

# Nollywood and redefining Nigeria's identity through storytelling

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Received 4th February 2025; Accepted 23rd May 2025

**ABSTRACT:** The remarkable rise of Nollywood has transformed Nigeria's film industry into a potent and prolific vehicle for reshaping the country's identity through storytelling. Existing scholarship has shown that Nollywood, known for its storytelling prowess, has transcended national boundaries, captivating audiences worldwide and offering narratives deeply rooted in the Nigerian experience that move beyond stereotypes. This study explores Nollywood's pivotal role in reshaping Nigeria's identity by delving into the complex facets of its culture, history, and socio-political realities. The study adopts the narrative transformative theory as the theoretical framework and uses content analysis to analyse two Nollywood films, *The Rise of IgbinoGun* directed by Ideh Chukwuma Innocent, and *The Black Book*, directed by Editi Effiong. Through this method, the study examined how Nollywood's storytelling has evolved global perceptions of Nigeria. The study discusses the profound impact of Nollywood's storytelling on promoting a positive image of Nigeria, emphasising its potential to challenge stereotypes and rectify misconceptions. The study argues that Nollywood plays a transformatory role in redefining Nigeria's identity and shaping its global image through storytelling.

**Keywords:** Film culture, identity, Nollywood, storytelling.

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's film industry is a potent tool for reshaping the country's identity through storytelling. The Nigerian identity or National identity is a person's sense of belonging to a nation and a shared understanding of history, culture, language, and symbols that bind people together (Smith, 1991). It is not static but evolves in response to political, economic, and social transformations. Anderson (2020) conceptualised nations as "imagined communities," where the collective identity is constructed through shared experiences, media, and institutions. Redefining national identity often becomes necessary in post-colonial societies or during periods of political transition, globalisation, or conflict. In Africa, for instance, colonial boundaries often forced diverse ethnic groups into single political entities, resulting in contested notions of national identity (Mazrui, 2002). Mazrui's instance is the typical case in Nigeria, where the nation of Nigeria is a product of colonialism. Then, the Post-independence leaders have had to reimagine national unity through inclusive narratives,

symbols, and policies that promote shared values.

Moreover, globalisation challenges traditional national identities by introducing hybrid cultures, leading to a "re-nationalisation" or an emphasis on cultural revival (Castells, 1997). Some scholars argue that redefining national identity must incorporate pluralism and the recognition of minority rights to reflect contemporary social realities (Kymlicka, 1995). Moreover, media and education play significant roles in shaping and redefining national identity. National films, in the case of Nigeria, Nollywood, literature, and school curricula, are often utilised to create a cohesive narrative that aligns with state ideologies and aspirations (Du Gay and Hall, 2011). Particularly in post-conflict societies, like Nigeria with a battered image and poor reputation, cultural production becomes a vehicle for reconciliation and the crafting of new, inclusive national identities (Bhabha, 1990).

Ultimately, redefining national identity is an ongoing process shaped by both internal dynamics and external

pressures. It requires careful negotiation between tradition and modernity, unity and diversity. This is where the artist comes in, among others. The ideological predisposition of the artist influences their artistic output, and this tendency may be represented in various ways depending on the artist's consciousness and reality-interpreting skills. In Onoge's (1974) *crisis of consciousness*, there are three layers to the degree of consciousness and the capacity to perceive reality. Writers such as Lewis Nkosi, John Peper Clark, and John Nagenda contend that societal factors have no role in judging the worth of a writer's work. This "Art for art's sake" school of artists believes that the artist's only duty is to develop the form of his work. The second layer, known as critical realism, promotes writing that critically examines society's current reality.

The absence of a critical relation between the literary concerns of artists and the realities of African nations depresses artists such as Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka. According to critical realism, the role of the writer in society is to express a clear vision while concentrating on contemporary problems that afflict members of the populace. Third layer, socialist realism goes beyond critical realism. It implies the writer's fundamental agreement with the goals of the working class and the emerging socialist world as believed and advocated by artists such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and Ousmane Sembene.

In his summary, Fischer (1971) clarifies that genuine socialist realism is also a critical realism that is enhanced by the artist's basic acceptance of society and optimistic social viewpoint. With socialist realism, the artist works within the framework of social harmony rather than in opposition to the environment around him. As a result, the audience receives not just the truth but also the societal vision of the artist, that is, their critical sensibility and creative temperament. Film falls within this realm.

Film is social in form and substance by definition (Turner, 2006; Kolker and Gordon, 2024). As a result, film as art should have a purpose, be socially conscious, and advance the advancement of both society and its inhabitants. The introduction of motion picture technology into Africa led to the development of the filmic medium as a powerful instrument for the dissemination and promotion of African culture among various African populations (Ugor, 2001). To Ugor, the many African ethnic groups have turned to the film industry as a means of promoting, projecting, and asserting their ethnic identities and image. Film was used by Africans and Black people in general to redefine and re-imagine the world. He further asserts that it was widely recognised when a desperate, intentional, and active drive to redefine and re-imagine the African in the world's eyes through the screen got underway. A new cultural renaissance for Africans had begun through the film, starting with the *Home of the Brave Pinky*, which emphasised the social lives of Blacks in the Harlem renaissance as early as 1918. Jean Rouche, a native Frenchman interested in ethnographic films, joined the new wave on the African continent proper with his film *The*

*Foolish Masters*. Additionally, trade unionist Ousmane Sembene began producing social commentary films about his native Senegal.

Film did not begin with Nollywood in Nigeria; the country's first public film exhibition took place in 1906 (Ekwuazi 2008 a). Tracing the history of indigenous filmmaking in Nigeria, it is important to note that nationalistic fervor among Nigerian theatre artists both before and after Independence played a role. These artists considered creating a national consciousness and identity, believing that an indigenous film industry that reflected Nigerian culture and portrayed the country's national outlook would project an image that people would want to identify with globally. Ukadike (2007) observes that the cinema embarked upon its project of complete decolonisation following the example of an already flourishing liberationist literature channelled to this same purpose.

Since colonial times, film has been a part of Nigeria's cultural and creative landscape, although its progress has been, to put it mildly, inconsistent. The Nigerian film industry had a severe decline in fortune in the late 1980s due to growing economic challenges, and by the early 1990s, cinema as an art form had abruptly ended. Several things contributed to this, such as the weak national economy and piracy, which prevented filmmakers from continuing to use celluloid technology (Ekwuazi, 2008b; Ndu, 2023).

With the decline of celluloid films, in the late 1990s, the video film industry known as Nollywood, and currently the second-largest film industry in the world, emerged (Ekwuazi, 2008c), thanks to the endeavours of a few Igbo entrepreneurs. However, Ekwuazi (seen in Ndu, 2023) point out that the ranking's indication of the industry's scale is mostly dependent on "The sheer volume of production" rather than "The quality of production." However, with the "new Nollywood" with its advancement in technology and digital distribution platforms, the industry's production quality has improved.

In line with this enhancement, this study explores Nollywood's role in reshaping Nigeria's identity by delving into the complex facets of its culture, history, and socio-political realities. The study adopts the narrative transformative theory as the theoretical framework and uses content analysis to analyse two Nollywood films, which were purposefully selected: *The Rise of Igbino* directed by Ideh Chukwuma Innocent, and *The Black Book*, directed by Editi Effiong. Through this method, the study examined how Nollywood's storytelling has evolved global perceptions of Nigeria. The study argues that Nollywood plays a transformative role in redefining Nigeria's identity and shaping its global image through storytelling.

### Theoretical framework

Narrative transformative theory is an interdisciplinary

approach that examines how stories and narratives shape individual and collective identities, influence behaviour, and can lead to personal and social transformation (Liu and László, 2007). It is grounded in the idea that narratives are not just representations of reality but are active components in the creation and re-creation of reality itself. Narrative transformative theory combines elements of narrative theory and transformative learning theory to explore how storytelling and personal narratives can facilitate significant changes in individuals' perspectives and understanding. The narrative transformative theory includes concepts like Root Narrative Theory (RNT), which explores how stories and narratives shape and are shaped by social power dynamics (De Fina and Akopoulou, 2011). It examines how interests, values, and emotions intersect in conflicts that arise through the clash of different root narratives.

Narrative transformation theory in the context of film examines how storytelling techniques and narrative structures can lead to significant changes in audience perception and understanding. This theory emphasises the transformative potential of narratives, particularly in how they engage viewers emotionally and cognitively. In essence, narrative transformation theory in film highlights the powerful role of storytelling in shaping audience experiences and perceptions. By analysing narrative structures, emotional engagement, and reflexivity, we can better understand how films can lead to transformative experiences for viewers.

This theory helps to understand how Nollywood, as a powerful storytelling platform, acts as a medium for cultural expression, identity formation, influence, and transforms the audience's perception of Nigeria's identity. In Leeuw's (Hinkel *et al.*, 2020) point of view, Narratives are socially constructed "stories" that make sense of events and phenomena, integrating them into worldviews. Hinkel *et al.* (2020) assert that narratives shape preferences and opinions, giving direction to human action.

## **NOLLYWOOD: TELLING AFRICAN/NIGERIAN STORIES**

Nollywood has emerged as a critical platform for telling African stories from African perspectives, effectively countering colonial and Western portrayals that once depicted the continent as primitive and dangerous (Olorunubi, 2024; Ndu, 2024). Nollywood's rise has fueled the rebirth of modern Nigeria, promoting a viable postcolonial African state in the 21st century (Akinola, 2014; Afolabi *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, Nollywood films are redefining the 'blockbuster' genre by fusing African themes with traditional melodrama aesthetics (Arthur, 2014; Emelonye, 2024; Olorunubi, 2024).

In the same vein, Omenugha *et al.* (2019), Omoera (2024), and Effiong (2022) observe that Nollywood films function as tools for preserving and transmitting historical memory, where they serve as repositories of collective identity. Haynes (2021) underscores the unifying power of

Nollywood, noting that despite state failures, the industry has succeeded in cultivating a sense of national and Pan-African unity through the widespread use of Nigerian Pidgin as a communicative medium. Adesokan (2014) further emphasises that the films' common artistic idioms reflect an emerging Nigerian identity, shaped by urban culture, commerce, and voluntary association.

Beyond its national influence, Nollywood has transcended borders, establishing itself as a significant force in global cinema. Its cultural products have resonated deeply with African diasporic communities, fostering a post-national identity for Nigeria. Tsaaior (2018) affirms that "New Nollywood," characterised by higher budgets and more sophisticated storytelling, has evolved from its earlier forms, reaching international audiences. Onyenakeya *et al.* (2017) report that Nollywood films have enhanced South Africans' knowledge and appreciation of Nigerian culture, with some viewers adopting Nigerian expressions and even speaking fragments of the Igbo language. The unanswered question to this assertion is the treatment of Nigerians in South Africa, bearing in mind the "xenophobic attacks".

Recent developments underscore Nollywood's growing global relevance. Films like *The Black Book* have achieved international acclaim, further demonstrating the industry's ability to produce globally competitive content while maintaining African authenticity (Asadu, 2023). The Financial Times (2025) also acknowledges Nollywood's expansion into a Lagos-born cinematic universe, underscoring its capacity to meet both local and global demands for culturally rich storytelling.

The transition from "old" to "new" Nollywood marks a significant shift in narrative sophistication, characterisation, and production quality (Tsaaior, 2018; Ezepue, 2020). However, criticisms persist regarding narrative construction. Apejaye (2014) warns that Nigerian filmmakers may sometimes hastily develop stories without adequate dramaturgical rigor, potentially affecting the global perception of Nollywood's artistic quality. Despite such criticisms, scholars like Okafor (2024) highlight improvements in costuming and prosthetic artistry, pointing to an ongoing effort to enhance visual storytelling in Nollywood productions.

Indigenous narratives and folktales remain foundational to Nollywood's storytelling ethos. These elements provide a cultural richness that resonates with both local and international audiences. Nonetheless, Euphemia *et al.* (2015) caution that foreign influences sometimes lead to negative portrayals of Nigerian culture, thereby diluting indigenous authenticity.

Recent studies, however, offer a more optimistic perspective. Utoh-Ezeajugh and Salami (2024) explore how traditional Nigerian attire in Nollywood films acts as powerful cultural signifiers, enhancing authenticity and preserving heritage. Similarly, Okadigwe (2023) illustrates the eclectic yet culturally specific nature of costume designs in Nollywood epic films, demonstrating a deep engagement with Nigeria's diverse cultural backgrounds.

Costuming in Nollywood has become a strategic medium for expressing national identity. Ndu (2023) and Udeji (2016) argue that costumes not only reveal social, marital, and religious status but also serve as visual markers of national heritage. Costumes help in reinforcing cultural pride and connecting citizens to specific historical and regional identities. Film costumes in Nollywood historical films significantly contribute to collective memory and nation-building efforts (Okadigwe and Ajiwe, 2024). Bature-Uzor (2024) also identifies costume, make-up, and props as essential conveyors of culture, embedding narratives within their unique sociocultural contexts.

Scholars have written on how Nollywood has significantly contributed to telling the Nigerian story through its unique storytelling. It presents African stories from African perspectives, but challenging negative stereotypes and fostering a sense of national unity is still a debate. With the industry's global reach and evolving narrative techniques, this paper investigates the role of Nollywood in redefining Nigeria's identity through its storytelling.

## AN OVERVIEW OF THE SELECTED FILMS

### *The Rise of Igbinogun*

The film opens with an intense duel between Igbinogun and her close friend Nosa, establishing her fighting spirit and setting the tone for the narrative. Raised by her father, Ogbo; a revered warrior with a painful past, Igbinogun is trained to be stronger than her male counterparts. Her journey is deeply rooted in personal tragedy: her mother, Itohan, a palace maiden and priestess of Olokun, died during childbirth after being cast into isolation for her forbidden love with Ogbo. This injustice ignites Igbinogun's lifelong desire to challenge the existing power structures.

Despite her father's initial reluctance to involve her in his world, Igbinogun proves her strength, courage, and leadership. By night, she leads secret raids on corrupt leaders, redistributing stolen wealth to the poor. Her father's discovery of her vigilante acts leads to a tense confrontation, as he urges her to abandon her dangerous path. Igbinogun, however, is unrelenting. She sees herself as a bearer of justice, a voice for the voiceless, and a living testament to her mother's sacrifice.

Tensions reach their peak when Igbinogun defies tradition by entering a male-only warrior contest disguised as a boy. In a climactic battle against the crown prince, she emerges victorious. The prince, overwhelmed by defeat and humiliation, takes his own life. The king's fury at Igbinogun's audacity results in a final tragic confrontation where Ogbo, in defence of his daughter and to avenge Itohan, kills the king. This leaves the throne empty, with the queen quietly returning to her homeland.

### *The Black Book*

In a nation where power often trumps justice, a horrifying

incident at a Special Anti-Kidnapping Squad (SAKS) checkpoint sets off a chain of tragic and transformative events. The Craig family falls victim to a brutal and orchestrated attack at the hands of kidnappers operating in collusion with the SAKS. Fuel is poured on their vehicle, and in the chaos, Mr. Craig is forced out of the car to save his child. Both he and his child are kidnapped. Their motivation was not ransom, but a deadly warning to Mrs. Craig to stop uncovering corruption among the nation's elite. Eventually, both husband and child are murdered.

A suspect involved in the kidnapping is briefly apprehended but escapes police custody. Desperate to recapture him, the SAKS begin targeting individuals matching a broad physical description: tall, dark-skinned, and dreadlocked. This leads to a tragic case of mistaken identity. Paul Edima's son, while on his way to church, becomes the next victim of SAKS' unchecked power. Despite being innocent, he is profiled and fatally shot at a checkpoint under the false suspicion of being the escaped suspect. Paul Edima, a former elite operative with a dark past, having orchestrated assassinations, coups, and military operations across West Africa, is shattered. Initially, he believes the death of his son is divine retribution for his sins.

Denied access to his son's body and vilified by the media, Paul's grief transforms into a quest for truth. Determined to clear his son's name, he uncovers the corrupt officers responsible for the murder and forces them to confess. His journey gains an ally in Victoria Kalu, an investigative journalist seeking justice for her mother, who had been killed by Paul during one of his past missions to retrieve the Black Book, a classified record of the nation's deepest secrets.

Paul's pursuit of truth brings him into direct conflict with the country's powerful elites, particularly General Issa (Alex Usifo), the orchestrator of many of the state's darkest operations. Issa offers Paul a million naira to abandon his pursuit. Paul refuses, demanding that Dipo, Angel, and others involved in his son's death confess publicly. In retaliation, Issa orchestrates a deceptive "fumigation" operation to capture Paul. Meanwhile, Victoria is kidnapped by Issa's men, used as bait to lure Paul into the open. To rescue her, Paul enlists the help of Big Daddy, an old associate and underground leader.

Together, they hatch a daring plan: plant a bomb in the city during Friday prayers, forcing the military to abandon Issa's ranch and making it vulnerable. With the ranch exposed, they execute a high-stakes rescue mission for Victoria and retrieve the Black Book, the ultimate weapon of accountability. The mission unfolds amid chaos. While Victoria escapes with the key to the safe housing of the Black Book, Paul's allies confront Issa and his forces. As the General's empire begins to crumble, Victoria takes the mantle of justice, entrusted with exposing the truth to the public.

The Black Book, once a tool of control, now becomes a beacon for justice, set to unveil the crimes of a corrupt system and vindicate the innocent lives lost in its shadow.

## ANALYSIS OF SELECT FILMS

### *The Rise of Igbinogun*

The Nollywood film, *The Rise of Igbinogun*, not only entertains but also serves as a medium for cultural preservation and social commentary and can be analysed in the context of Nollywood's role in redefining Nigeria's identity through storytelling, particularly when applying the Narrative Transformative Theory. Narrative Transformative Theory emphasises the power of storytelling in shaping perceptions and addressing social issues by transforming the audience's understanding of reality. It explores how narratives can influence societal views and contribute to conflict resolution and social change.

*The Rise of Igbinogun* is a film that tells the story of a warrior who becomes a legend among the people by stealing from the rich to empower the poor. This narrative is transformative as it challenges the status quo and presents a tale of empowerment and resistance against oppression. The film uses authentic props and storytelling techniques to engage viewers and provide a cultural and historical context.

*The Rise of Igbinogun* addresses historical events in Nigeria through its narrative, which is set against the backdrop of ancient African culture. While the film is a work of fiction, it draws on elements that are deeply rooted in Nigerian history and folklore. The film tells the story of a young female warrior, Igbinogun, who challenges the existing social order by supporting the poor with her loot. This Robin Hood-esque narrative is reflective of the historical struggles within Nigerian society, where disparities between different social classes have been prominent. Moreover, the character of Igbinogun becomes a symbol embodying the spirit of historical figures who have fought against injustice and oppression. The film's portrayal of battles and the warrior's journey echoes the tales of past heroes and heroines in Nigerian history who stood up for their people and their beliefs.

The setting and cultural elements presented in the film, such as the traditional attire, rituals, and the dichotomy between the rich and the poor, are reminiscent of pre-colonial and colonial periods in Nigeria. These aspects serve to remind viewers of the country's rich past and the ongoing impact of historical events on contemporary Nigerian society. In essence, *The Rise of Igbinogun* uses the power of storytelling to weave a narrative that, while not directly recounting specific historical events, encapsulates the themes and struggles that have shaped Nigeria's history. It invites the audience to reflect on the past and consider its influence on the present and future of the nation. The narrative projects a Nigeria that can stand adversity and fight for a good cause, hence redefining the nation's identity.

### Highlights of various aspects of redefining Nigeria's identity as portrayed in the film

**Cultural Heritage:** The film showcases Nigeria's rich cultural heritage through its setting, costumes, and music. It reflects the traditional society's values and the importance of folklore, which is a significant part of Nigerian culture. Dance sequences in the film are not just for entertainment but also serve as a form of artistic expression that is deeply rooted in Nigerian culture. The movements and rhythms reflect the cultural identity and social customs of the community depicted in the movie. The music in the film helps to establish the ancient setting, providing a backdrop that is both historically resonant and culturally rich. This helps to transport viewers to the time and place where the story unfolds.

**Social inequality:** The story of Igbinogun, who steals from the rich to help the poor, highlights the social inequalities present in Nigerian society. This aspect of the film mirrors the real-life disparities between different social classes in Nigeria. Igbinogun's mission to steal from the rich and give to the poor symbolises the struggle against social inequality and the desire for a more equitable society.

**Gender roles:** With Igbinogun as a strong female lead who fights against injustice, the film challenges traditional gender roles. It portrays a woman taking on a role typically reserved for men, thus contributing to the conversation about gender equality in Nigeria. This symbolises the changing perceptions of gender in Nigerian society.

**Spirituality and religion:** The narrative incorporates elements of spirituality and religion, which are integral to Nigeria's identity. The rituals performed in the film, such as the ritual of sanctification by Igbinogun's grandmother, also, rain strengthens Ogbu, Igbinogun's father, during a battle, and later, Igbinogun seeks her father's blessing and undergoes a ritual in the rain before her battle, signifying purification and empowerment. The reference to gods and rituals in the film underscores the spiritual beliefs that are deeply rooted in Nigerian culture. The film portrays these rituals in a positive light as against the rituals of human sacrifices for personal gain and wealth, and voodoo that the industry is notorious for.

**Resistance and empowerment:** The film's plot revolves around the theme of resistance against oppression and the empowerment of the underprivileged. This reflects the historical and ongoing struggles for justice and equity in Nigeria. Igbinogun is seen as a messiah to the needy and poor, a motif that resonates with the idea of a saviour who stands up for the marginalised and oppressed.

**Valour and bravery:** The valour and bravery of the prota-

gonist, who fights against injustice, are qualities that resonate with the Nigerian spirit of resilience and courage in the face of adversity. As a young female warrior, Igbinoḡun embodies the warrior spirit, representing strength, bravery, and resilience, which are highly valued in Nigerian culture, and it is a transformative narrative of the present-day Nigerian youths who believe in the get rich quick syndrome.

**Art and expression:** *The Rise of Igbinoḡun* is also a celebration of art and expression, showcasing Nigerian storytelling, dance, and music as forms of artistic expression that contribute to the nation's identity. The film's narrative is further enriched by this use of music and dance, which can symbolise various themes such as unity, resistance, or spiritual connection. They act as non-verbal storytelling devices that complement the spoken dialogue and action. Through these aspects, *The Rise of Igbinoḡun* not only entertains but also serves as a medium for reflecting on and redefining Nigeria's identity, highlighting the complexities and richness of the Nigerian experience and with this projection, the image of the nation is viewed from a different perspective. These symbols and motifs contribute to the film's exploration of Nigerian identity, highlighting cultural values and societal issues through the lens of a compelling narrative. They serve not only as elements of storytelling but also as reflections of the rich tapestry of Nigerian culture and history.

*The Rise of Igbinoḡun* successfully creates an authentic cultural experience that resonates with viewers and pays homage to the rich traditions of Nigerian storytelling. The film exemplifies how Nollywood films can be powerful agents of cultural identity and societal transformation, using narrative as a tool to redefine Nigeria's identity and address pressing social issues. Through its storytelling, the film invites viewers to reconsider their roles in society and the potential for collective action in the face of adversity.

### ***The Black Book***

The film, *The Black Book*, directed by Editi Effiong, can be analysed through the lens of narrative transformative theory to understand its portrayal of Nigeria's identity. This theory suggests that narratives have the power to shape and transform individual and collective identities by influencing perceptions and values.

*The Black Book* is a crime thriller that tells the story of Paul Edima, a deacon whose son is falsely accused and killed, prompting him to seek revenge. The film explores themes of corruption, justice, and redemption, reflecting on the darker aspects of Nigerian society to transform the nation's collective identity by influencing perceptions and values through this narrative.

The film's portrayal of Nigeria is multifaceted, showing

both the struggles and resilience of its people. It delves into the country's issues with corruption and the quest for justice, which are significant aspects of Nigeria's contemporary identity. By focusing on a character who is a former hitman turned deacon, the film also comments on the possibility of transformation and redemption, suggesting that Nigeria's identity is not static but evolving. Using narrative transformative theory, we can see how *The Black Book* serves as a medium for reflecting and potentially altering the audience's perception of Nigeria. The narrative challenges the single story of Nigeria by presenting complex characters and situations that resonate with the audience's experiences and emotions. The film's success on a global platform like Netflix indicates its impact in redefining Nigeria's image beyond its borders.

The audience is presented with a narrative that goes beyond the typical portrayal of Nigeria, offering a deeper look into the personal and societal conflicts that shape the nation's identity. This can lead to a transformative effect on how Nigerian identity is perceived, both domestically and internationally, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the country's culture and challenges. *The Black Book* utilises narrative transformative theory to present a story that contributes to the ongoing discourse on Nigeria's identity. It provides a platform for audiences to engage with and reflect on the complexities of Nigerian society, thereby participating in the collective reshaping of the nation's identity.

### **Highlights of various aspects of redefining Nigeria's identity**

**The market scene:** The film takes us to the heart of a bustling Nigerian market run by a boss lady, "Big Daddy" (Shaffy Bello). This setting is emblematic of the entrepreneurial spirit and the matriarchal influence prevalent in many Nigerian communities and markets like the 'Iyalojas and their counterparts in other Nigerian market cultures.

**The Kaduna sequence:** The filmmakers transport the audience to Kaduna, showcasing a region less often seen in Nollywood films. Journey to Kaduna reveals the geographical and cultural diversity of Nigeria. The portrayal of 'the General' in this region emphasises the significance of military figures in Nigerian history and the impact they have on the identity and politics of the nation. This sequence is significant for displaying the scale and importance of the character 'the General' (Alex Usifo), reflecting the diverse landscapes and cultures within Nigeria.

**Paul's transformation:** The protagonist, Paul Edima (Richard Mofe-Damijo), is a former hitman turned deacon. His struggle to clear his son's name leads him back into

his old life. This character arc reflects the themes of redemption and the internal conflict between past and present identities that many Nigerians can relate to.

**The corruption narrative:** The film delves into the corruption within the Nigerian police force, as a gang of corrupt policemen unjustly target and frame Paul's son. The film also exposes that the Special Anti-Kidnapping Squad (SAKS) is also corrupt and this exposure is a call for a redefinition. This narrative thread exposes the challenges faced by ordinary citizens and the fight for justice, which is a significant part of Nigeria's ongoing story.

**The action sequences:** Richard Mofe-Damijo's portrayal of Paul in action sequences brings a Nigerian twist to a genre typically dominated by Western narratives. It showcases a Nigerian character in a new light, breaking stereotypes and redefining what Nigerian protagonists can be like on the global stage.

**Historical echoes:** The film pays attention to detail and makes references to Nigerian history and society, echoing real-world events like insecurity, corruption, and police brutality. These elements serve as a mirror to the current state of the nation and its efforts to forge a better future.

**Gender roles:** To the surprise of everyone, "big daddy" turns out to be a female with a powerful all-female army that saved the day. With this portrayal, the film brings more to the narrative of the redefinition of the nation's identity by challenging existing stereotypes, especially about women.

These scenes, among others, contribute to a narrative that is uniquely Nigerian, offering a glimpse into the country's identity through the lens of Nollywood storytelling. The film's engagement with themes of justice, power, and transformation resonates with the Nigerian experience, making it a compelling piece of film that reflects the nation's identity.

## CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to investigate the role of Nollywood in redefining Nigeria's identity through its storytelling. The films analysed showed evidence of redefining Nigeria's identity through its storytelling technique, portrayal and projection of Nigeria's landscape, people, culture, tradition, temperament, lifestyle, struggles, socio-economic, and socio-political issues that make up the nation's identity. It challenges pre-existing stereotypes and provides a new perspective to Nollywood's storytelling. By doing so, Nollywood plays a significant role in redefining Nigeria's identity both domestically and internationally. Through its narratives, Nollywood addresses various societal issues such as gender inequality, corruption, health crises, and environmental challenges.

These stories not only entertain but also foster empathy, spark dialogue, and inspire action among audiences.

In essence, it can be argued that Nollywood's storytelling serves as a transformative tool that reshapes perceptions and reinforces a sense of national identity. It allows for the exploration of different "root narratives" within the Nigerian context, promoting a more nuanced and empowered understanding of what it means to be Nigerian in the modern world.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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