficult, nay impossible for a cultural industry – notably a national cinema – to stay perfectly untouched by foreign influences or currents. Global popular cultures permeate national cinemas and efforts at controlling the diffusion or proliferation of such global influences in local cultural industries is often herculean (Tomlinson 2001; 2003). Also, not all exogenous influences may strictly be aggressive or deleterious to a national cultural industry. One therefore needs to differentiate healthy from bad external influences. In tandem, with this, a number of Cameroonian film directors and critics have sought to differentiate bad from positive Nigerian influences in the Collywood/Cameroonian film industry. Such optimistic critics

or videastes suggest that Cameroonian filmmakers should essentially copy specific aspects of the Nollywood filmmaking and film distribution model.

Two of such aspects are the “produce cheap and sell fast” paradigm and the obsession with producing for mainly capitalist purposes. According to Francophone film director Blaise Ntedju (cited in Maimounatou 2020), Cameroonian videastes should emulate their Nigerian counterparts by putting an emphasis on quantity first, before thinking of improving on quality of films. According to the director of *Miranda* (a film which enjoyed huge commercial success), it is by prioritising quantity – that is massive production of films – that the Nigerian film industry has “grown” to become the second most prolific cinema industry in the world. In an attempt to reproduce this “produce cheap and sell fast” culture, Blaise Ntedju conceived a movement christened “*Le Challenge Nollywood* [the Nollywood challenge]”. This movement consists in producing films in mass, for business purposes and for the sake of mitigating local audiences’ dependence on, or heavy consumption of imported films. In an interview granted the local tabloid *Cameroon Tribune*, Ntedju confides that:

J’ai décidé de produire 12 films en un an à travers le Challenge Nollywood. C’est ma façon d’interpeller les cinéastes et de les amener à comprendre que le cinéma est un business. [...] l’autre objectif c’est de réduire le taux de consommation des telenovelas dont les histoires n’ont rien à voir avec le contexte camerounais. (cited in Maimounatou, 2020: 18)

I have decided to produce 12 films each year, in keeping with *Le Challenge Nollywood* movement. It is my own way of sensitizing Cameroonian cineastes and making them regard cinema as a business. [...] the other objective is to reduce local audiences’ consumption of tele novellas whose contents have no connection with the Cameroonian experience. [My translation]

Ntedju’s idea, to some extent, appears to be a plausible solution to foreign competition and local audiences’ avid consumption of foreign films. However, it remains problematic. The tendency of prioritizing quantity to the detriment of quality has remained one of the most serious flaws of the Nigerian film industry. In effect, most detractors of Nollywood tend to use such prioritization of quantity over quality to bash the Nigerian video film industry and present it as a movement far away from the ideals of cinema. On the basis of this criticism, the act of advocating this model of prioritization in the Cameroon film industry can only be problematic.

Apart from Ntedju, other Cameroonian cineastes have defended the idea that copying the Nollywood model cannot be inherently unproductive or a danger to the preservation of Cameroonian cultures. Film director Eka for instance, admits that although Nollywood has been a source of inspiration to many Cameroonian cineastes, it has not derailed the latter (local cineastes) from their cultural mission of representing the Cameroonian experience. In an interview granted Kennedy (2014: 9), he affirms that:

Sometimes when we do movies, people say that we’re copying Nigeria, but we’re trying to tell our own stories. It’s a gradual process; first we have to prove our worth, and then we can use this

platform to showcase ourselves so that Cameroonians and those living in the Diaspora know that things like this [voodoo, poverty, social discrimination and moral decadence] can happen in our own home.

Whether the Nigerian model is beneficial or aggressive to the ideal of preserving the Cameroonness of Collywood or not is subject for another debate. The topic is subject to controversy. However, what remains observable is that the Nigerian model has inspired a number of Cameroonian cineastes. There are reasons to believe that this trend will continue. The cultural globalization current is bound to enable the continuity of the trend.

CONCLUSION

Since its inception the Collywood cinematic movement has attracted a mitigated criticism from both Cameroonian and foreign commentators. This criticism has partly bordered on the “Cameroonness” versus the “foreignness” of Collywood, and has followed from the trans-nationalisation or importation of exogenous cultural concepts in Cameroon, particularly the Nollywood cinematic style/model. In line with this trans-nationalisation of the Nollywood model in Cameroon, a number of critics have argued that the cinematic movement is one of the multiple vectors of the nigerianisation of the Cameroonian cinema industry. Such critics have viewed such a development as a danger to the promotion of a Cameroonian cinema that is representative of the country’s cultural dynamics. Contrary to this school of thought, other commentators have pontificated that the Nollywood model may rather enable Cameroonian cineastes to boost their film productions and ultimately inundate the local market with movies that speak to local cultures and reflect the quotidian experiences of Cameroonians. The latter commentators have even advocated that, through the instrumentality of benchmarking, Cameroonian cineastes use the Nollywood model as a lead to revive their country’s film industry.

This paper has revisited the above mentioned debate. It has examined the creation, vision and merits of Collywood as an avant guard cinematic movement in Cameroon, highlighting the Anglophone domination which pushes commentators to doubt the inclusiveness of the movement. In effect, the paper vindicates commentators and observers who profile Collywood as an essentially Anglophone and not inclusively Cameroonian movement. In other words, the paper argued that there is a remarkable anglophonisation of Collywood.

The paper also examined the extent to which Collywood may be said to capture the aspirations of Cameroonian cineastes as well as the extent to which Collywood is a nigerialised movement, and a vector of the nigerianisation of the Cameroonian film industry. It was argued that Nollywood influence and even imperialism on Collywood is clear. However, this influence has some positive consequences. Local Cameroonian filmmakers could really exploit the Nollywood model.

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