

# RETHINKING MIGRATION NARRATIVES IN NOLLYWOOD NARRATIVE FICTION FILMS

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## **Abstract**

*The narratives of migration contained in many Nollywood migration themed narrative fiction films tend to romanticize the idea of irregular migration and which potentially has a corresponding effect on the psychology of the viewing public. Using the case study approach of the qualitative research method, the researchers critically examined the representations of migration in two Nollywood narrative fiction movies: Ozoemena Ozubulu (2017) and The Billionaires (2018). Building on the Cultivation Theory of the Media by Goerge Gerbner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan and Nanoy Signorielli, and the Agenda Setting Theory of McCombs and Shaw, the researcher argued that using Nollywood narrative fiction films to set the right public agenda on migration will help in cultivating the right notions of migration among its audience and which can have a significant effect in the reduction of irregular migration activities in Nigeria. The researcher recommended workshops between Nollywood stakeholders and government agencies like the National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons and Other Related Offences (NAPTIP), the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) and the Ministry of External Affairs with the view to creating the right public agenda for Migration in Nigeria.*

**Key Words:** *Regular Migration, Irregular Migration, Film, Nollywood, Narratives, Fiction Films.*

## **Introduction**

Nollywood has mostly presented migrant experiences as rosy and gay. Its narrative of migrant experiences depicts migration as a quick patch to hunger, poverty and joblessness. Considering the popularity of Nollywood films as corroborated by Charles Effiong and Lucy Eseng (76) and the degree of influence the media wields on societal psychology (Maxwell McCombs 45), this unfortunately becomes the picture of migration that many Nigerian youths are exposed to. This possibly may have contributed immensely to the raging crisis of irregular migration in the country.

The significance of this research is bolstered by the simmering challenge of irregular migration that beleaguers Nigeria. Nigeria has become prominent in the global migration discourses because of the alarming rate of emigration among its youth population (Lanre Ikuteyijo 1). Irregular migration has become a teething problem not just for Nigeria but the whole of the sub-Saharan Africa. Hunger, joblessness, political instability and ethno-religious restiveness are some of the push factors that occasion the irregular migration surge (Ayuba 7). Due to the harsh conditions of migrating through irregular means, the mortality rate of irregular migration has remained high. Hein De Haas reports that significant numbers die or get seriously injured while trying to enter the EU zone every year (12). Upon this, the urge to engage in transnational migration away from the harsh economic realities of Nigeria continues to surge mostly among the youth. The quest to realize this dream has made many engage in undocumented migration which in recent times has placed Nigeria on the spotlight in international migration discourses. The recent human rights crisis in Libya in which scores of Nigerians were sold into slavery while some had their vital organs harvested for black market operations exemplifies this scourge. More so, the recent xenophobic attacks against black

migrants in South Africa in which Nigerians were the bulk of the victims also give an insight into the problem of transnational migration in Nigeria.

However, upon all these gory reportage on the media, Nollywood has continued to romanticize the experience of irregular migration in many of its narrative fiction films. Some of these include *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2017), *The Billionaires* (2018) and *Money Making Machine* (2015) to mention but a few. The effect of this kind of representation can be lethal and will most likely make many of the audience of this kind of narratives who many not have the means for regular migration to see irregular migration as worthy a alternative. This is justified by the propositions of Goerge Gebner, Larry Gross, Michael Morgan, and Nanoy Signorielli in their theorization of the cultivation process. The cultivation theory, according to Gebner, Gross, Morgan and Signorelli, is a process by which a television adherent begins to imbibe the things he/she sees constantly in the media as the realistic ideal (3). The implication is that media forms such as films, videogames and the television wield so much influence on the socialization process. In effect, social realities are no longer wholly dependent on information from primary information sources but significantly from the cultivated world of the television. Thus, Nollywood as a cultural medium with mass appeal is most likely to influence how people view sensitive socio-economic issues like migration, thus the urgent need for a redefinition of its approach to the narrative of migration.

More so, the power of the media to set agenda has been made prominent in scholarship by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in their article, *The Agenda Setting Function of the Mass Media*. McCombs and Shaw posit that most politicians rather than go directly to the people for their political campaigns go to the media fully aware of its capacity to set agenda and influence public opinion. In their words;

The mass media force attention to certain issues.  
They build up public images of political figures.

They are constantly presenting objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about. (177)

The implication is that the media, having become an entrenched meaning-creating agent in society, makes surreptitious inroads into the thought patterns of people. Thus, as man relies heavily on the media for information, the media surreptitiously determines what society thinks about and the degree of importance attached to every issue. In the same vein, media forms like narrative films with their popularity among the local audience have the capacity to set social agenda. Therefore, the need to redefine Nollywood's approaches to narrating migration is further strengthened by the agenda setting theory's exposition of the media's capacity to affect and influence social truths. Through the analysis of the selected case studies; *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2017) and *The Billionaires* (2018), the research fosters McCombs and Shaw's agenda setting theory and Gebner, Gross, Morgan and Signoreilli's cultivation theory as the philosophical guide for the maximization of Nollywood's potentials in curbing irregular migration in Nigeria through a re-strategization of its narrative philosophy.

### **Irregular Migration in Nigeria**

Migration in Africa has become a very serious issue as many of the migrants are most times willing to migrate clandestinely even under perilous conditions. The understanding is that most of the migrants are without choice as they are most times left to choose between certain socio-economic difficulties on home soil and dying on migrant routes with the hope of better life. Gumisai Mutume's (n.p) description of the irregular African migrant is laced with pictures of horror and death. According to him "sometimes, for months, young African men and women risk everything, including their lives, to take on the perilous trip across dozens of borders and the treacherous waves of the Mediterranean

Sea in search of a better life in the North”. Of this desperation for migration, Philip Connor pinpoints the Sub-Saharan Africa as having a significant migrant population in the African-Europe migration trend. Based on the United Nations’ data on the number of emigrants, Connor argues that sub-Saharan Africa accounts for eight of the ten fastest growing migrant populations since 2010. In Connor’s words:

The total number of emigrants worldwide from all sub-Saharan African countries combined grew by 31% between 2010 and 2017, outpacing the rate of increase from both the Asia-Pacific (15%) and Latin America-Caribbean (9%) regions. Only the Middle East-North Africa region saw a larger increase (39%) of people living outside of their birth country during the same span, driven largely by people fleeing conflict in Syria (n.p).

Nigeria particularly has a huge number of its population engaged in cross-border migration. The number has become increasingly alarming in recent times. Research by UcheIsiugo-Abanihe and IOM’s Research Division shows that “The number of Nigerians living outside Nigeria more than doubled between 1990 and 2013, from 465,932 to 1,030,322”. Espousing this claim, Black, Ammassari, Mouillesseaux and Rajkotia opine that Nigeria has witnessed a ‘reverse migration transition, transforming itself from a net immigration to a net emigration country’. From being an immigration hub for other West African countries in the 1980s when the oil boom made Nigeria’s economy a global hopeful, Nigeria has suddenly become an emigration hub as many of its citizens leave the country in droves in search of better livelihood. The excessive drive to emigrate by most Nigerian youths has burgeoned the figures on illegal migration across the Sub-Saharan. The 2017 report from the International Organization for Migration

highlights poverty, joblessness and restiveness as the major factors that drive Nigerian-Europe migration tide in modern times. The BBC report of April 28, 2017 shows that, about half of the 40,000 sub-Saharan African migrants that crossed the Mediterranean in 2017 are Nigerians. The recent migrant crisis in Libya, South Africa, Italy and some other European countries in the recent past have also shown that migration has become a teething problem in Nigeria. The monotonous narrative of migration and the continued romanticization of migrant experiences in most Nollywood feature films also may have contributed immensely to the raging myth of migration as solution to the debilitating economic challenges in modern Nigeria.

### ***Ozoemena Ozubulu (2017): a Synopsis***

*Ozoemena Ozubulu* is a 2017 movie produced by Chinedu Collins Ezenwa and directed by Kenneth Nwawueze. The movie themed on love, migration, and the quest for fast money is a metaphor of the common man in Nigeria, his ordeals with poverty and the corresponding frustrations from his encounters with money and what money can do. Ozoemena is a young man who has made up his mind to spend his life in his hometown Ozubulu. He is contented with his life in the village and takes pleasure in praising himself and pours eulogies on himself at every little chance he gets. However, his happiness comes to an end when Makuo returns from Malaysia and snatches his girlfriend Ozindu. Ozoemena resolves to take revenge and travels to Malaysia in a bid to acquire wealth just like Makuo. He comes back flamboyantly wealthy after just six months and takes his revenge on all who scorned him when he was a poor man resident in his home town Ozubulu.

### **Rethinking the migration Narrative in *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2017)**

In line with the almost monotonous approach to representing migration and the experiences of migrant returnees in most

Nollywood films, the director once more painted an illusion of migration that made it seem almost like a haven to the Nollywood audience many of whom may be uncritical in their consumption of narratives in films. The frames and narrative perspectives pushed forward in the movie tilt towards a romanticization of the idea of migration and migrant experiences. Though migration in general is a natural human phenomenon, the migration represented in the film was mostly irregular which is where the danger lies. Representations of migration in the movie are built around three major characters two of whom experienced tremendous economic liberation by engaging in transnational migration to Malaysia. Thus, the conflict of the movie is directly woven around Ozindu; it is a question of who wins the battle to have Ozindu as lover. However, this rivalry over Ozindu is grounded in the discourse of economic power – the girl in effect belongs to any who possesses superior economic power. But this superior economic power is directly and absolutely implicated in migration to Malaysia; in other words, one acquires it by leaving the shores of Nigeria to that South-East Asian country which the filmmaker carefully portrays as a haven of sure wealth. Thus, Ozoemena fully convinced that staying in Ozubulu would make him lose the fight to the migrant returnee, decides against his desires to go to Malaysia in a bid to restore his stolen dignity. This approach to building a migration themed story can only deepen the migration crisis in Nigeria by reinforcing the myth of migration (whether regular or irregular) as a sure path to economic liberation. The power of film as a tool for socialization is immense and has been proven repeatedly by research. Eman Mosharafa espousing this opinion asserts that “TV portrays hidden and pervasive values, rules, and moral for what is right, what is important, and what is appropriate in a social discourse in an invisible manner” (24). Thus, storylines like this can only end up making migration seem like the worthy ideal for escaping poverty within a short time. And unfortunately, many of the youth population who are exposed to this kind of narrative who may not

be able to afford regular migration may end up taking the irregular migration route out of desperation. Thus, rather than cultivate this notion through the kind of storyline used in the film under review, it then becomes more appropriate to consciously build stories to set positive agenda on migration knowing that film is a powerful tool for agenda setting. In a bid to do this, such films should rather show the many dangers that face irregular migrants who like Ozoemena leave the country in search of quick wealth through irregular means.

The film set in the Eastern part of Nigeria opens with a gay tone that is suggestive of neither a tragedy nor an express comedy. The two principal characters Ozoemena and Makuo are introduced in the very first scene in an altercation that would set the mood, tempo and eventually the conflict that would run through the length of the narrative. Thus, the moviemaker finds it apt to establish a remote rivalry between two age mates who would eventually be used to push a perspective that makes migration the resort for the poor and a sure path to departing the line of poverty.

Ozoemena's life in the village may be described as that of a contented stubborn village boy who feels fulfilled with a good treat from the woman he loves. After the initial altercation with Makuo in the beginning of the movie, Makuo disappears and Ozoemena lives a happy life doing the little things he could to make sure Ozindu his girlfriend remained loyal. His world revolved around Ozindu and his happiness, fulfillment and achievement as a man were defined by Ozindu's state of mind. Thus, for Ozoemena, Ozindu's happiness was paramount to his existence. The underlying suggestion is that once his place in Ozindu's life is threatened, then Ozoemena is threatened and peace will cease to exist. The following dialogue between Ozoemena and his best friend Okoro will shed a little light on this:

**Ozoemena:** I can't wait to get to Mama Ozi's shop. First and foremost, I will use this one to buy paper soup and malt for Ozim, then I will give her this one



for pocket money, then I will go home with 30niara and I will be a very happy man

**Okoro:** Ozo

**Ozoemena:** Yes

**Okoro:** So, after working you will go to mama Ozindu's shop to give Ozindu the money you made?

**Ozoemena:** Is it your business? That is what gives me joy na, it's all about my happiness. If I give her this money now, I will be happy.

Having woven this combustible premise, it becomes very easy to spark conflict and weave crisis on the things that will redirect Ozoemena's drive and such a thing becomes primeval, principal and subtly consolidates as the objective substance in the mind of the viewer. Thus, Ozoemena's nightmare is not a man of his ilk and neither is it someone he could effectively match. The filmmaker introduces a character who is re-invented in class, money and oozing with some degree of foreignness. What makes it even the most frustrating is that Makuo used to be Ozoemena's contemporary whom he could beat and subdue in their secondary school days. Thus, it becomes more tormenting that his antagonist is a rival he knows but does not understand.

To re-introduce Makuo into the movie as a migrant returnee, the director equips him with exotic vehicles carefully arranged in a convoy, a style which has become a conspicuous element in the monotonous narration of migration in Nollywood. The car element along with its accompaniments of cash sprays and women have all but become stereotypical in the narration of migrant experiences in most Nollywood films. These elements aid the lopsided representations of migration and make it a single story that almost always culminates in material success. This arbitrary association of

migration with exotic living constitutes the narrative challenge that has to be redefined in a bid to achieve positive socialization as it concerns migration. The argument however is not that migrants do not get rich. Rather, the researcher contends with the one-sided approach that shows mostly the gay experiences of migration, as it will only end up becoming the dominant image of migration that the audience can relate with in their subconscious. The implication is that those who can't afford regular migration may end up using the irregular means out of desperation. Thus, to prevent a further escalation of an already sore social problem in the country, it becomes more pertinent to rather use the medium to set positive agenda that can have a healthier effect on the public psyche. Hence the need for the redefinition of approaches to migration narratives to reflect a more realistic situation of Nigerian migrants many of whom do end up worse than they left the country. Such approach, rather than aggravate the migration crisis in the country, will demystify the myth of migration among the local population.

The cars are so exotic that from the conversation between Okoro and Ozoemena, the audience could deduce that owning such an exotic collection is typical of migrant returnees whose successes are always taken for granted. Though the director aimed at re-introducing Makuo with the convoy, his personality was carefully muted so that Okoro and Ozoemena could not discuss the individual who owns the convoy, but a group who have become associated with owning such exotic car collections. In doing this, 'abroad boys' becomes the categorization that was used to qualify migrants who supposedly are bound to be successful. This representation surreptitiously creates an impression of migration as a wealth-bound exercise. Thus, once someone leaves the shores of Nigeria in search of greener pastures, he is classified in the group and is bound to come back wealthy. This brings to the fore Ervin Gofman's theory of framing which in its entirety is applicable in this instance. In framing, the filmmaker/producer carefully selects what to show while neglecting the other parts. Knowing the power of the media to

construct reality, the producer carefully chooses what to feed his audience in a bid to achieve a desired goal. ‘Abroad boys’ in this sense is used as a tag to qualify migrant returnees who are assumed to always be successful. Thus the gory parts of their experiences as migrants are neglected while only the flowery parts are projected. The director seemed to have carefully avoided the narrative of the many difficulties that are encountered by migrants abroad including their transitional process in which many of the ‘abroad boys’ die on the road to Europe and Asia as reported in Patricia Ogu (50). He does not bring to fore many of these ‘abroad boys’ who may have sold their kidneys or other internal body organs in a bid to survive in a foreign land. He also carefully avoids adding to this group the very many Nigerian youths who are languishing in different prisons abroad, many of whom are on death roll as a result of drug dealing and other crimes attracting capital punishment. Instead he only presents the version of ‘abroad boys’ that further exacerbates the utopian notion of migration that through its seductive appeal makes irregular migration irresistible to most youths in Nigeria. The following dialogue will best shed light on the issue:

**Ozoemena:** Okoro, those boys are thieves. Those boys that drove past with those big big cars

**Okoro:** Ozo, you know sometimes when poverty takes over your life you start saying things you are not sure of. Those boys are not thieves, they are ‘abroad boys’. Let me tell you, the car I heard Oga Njoku’s son Makuo will come back with is even bigger than the ones we just saw.

**Ozoemena:** Taaaaaa

**Okoro:** Look at you. You don’t know that this is the time when these ‘abroad boys’ come back from wherever it is they

have gone to. They will come and start intimidating home-based like me and you.

The need to redefine the approaches to migration narration is even made more urgent by frames of representation in the discussion above. The implication of the conversation between Ozoemena and Okoro is that migrant experiences have been stereotyped. This stereotype rather achieves negative socialization by elevating migrant returnees above local dwellers. Thus, this frame of narrative ends up propagating the myth that foreshadows the migrant returnee as always wealthy and classy. They are perceived to have all the good things life can offer. With repeated cultivation of this line of narrative in the minds of the audience, these figures become models that younger boys in the villages will tend to model their lives after.

More so, Makuo is further represented in the movie in a way that elevates him beyond all the local boys who are yet to cross the shores of the country. On his first encounter with Ozoemena as a migrant returnee, he acts with an air of condescension that belittles Ozoemena and other locals who came in contact with him. The director achieved this by making the character a boastful spender, flippant and unrestricted with his propensity to show off his wealth. Having established Ozubulu as an economically average community inhabited mostly by the lower middle class who have a total adulation for money, he endows Makuo with much money that would cow the spirit of the community and command underserved loyalty from people who muddle character with wealth. These frames further reinforce the notion of migration as a way out and a sure path to success. Thus, to humiliate Ozoemena, he brings out money and begins to spray on him in a bid to break his ego. Ozoemena is cowed as even Ozindu his girlfriend publicly switches loyalty to Makuo who wields the instrument of power. In doing this, the director further reinforces the migrant returnee as powerful. Ozoemena could only beckon on his friend Emeka who is also a

Malaysian migrant returnee to save him from the public ridicule in the hands of Makuo by making a public display of wealth on his behalf. The extent of vulgar display of wealth by the characters is such that makes one suspect that these are not migrants earning legitimate living abroad. Such spectacle is typical of drug dealers and migrants who engage in money heist, dupery and fraudulent practices in a bid to make big wealth. This is more so as these migrant returnees had left as half-educated youths who didn't have the requisite skill to succeed even in Nigeria. Thus, a filmic glorification of such characters and their crass display of wealth just after few years or few months (as in the case of Ozoemena) of migrating to Malaysia cast questions on Nigeria's cultural values. These values have to be redefined and entrenched in Nigeria's film policies. With this redefinition, frauds and dupes would be cast as antagonists who must meet a deserved Waterloo rather than be celebrated as protagonists with popular admiration. In effect, Characters like Makuo and Ozoemena should be made to meet their Waterloo in their continued quest to obtain wealth through illegal means in their communities of settlement. Such stories will cultivate in the society a perception of migration that will go a long way in combating irregular migrant scourge that faces the country.

The belief that the grass is always greener at the other side has subtly become etched in the worldview of many youths from the Eastern part of the country. An average youth, whether educated or not, skilled or unskilled, strongly believes that life is better 'abroad' and will do anything to migrate in search of greener pastures. This is substantiated in a research by Thomas Isbell and Oluwole Ojewale which shows that "More than one in three Nigerians (35%) say they have considered emigration, including 11% who say they have given 'a lot' of thought to the idea" (3).

Another character that played a prominent role in migration narrative in the film is Emeka. Emeka made it clear to Ozoemena that he could not have made the kind of wealth he has in Nigeria and not even in Lagos. This was in a bid to persuade Ozoemena to

follow him to Malaysia. The utopian narrative is even heightened by Emeka's announcement that the money was made within just six months of travelling to Malaysia, a feat he couldn't imagine all the time he was in Nigeria. He says this to further mesmerize Ozoemena who is already astonished at how so much a man can own within so little a time.

**Ozoemena:** So, you spent two years in Malaysia and bought this car?

**Emeka:** Who is talking about two years? Just six months.

**Ozoemena:** So, within six months in Malaysia you bought this car?

**Emeka:** *Ego Mbuta.*

*Ego Mbuta* literally means money that is freely packed from the streets; connotatively it means wealth gained in a spectacular quantity and with very little stress. The image of Malaysia created by Emeka in the dialogue above is that of easiness, freedom and a stress-free way of making money. The director creates the impression that there is money lying everywhere on the streets of Malaysia. The underlying suggestion is that travelling to Malaysia is a guarantee for becoming wealthy like Emeka and other 'abroad boys' who come back to the village during Christmas periods to show off. The director carefully leaves out important information that will at least let the audience into the process of becoming rich in Malaysia. He does not talk of the business they do in Malaysia that guarantees the kind of wealth that Emeka is telling Ozoemena about. From the dialogue, the only thing needed for making money in Malaysia is migrating to that country; a fantastic narrative that has become ubiquitous in the representation of migration in Nollywood. One of the ways the media creates and imposes meaning according to Stewart and Kowaltzke is repetition. Elements that are repeated by the media in time assume the status of the normal. This method is employed by brand promoters, advert

managers and many media content providers in marketing their contents and ideas. It is an aggressive propaganda strategy that works perfectly amongst uncritical media consumers. Thus, by constantly inundating the local audience with the single story of migration, films like *Ozomena Ozubulu* (2017) build in their minds the notion that affluence is a natural outcome of migration to foreign lands.

More so, the filmmaker continues the assault on the psyche of the audience by foregrounding, via repetition, the idea that money can be made in just six months through migration to Malaysia. Having migrated with Emeka his friend to Malaysia, Ozoemena returns after just six months with class and wealth. The single narrative is even consolidated the more with this onslaught. Just like Emeka promised, it doesn't take forever to make money in Malaysia; all one needs is six months and sometimes less than that. This systematic repetition and re-narration are likely to achieve a lethal psychological effect in the mind of the ordinary viewer. Ozoemena is re-invented just after six months. To demonstrate the change, the director envelopes him in the awe of funny but classy costumes and adorns on him tattoos aimed at achieving a mental reclassification of the new Ozoemena as one of the 'abroad boys. Just after six months, he comes back rich, bold and confident. From the airport he calls Zeruwa his mother and announces his return and the newly acquired fortune in the following manner:

**Ozoemena:** Mama it's me Ozoemena. Mama, tell our people that Ozoemena Ozubulu Anapku is back straight from Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur to be precise. Mama I am rich forever. Mama in fact go to our market square and slap three people and when I say three people, I don't mean barrow pushers or tomato sellers. As a matter

of fact, look for the three richest people in town and slap them for me so that the case will be on while I am on my way back. Mama I have gone to Malaysia and I have made money.

The manner of representation of migration and migrant experiences in the film is summarized in the last sentence in the dialogue above; “Mama I have gone to Malaysia and I have made money”. This representation is skewed towards the imaging of the concept as an easy, stress-free and sure path to wealth. This kind of narrative is dangerous to healthy cultural cultivation. It achieves a retrogressive affection of society as it concerns volatile concepts like migration. Thus, rather than film helping to set positive public agenda, it directly achieves the opposite and surreptitiously cultivates in society seeds that are inimical to nurturing positive mindsets in relation to migration in Nigeria. This is what the redefinition of migration narrative must fight against. The film audience should be exposed to the inherent dangers in irregular migrant engagements. This should be the unspoken agenda set by narrative fiction films that have become a cultural mainstream for socialization in Nigeria.

### **Synopsis of *The Billionaires* (2018)**

The Billionaires is a 2018 Nigerian movie produced by Osita Eze and directed by Don Single Ndubuisi. The movie themed on succession, poverty, wealth, ritual and migration, metaphors the ordeals of materialism and its preponderance of moral derogation in Nigeria. The throne of Agbara kingdom is vacant and needs to be filled. As the tradition of Agbara demands, the throne is rotated among the villages that make up the kingdom. Accordingly, it is the turn of Chime’s family to be king and Chime is the eldest member of his family and by right should be king. However, Ezekwueche, a young man from the village of the immediate past king who has



made a great fortune supposedly from ‘abroad’ nurtures the ambition of becoming the king. He offers ten million naira to Chime so that the latter can relinquish his rights to the throne. However, Chime finds it absurd and does not agree to sell out his birthright. Ezekwueche forcefully makes moves to take the title by bribing his way through. Victor, Chime’s son trolls the father for not accepting the money from Ezekwueche as that will go a long way in changing the family’s fortune. Table turns as Akpaka, Chime’s second son, supposedly returns home from Malaysia with so much wealth and vows to fight Ezekwueche to a standstill so as to make sure his father gets what rightly belongs to him.

### **Rethinking the Migration Narrative in *The Billionaires* (2018)**

Just as in *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2017), *The Billionaires* (2018) painted migration as a sure path to overcoming poverty in Nigeria and gaining all the beautiful things that money can bring, ranging from ostentatious living to wielding of social influences. In effect, it is represented as an escape route from hard work and the natural course of economic events in its dynamics of availability and scarcity, opportunities and limitations, such that for a migrant these alternating possibilities do not matter as success is always guaranteed.

Migration in the movie is used as a shade, a cover-up for social miscreants whose pursuit of wealth and materialism pushes to a most debilitating edge. Though the movie leads the audience into the open secrets of both the protagonists and the antagonist and reveals them as avaricious money ritualists, the representations of migration in the movie still pushed forward a migration narrative that among other things reinforces a myth of migration, which though border more on the fantastic than the real, has sunk deep into the consciousness of the Nigerian society. The myth is propagated by a tacit romanticization of migration as the key to the extraordinary for the youth in Nigeria. Ezekwueche is a young man who nurses the ambition of social leadership in Agbara kingdom. In

doing that, he needs money to force acceptance. As a result, he indulges in spiritual manipulations and rituals in order to have abundant wealth. However, having such wealth demands an explanation that will have some level of credibility. In order to construct a convincing explanation that won't spur suspicion and betray him as a villain who makes material benefits by sacrificing his loved ones, he credits his wealth to his sojourn in Malaysia. Thus, with the overseas migration serving to validate his wealth, all questions as to its source are deemed settled. This is where the main problem of the narrative lies, and no doubt, such fantastic resolution tends to reinforce the societal myth that migration is a sure, unassailable key to abundant wealth. Perception most times inform action, hence such stories that encourage a misguided perception can only lead to further degeneration of the irregular migrant crisis that bedevils Nigeria. Just like in *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2018), Malaysia once more comes to play; and this consistent association may cultivate in the psyche of the local audience the idea that Malaysia is a wealth paradise. The ordinary audience consciously or subconsciously imbibes this narrative as the objective reality. While it is true that many Nigerians are migrating to Malaysia in search of economic opportunities and education, verifiable evidence on ground shows that most of the returnee migrants who engage in flippant display of wealth are engaged in one illicit business or another. Drug dealers and virtual money heists form part of this core. According to Musa Yusuf Owoyemi, Abdul Kadir Haji Din and Ahmad Zaharuddin:

The situation in Malaysia, which currently hosts over 14,000 Nigerians, is equally alarming. Newspaper reports show that Nigerians had become a thorn in the flesh of the Malaysian society in so far as the issue of trafficking and selling dangerous drugs is concerned. In fact, the reports indicate that most of the international drug syndicates in this region and

Asia were controlled by Nigerians and their local accomplices (59).

This report helps to shed light on the activities of many of the Malaysia migrants who come back to the country to engage in obscene display of wealth. The need to redefine the philosophy of representing migration in narrative fiction films is made more urgent by demeaning reports of this nature. A continued romanticization of the experiences of migrants in the category described above does more harm to the social consciousness of Nigerians many of whom may not be immune to such pull factors.

Ezekwueche is not portrayed in his reality as a ritualist but as a Malaysia returnee mogul interested in the politics of his local community. In line with the dominant approach of migration narrative in Nollywood, he is presented as a money mogul who has acquired unlimited wealth abroad. Once more, car convoy, armed bodyguards and a hype man who perpetually sings his eulogy become part of the realities with which migrant returnees are identified. The signification is affluence, power and pleasure which are supposed products of his sojourn abroad. Thus, the local audience is once more inundated with a narrative monotony that configures their idea of migration and makes it a vision, a dream and an ideal path to economic emancipation. Ezekwueche is rich and bold and buys his way through. Thus, with his money, he achieves the impossible and arrogantly intimidates others into allowing him have his way. The following is the conversation between him and Chime.

**Ezekwueche:** (To his bodyguard) get the brief case, open it and show him the content. I understand your situation Chief Chime, I understand that you are poor, very poor. And because of that I have made arrangement to fix you. In

the brief case is ten million naira, take it and leave the throne for me.

More so, the characters of Akpaka and Victor are treated similarly. Though the two brothers have not crossed the borders of the country, the claim of being Malaysian migrant returnees also helps endow them with a high status in the eyes of the public. Thus, in order to live up to the claim, the director, just like in Ezekwueche's case, clothes them in the exalted garb of migrants with its associated opulence and power. Consequently, Akpaka comes back very rich that he could afford to throw dollar notes around. The way and manner with which he is introduced by the director furthers the image of migration as the miraculous answer to poverty. Once more, exotic cars and armed bodyguards are used as codes for the representation of migrant returnees. The signification is power, wealth and overwhelming social influence.

Through Akpaka and Victor, the allures and attractions of international migration continue to dominate the narrative while the gory that many times characterize migration, especially when it is irregular, is neglected. The effect of this kind of representation need not be over emphasized. Ardèvol-Abreu's opines that, "Frames draw attention to some aspects of reality at the expense of others..." (424). Thus that which is conspicuous and repeatedly represented takes precedence in the mental assimilation process. This is what is succinctly contained in the cultivation theory of Gebner, Gross, Morgan and Signoreilli's and the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw.

This is the kind of narrative that has stereotyped migrant experiences in Nigeria; wealth, women, drinks, social followership and power. Malaysia in the movie is very significant. Migration therefore, just like in *Ozoemena Ozubulu* (2017), is sure path to money. The filmmaker uses Malaysia in a symbolic representation of departure from poverty to wealth. Thus, for the filmmaker, migration is the key to the restoration of human dignity initially

soiled by poverty and the many frustrations that face the common man in Nigeria. The motive of this research is a deconstruction of this sort of narrative so as to help curb perceptions that encourage desperate migration engagements.

## **Conclusion**

It has become apt to rethink migration narratives in Nollywood narrative fiction films. The raging problem of migration has made it imminent to cultivate the right social philosophy through the main agents of socialization of which Nollywood narrative fiction films have become main stream in contemporary Nigeria. Most Nollywood films that are themed on migration have developed a monotonous approach to representing this phenomenon. As such, many of the films tend to romanticize the idea of migration especially the experiences of migrants whose involvement in irregular practices in their host countries give them access to so much wealth. The continuous representation of the experiences of this category of migrants in a way that makes it appealing poses great danger to public psyche. Thus, redefining these narratives to counter the misguided mindset that encourages irregular migration and human trafficking in Nigeria will go a long way in solving a nagging social problem.

## **Recommendations**

Having critically x-rayed the weaknesses of Nollywood feature films in narrating migration, the researcher recommends that:

- i. Workshops between Nollywood stakeholders and government agencies like NAPTIP, Nigerian Immigration Services (NIS) and the Ministry of External Affairs will go a long way in sensitizing Nollywood filmmakers on the dangers of narrating migration from a single perspective. Such sensitization must be geared

- towards honest partnerships that will improve the approaches to narrating migration and migrant experiences in Nollywood.
- ii. Regulatory bodies like the Nigeria Film and Video Censors Board (NFVCB) should also be made to live up to its duty of regulating mentally damaging contents in narrating migration. Stiff measures should be put in place in order to ensure that stories on migration in Nollywood feature films are balanced in such a way that the audience has the exposure to the real truths of migration.
  - iii. The government should commission feature film projects aimed at countering the misleading myths of migration and providing a more balanced perspective on irregular migration and the dangers therein.

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