

## Thought Report

# Nollywood Celebrities and the Emergence of Pro-Nigeria Fan Cultures in Cameroon: A Conceptual Discourse

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**Abstract** - Like other world cinemas, Nollywood has since its inception in the 1990s, engendered actor fandom inside and outside Nigeria. Indeed, the trans-nationalisation and explosion of Nollywood have enabled the popularity not only of Nigerian films, but also of Nollywood stars, in countries across the world. As mentioned in passing by a number of commentators, Nollywood celebrities have rapidly become stars in such places as African Diasporas in the West, in Caribbean countries and most especially in Africa. In tandem with this, a number of Nigerian actors have, thanks to their popularity, been recruited to work in giant political and marketing campaigns outside Nigeria. However, although mentioned in a number of cinema studies and blog articles, the issue of the emergence of Nollywood actors' fans in countries across Africa remains understudied nay downplayed in research works. The studies that evoke this phenomenon tend to do so just in passing. In the bid to fill this gap in knowledge, the present article attempts an examination of pro-Nigeria fan cultures which emerged in Cameroon from early 2000s as a result of the popularity of Nollywood films and Nigerian actors in the country. Based on secondary sources and critical observations, the paper argues that Nollywood stars have been one of Nigeria's major image makers in Cameroon. These stars contribute immensely to the deconstruction of anti-Nigeria stereotypes, as well as to laundering a Nigerian image which has for decades, appeared seriously battered.

**Keywords:** Nollywood Films, Stardom, Actorism, Fandom, Fan Cultures, Nigeria Image Crisis, Country of Origin

## Introduction

Like other world cinemas, Nollywood has since its inception in the early 1990s, engendered actor fandom inside and outside Nigeria. The trans-nationalisation and explosion of Nollywood have enabled Nigerian films as well as Nollywood stars to enjoy a remarkable popularity in countries across the world. As mentioned in passing by a number of commentators, Nollywood celebrities such as Genevieve Nnaji, Omotola Jalade-Ekehinde, Pete Edochie, Nkem Owoh, Sam Loko, Ramsey Noah and Jim Ike just to name a few, have easily become stars in such places as African diasporas in the West and in Caribbean countries as well as in most of the African continent ([African Business 2011](#); [Haynes 2007, 2011](#)). In tandem with this, a number of Nigerian actors have, thanks to their popularity, sometimes been recruited to participate in giant political and marketing campaigns outside Nigeria. The participation of Genevieve Nnaji in some political campaigns in Liberia for instance, pulled masses of Liberians to political rallies in that country. Similarly, Omotola Jalade is one of *Time Magazine's* 100 most influential people in the world ([Odutayo & Busari 2018](#); [Tsika 2015](#)).

In spite of its topical nature, Nollywood actors' popularity in Africa in particular has still not attracted the scholarly attention it deserves. Although mentioned in a number of cinema studies and blog articles, this issue (the emergence of Nollywood actors' fans in countries across Africa) remains visibly understudied and downplayed in research works. The studies that evoke the phenomenon tend to do so only in passing. In the bid to fill this gap in knowledge, the present study attempts an examination of pro-Nigeria fan cultures which emerged in Cameroon from early 2000s as a result of the popularity of Nollywood films and actors in the country. In line with the above mentioned goal, the present paper seeks specifically to answer the following research questions: What is the place of "Nigerianisation" in the foreign cultural currents influencing fan cultures in Cameroon? What is the place of Nollywood in the factors contributing to the spread of Nigeria's soft power in Cameroon? And to what extent are Nollywood actors playing the role of Nigeria's image makers in Cameroon?

Based on secondary sources and critical observations, the paper argues that Nollywood stars have been one of Nigeria's major image makers in Cameroon. These stars have been contributing immensely to the deconstruction of various negative stereotypes around Nigeria. The stars have also contributed in no small measure to laundering the Nigerian image in Cameroon, an image which for decades has appeared seriously battered. In the first place, the paper provides a theoretical framework centred on the concept of celebrity branding. In the second place, the author examines the foreign popular cultures that have been present in Cameroon, underlining the place of "Nigerianisation" in this trans-nationalisation of popular cultures. In the third place, the place the paper examines the popularity of Nollywood in Cameroon; while in the last place, the article focuses on Nollywood actors as image makers for Nigeria in Cameroon.

### **The Celebrity as Country Image Maker: A Theoretical Perspective**

The belief that a celebrity can help sell products, ideas and even places (destination or country) is very common among image makers, brand specialists and marketers. This belief has inspired marketers and brand experts to constantly – or strategically – resort to celebrity branding in some of their marketing campaigns. By definition, celebrity branding is a situation where the social status, prominence or popularity of a celebrity is used to raise awareness about an issue or sell an idea, a product or a destination. This type of marketing or branding strategy is based on the assumption that celebrities have the necessary qualities to attract the attention of people and spark audiences' love for the product, idea or place being marketed. Celebrities' popularity in a country or in the world is a factor that can trigger the patronage, admiration or support of targeted audiences. In other words, fame has a great role to play, when it comes to attracting attention and shaping popular perceptions of ideas, products and places.

In tandem with the above, many international non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations, rely on celebrities for many of their international campaigns. They enlist the help of celebrities and goodwill ambassadors for such things as fund raising, diplomacy, and awareness/advocacy. [UNICEF \(2021\)](#) affirms for instance that:

Fame has some clear benefits in certain roles with UNICEF. Celebrities attract attention, so they are in a position to focus the world's eyes on the needs of children, both in their own countries and by visiting field projects and emergency programmes abroad. They can make direct representations to those with the power to effect change. They can use their talents and fame to fundraise and advocate for children and support (p.17)

In the same way they help politicians, marketers and international organisations catch the attention of masses during international campaigns, celebrities subtly draw international audiences' attention to their countries of origin. Taking cinema as case study, [Zhu and Wu \(2021\)](#) observe that both skilled and publicity actors can use their *actorism* in “patriotic films” to spark love for their countries of origin. The two scholars explain that these actors engage audiences emotionally. The actors do not only increase the popularity of the specific or respective films in which they star but also spark love for the country in which the films originate. This is particularly true to Hollywood actors who, by their way of acting and their global popularity, have contributed in no small measure to shaping Third World audiences' perception of America. Many Africans for instance, do believe that these Hollywood actors are epitomes of the American dream ([National Intelligence Council 2021](#); [Warren 2013](#)). [Costa and Goodkin \(2011\)](#) share corollary when they note that “the most influential US ambassadors seem to be our pop culture and foreign policy [...] nearly unanimously, survey respondents wrote of the pervasiveness of US popular culture in their host countries: often, American movies, television, music, celebrities and products are more popular than their local counterparts ” (p.1).

### **Foreign Pop Culture, Nigerianisation and Fan Culture Formation in Cameroon**

Like many other African countries, the Cameroonian market has over the years been considerably permeable to foreign and global popular cultures. From Americanism and westernisation to orientalism and South-Americanism, almost all big global popular cultures have found a breeding ground or a propitious terrain in the Cameroonian socio-cultural space. This is evidenced by many factors, one of which is the fact that, for decades,

American pop music and Hollywood movies have remained avidly consumed in Cameroon (Endong 2017; Mediat Tech 2017). In tandem with this, many big figures of the American show business have since the 1990s, continued to be very popular in the Cameroonian market. In the same way the likes of Michael Jackson, Black Box, Madonna, Steve Wonder, Denzel Washington, Jean Claude Van Dame and Sharon Stone (among others) were popular in the years 1990s in the country, big figures of the American music and cinema industry such as Beyonce, Rihanna, Don Jazzy and Maria Carey and the like are today, well known stars in Cameroon. These big names continue to influence or inspire communities of youths, particularly young artistes in Cameroonian urban cities.

The emergence and globalisation of the Bollywood film industry and the Hong Kong martial arts movies have similarly catalysed the popularity of orientalism in Cameroon. Right from the 1980s, Chinese Kung fu films have, in a sustained manner, penetrated the entire Cameroonian market. These foreign films competed only with Hollywood movies and represented many Cameroonian audiences' very first contact with cinema as well as with China and the Asian world. This development has enabled the popularity of actors such as Bruce Lee, Jacky Chang and Chaolin among others in 1980s Cameroon. The actors mentioned above remained very popular until recently (around the early 2000s) when Nollywood's popularity became perceptible in the country (Endong 2017). Another vector of orientalism in Cameroon has been the Bollywood film industry/culture. This film culture owes its popularity in Cameroon to the growing presence of such global Indian Televisions as Zee World and Zee Special in the Cameroonian territory. Through their film-only programming, these television stations have succeeded to "market" myriads of Indian actors and musicians. Thus, the growing consumption of Bollywood films in the Cameroonian market has enabled *Indianism* to be part of the multiple foreign currents influencing the world views of communities of youths in Cameroon since the early 1990s. This growing consumption of Indian films has also made the likes of Shah Rukh Khan, Madhuri Dixit, Kareena Kapoor and Hima Das among others to become very popular in Cameroon in the early 2000s.

Apart from Western and oriental currents, there have been African musical and cinematic movements which have positively been received in Cameroon. A good example is Congolese music which from the 1970 to the early 2000s was very popular in Cameroon.

With frenzy and trendy rhythms such as *Soukous*, *Congolese Rumba* and *Ndombolo*, artistes such as Diblo Dibala, Lutiana, Koffi Olomide, Pepe Kale, Kwassa Kwassa, Zaiko Langa Langa, Tabu Ley, Suzy Kasiya, Theo Blaise, Awilo Longomba, Defao and Extra Musica among others have secured millions of fans in Cameroon from the 1970s to recently in the early 2000s (Musah 2021; African Dance 2018; Wheeler 2005). A similar scenario that is related to Ivorian music has been observed in the country. In the early part of the 2000s, there has been an explosion of the Ivorian music in Cameroon which made the likes of Espoir 2000 and Dj Arafat, Dj Jacob and Dj Jeff among others to similarly enjoy ever-growing fan bases in the country (Exploring Africa 2020).

“Nigerianism” is another major transnational cultural current which is perceptibly present in Cameroon. This “nigerianism” is enabled by the trans-nationalisation of at least four things namely Nigerian Christianities, Nigerian fashion, Nigerian urban music and Nollywood films. Nigerian Christianities have rapidly propagated and become vibrant in Cameroon thanks to the implantation of churches founded by Nigerian apostles and overseers. Examples of such transnational churches include the Redeemed Christian Church of God (of Eunuch Adeboye), Christian Fountain Church alias Winners’ Chapel (of David Oyedepo), Dipper Life (of Kumuyi), Synagogue Church of Nations (of T.B. Josua) and Christ’s Embassy (of Chris Oyakhilome) among others (Ukah 2007; Mbe 2002). The founders of the churches mentioned above, together with their close Nigerian collaborators are veritable stars in Cameroon (Made for Mind 2019; Tella 2021). This notion is clearly revealed in situations where they organise international/national religious events such as conventions, holy camps or evangelisation campaigns on Cameroonian soil. The presence of these Nigerian men of God in religious events organised on Cameroonian soil usually pulls thousands of fans and devotees. The latter usually come driven by the desire to commune with the religious leaders and enjoy a face-to-face experience with these Nigerian ecclesiastic figures.

Besides Nigerian Christianities, other forms of popular culture such as Nigerian urban music and fashion have been very popular in Cameroon, and a vector of pro-Nigeria fandom in the country. Actually, Nigerian popular music together with Nigerian textile have since the 1980s been heavily consumed in Cameroon, particularly in the Anglophone zone of the country (Pani 2012; Endong 2017). Popular artistes such as Cameroon born

Prince Niko Mbarga (with his popular hit named “Sweet Mother”) and Afrobeat apostle Fela Anikulapo-Kuti among other pop music icons enabled Cameroonian audiences to appreciate and dance to a number of Nigerian rhythms (*highlife, apala, juju music, fuji* and *Afrobeat* among others). The most remarkable and diffused among these Nigerian popular musicians have been gospel music singers, some of which include Voice of the Cross, Sunny Okosun and Agatha Mosses among others. Since the 1980s, this popularity has remained intact as Nigerian super stars such as P-Square, D Banj, Timaya, Niara Marley, Davido and Shales among others continue to be very popular in Cameroonian urban spaces. In January 2020 for instance, Nigerian popular artiste Wizkid was invited by the famous “Bistol Restaurant” in Yaounde for New Year performance. Wizkid’s performance at the Bristol Restaurant coupled with the fact that president Biya’s daughter is a fan of the Nigerian artist earned Wizkid an invitation to privately entertain the presidential family. This presidential invitation fuelled a complex fuss as well as series of controversies and debates around the popularity of Nigerian artistes and actors in the Cameroonian cyberspace ([Stop Blabla Cam 2020](#); [BBC News 2020](#)).

The popularity of Nigerian artistes and actors in Cameroon has been increasing so much so that it has provoked mitigated reactions from local musicians and social arbiters and influencer. The latter have of recent, interpreted the growing mania for Nigerian celebrities as a problematic “nigerianisation” and a Nigerian invasion of the Cameroonian socio-cultural space. Many among these local Cameroonian artistes have reportedly called on stakeholders of the country’s cultural industry and the Cameroonian populace to curtail the growing influence/popularity of their Nigerian counterparts. For some years now, many Cameroonian artistes’ movements against “Nigerianisation” have been perceptible in the country. In December 2020 for instance, a popular Cameroonian actor named Cy Pancho, posted a video on Youtube where he ardently called on Cameroonian Djs, bloggers, entertainers and audiences to shun Nigerian music and films. Pancho based his xenophobic request on the arguable observation that while Nigerian artistes and actors are given red-carpet reception and much honour in Cameroon, their Cameroonian counterparts enjoy no such treatment in Nigeria. He said that while Nigerian music has literally inundated the Cameroonian market, no Nigerian Dj can recognise or play a Cameroonian artiste’s song

(Daily News 2021; Onikoyi 2021). Commenting on this xenophobic/nationalist tendency among Cameroonian entertainers, Mefo (2021) writes that:

The artists have argued that this [Nigerian celebrities' popularity in the Cameroonian market] 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. Local entertainers such as CY International, Stanley Enow, Magasco and Wams Klassic have particularly shown disgust at the trend, arguing that Cameroonian songs are not being played in Nigeria the same way we have been hypnotized by theirs. (p.3)

In spite of the “aggressive” efforts of local artistes and entertainers, the popularity of Nigerian artistes continues to be remarkable in the country. Most concerts organised by Nigerian artistes on Cameroonian soil are always welcomed and patronised by large crowds of Cameroonian fans. It should even be highlighted that beside the avid consumption of Nigerian cultural/musical products in Cameroon, a number of Cameroonian musicians tend to even copy the Nigerian style of music. In an interview granted the Cameroonian tabloid *Cameroun Tribune*, local artiste Mr. Leo, shared corollary thus: “We grew up listening to American music and Nigerian music. We learnt to make music their way and today we are able to fuse these urban sounds with our traditional sounds like *njang*, *makossa* [and] *bikutsi*”<sup>1</sup> (cited in Welleng 2022, p.8).

The next vector of “nigerianisation” in Cameroon (Nollywood) will be treated in the following section of this essay. The foregoing subtly suggests that, when the Nollywood films began to literally inundate the Cameroonian socio-cultural ecology in the early 2000s, the notion of a panoply Nigerian cultural products surviving in Cameroon was not that novel or strange to the majority of the Cameroonian public and sub-cultures. In some sense, a wide number of indigenous cultural synergies had already started working towards domesticating Nigerian popular cultural artefacts. Besides this index, and as earlier pointed

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<sup>1</sup> Njang, makossa and bikutsi are originally traditional rhythms practiced respectively by the Bamenda, Duala and Fan-Bet tribes of Cameroon. However, the rhythms have been modernised and are now explored by Cameroonian urban music makers irrespective of tribes. The rhythms are frenzy in nature.



out, Cameroon had always manifested openness to external cultural influences. As Remi Atangana rightly contends:

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<sup>2</sup>] (cited in [Africulture 2006](#))

In effect, since the 80s, Cameroonian artistes have developed the culture of copying exogenous rhythms, not only from Nigeria, but also from the Democratic Republic Congo (former Zaire), Cote d'Ivoire and the west. The advent of Nollywood films in Cameroon therefore consolidated the somehow weak “cultural presence” of Nigeria on Cameroon soil (particularly in the Anglophone region) ([Endong 2019, 2017](#)).

### **The Nollywood Effect in Cameroon**

Like in other African countries, Nollywood films are avidly consumed in Cameroon since the early part of the year's 2000s. This film culture has, according to researchers, constituted a dominant vector of “nigerianisation” in the country. No doubt Cameroon's online tabloid, *Ma Media Tech* notes that: “in the Cameroonian popular imaginary, the word “Nigeria” rhymes with Boko Haram, Nollywood and the Bakassi conflict [My

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<sup>2</sup> 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)

translation]<sup>3</sup>”. As will be illustrated in this section, Nollywood films have quickly become not only a window into Nigeria but also a serious source of inspiration for local Cameroonian filmmakers (Nalova 2015; Mballa-Mballa 2014). The latter have sought to copy the Nollywood cinematic paradigms.

Similar to their African counterparts, Cameroonian audiences have had to receive, interpret and come to terms with the Nollywood phenomenon. Indeed, like their Black African peers, Cameroon audiences have adopted varied consumption cultures as well as a variety of attitudes towards Nollywood films. In a 2007 study, Ajibade underscores the fact that, Cameroonian audiences’ reception of Nollywood films is not significantly different from that of Nigerian audiences. Ajibade actually observes that like their Nigerian counterparts, the Cameroonian publics consume Nollywood films in what he called “tied-in spaces” (buses equipped with video players and TVs), private spaces (offices or individual homes), found spaces (video shops) and public spaces (barding saloons, eateries, hotels, restaurants among others). Their attitude towards Nollywood films is remarkably and largely similar, given the fact that the films emphasise a wide number of social realities which are the quotidian experiences of audiences from Black Africa irrespective of nationalities and ethnicities. As he puts it “these themes and popular conditions are parts of the social raw materials that may be found anywhere on the African postcolony, south of the Sahara [...] If audiences in Nigeria, Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa find the films attractive, spell-binding and socially-engaging, then it can be inferred that the videos link to some of the people’s common experiences while mediating popular realities in cheap and untidy social dramas” (12).

National television channels such as *Spectrum Television* (STV) and *Canal 2* have been at the vanguard of popularising Nollywood films in Cameroon. It is on record that as from the 2000s when the Nollywood saga became so visible, *STV* as well as many other prominent TV stations based in Cameroon – notably *Canal 2* and *Equinox TV* – included Nollywood films in their programming thereby Africanising their programming (Endong 2017; Kanjo 2009, 2010). *STV* in particular perpetrated the tradition of broadcasting and rebroadcasting Nollywood films five days a week. This tradition constituted one of the

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<sup>3</sup> Dans l’imaginaire populaire au Cameroun, Nigeria rime avec Boko Haram, Nollywood et le conflit de Bakassi.

factors which have made Cameroonian audiences – particularly those dwelling in urban centres – to have a greater Nollywood film experience. *STV* is however not the sole broadcaster or media that have given enriched its programming with Nollywood films. Other vectors of the proliferation of Nollywood films in Cameroon include South Africa based Cable TV *Africa Magic*, *Nollywood TV* and a host of similar international broadcasters.

The broadcasters mentioned above have thus been playing a key role not only in popularising Nigerian films and cultures but also in selling specific Nollywood actors. By enabling Cameroonians to have a greater Nollywood experience, they subtly made specific Nigerian filmmakers popular in Cameroon. This will be discussed in the following section of the paper.

### **Nollywood Actors/Actorism and Pro-Nigeria Fandom in Cameroon**

There are basically three areas in which Nollywood can be said to affect the Cameroonian public and enable pro-Nigerian fan cultures in Cameroon: the reduced reliance on Hollywood films, the *Nigerianisation* of certain rituals (particularly in Pentecostal circles) as well as the adoption of Nollywood production paradigms in the Anglophone Cameroon cinema. Nollywood imperialism in the Anglophone Cameroon film industry is, of course, the most palpable of the three indexes mentioned above. There is a veritable Nollywood mania in the Anglophone Cameroon film industry, manifested by filmmakers and actors who want to religiously copy their Nigerian counterparts regardless of the risk of misrepresenting local realities and alienating indigenous film audiences. [Nalova \(2015\)](#) notes for instance that Anglophone Cameroonian filmmakers tap into Nollywood films in terms of body language, expression and verbal interjections. The filmmakers just attempt in most cases to superimpose a purely Nigerian style and experience to their filmic productions. In so doing they strip their productions of much of their “Camerooness” and their originality. Widespread emulation of Nollywood cinematic paradigms at all levels of production has systematically stifled creativity and originality in Anglophone Cameroon film production. Also reporting on the fact that Nollywood is serving as a model for Anglophone Cameroonian actors, [Kanjo](#) contends that if Cameroon is fond of Nollywood, it is also thanks to such creative forces and talents as Jim Iyke. [Kanjo](#) explains that, as one

of the most talented Nigerian actors, “Jim has inspired many rising Cameroonian actors who say they must work hard and be like him” (Pani 2015, p.18).

This Nollywood mania partially informs the culture of seeking partnership with Nigerian filmmakers or recruiting Nollywood stars to work in Cameroonian film project. This has caused popular Nigerian actors such Eucharía Anunobi, Emeka Ike and Jim Iyke among others, to star some of the Anglophone Cameroonian filmic productions or to be invited to feature in some cultural events in Cameroon. Emeka Ike, for instance acted in Aicha’s *Royal Destiny* while Jim Iyke starred in Agbor Gilbert’s *Pink Poison* and *Land of Shadows* (Kanjo 2010, Pani 2015). The partnerships between Collywood and Nollywood have been lauded by a number of Cameroonian film critics and scholars. Mballa-Mballa (2014) for instance, is of the opinion that through benchmarking, Collywood/callywood could tap into Nollywood to reinvent the entire film industry in Cameroon.

Another palpable and quasi-indelible index of Nollywood films’ influences on the Cameroonian market is the fact that most Nigerian actors are viewed as superstars in most urban areas of Cameroon. Their presence in some major cultural and entertainment events – notably film festivals – organized on Cameroonian soil have most often been welcomed by the public and mediatised. A good number of Nollywood superstars drive Cameroonian publics mad. Pockets of Cameroonian audiences (particularly female communities) “kill themselves” to have a glimpse of actors such as Ramsey Noah, Jim Iyke, Patience Ozokwor (Aka Mama G) and Pete Edochie among others.

Nollywood actors are inspiring many of their Cameroonian counterparts. Like their countrymen of the music industry (notably P-Square, Davido, May D, Kukere, Yemi Alade and Timaya), Nollywood actors are most often hailed by the Cameroonian populace, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon regions of the country. Recently, actors Tchidi Chikere, Walter Anga and comedian Klint Da Drunk were conferred with chieftaincy titles by the Mejan-Kom people of North-West Cameroon (Chioma 2016). The three men were respectively given the titles of *Mbanfon*, *Guifon* and *Fuifon*. This happened when the three Nigerian stars visited Cameroon to premiere a movie.

Cameroonian fans of Nollywood actors have sometimes overdone their eagerness and mania. Using the case of Nigerian superstar Jim Iyke, Kanyi (2016) recounts how the manifestation of such mania and eagerness has somehow been admeasured and chaotic. He

notes an incident which happened during the shooting of a movie in Limbe (a Cameroon town) thus:

Jim Iyke was in Cameroon to shoot his new movie, when an army of female fans suddenly besieged him while on location. [...] as soon as the over anxious female fans learned that the controversial actor was shooting a movie in their country, they thronged the location in their tens of thousands and within minutes crowded him like bees on a honey pot – pressing to touch their idol. The situation almost got out of hand, [and without] the timely intervention of security men, Jim Iyke would have been mobbed by the eager Cameroonian fans. (Kanyi 2016, para. 23)

Jim Iyke is not the only Nollywood actor to be idolised in Cameroon. Others include Ramsey Noah, Genvieve Nnaji, Omotola and other big names. Though it has been demonstrated that Nollywood stars have large pockets of fans in Cameroon, no available review has really examine the extent to which the celebrities' popularity reflects the soft power or popular perception of their country of origin. It is still hard to clearly make a parallel between the kind of mania Cameroonian public exhibit for Nollywood actors and these public's perceptions of Nigeria and the Nigerian brand. However, one thing remains clear: as products of Nigeria, Nollywood actors are positively viewed in Cameroon. They have large pockets of fans. This is a good development for the rebranding of the Nigerian image in Cameroon. It may thus be said that Nollywood actors contribute in a subtle way, to winning Cameroonian hearts for Nigeria.

The foregoing suggests that through its celebrities, the Nollywood industry is contributing in its own way to the laundering of the Nigerian image in Cameroon. The film industry is actually deconstructing many age old negative stereotypes of Nigerian. Some of these stereotypes include “invaders”, “economic competitors”, propagators of counterfeit products, voodooists and cultists and corrupt people among others. By their actorism, Nollywood actors subtly propagate the notion that not all about Nigeria is bad. They deconstruct what Ademola *et al.* (2011) refer to the proverbial Nazareth stories associated

with the image of Nigeria. By these Nazareth stories, nothing good can come from Nazareth.

## **Conclusion**

Like other world cinemas, Nollywood has since its inception in the early 1990s, engendered actor fandom inside and outside Nigeria. The trans-nationalisation and explosion of Nollywood have enabled not only Nigerian films but also Nollywood stars to become very popular in countries across the world. In effect, Nollywood celebrities have easily become stars in such places as African diasporic communities in the West, Caribbean countries and most especially in Africa. In line with this, a number of Nigerian actors have, because of their popularity, sometimes been recruited to work in giant political and marketing campaigns outside Nigeria.

In tandem with the above, Nollywood actors have become popular in Cameroon, thanks partly to the fact that Nigerian films are avidly consumed in the country. This paper has examined pro-Nigeria fan cultures which emerged in Cameroon from early 2000s as a result of the popularity of Nollywood films and actors in the country. The paper has argued that Nollywood stars have been one of Nigeria's major image makers in Cameroon. These stars contribute immensely to the deconstruction of anti Nigeria stereotypes. The celebrities have also immensely contributed to laundering the Nigerian image. This image has for decades being seriously battered. This paper has limited its focus to how the trans-nationalisation of the Nollywood film culture has enabled the formation of pro-Nigeria fan cultures in Cameroon. Future research may delve in an examination of how this pro-Nigeria fan culture enables Nigeria's support of Cameroonian cinema. Future research works may also examine how Nigerian celebrities receive this pro-Nigerian fan culture in Cameroon.

### ***Conflicts of Interest:***

The author declares no conflict of interest

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