

CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NOLLYWOOD'S *ROAD TO YESTERDAY* AND HOLLYWOOD'S *ROOM*

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Abstract

This study draws a comparison on character development in Hollywood and Nollywood films, assessing how culture influences the process in both industries. While the cultures of the environment in which film is produced usually affects the narratives, a gap identified is the comparison amongst industries, in this case Hollywood and Nollywood. Utilizing the Thematic Analysis approach and hinged on Stuart Hall's Representation Theory, this study draws comparison from the Hollywood film Room and Nollywood's Road to Yesterday. The units of analysis are two characters (the protagonist and the antagonist) from each of the films. Findings reveal a variance in the cultural influences of the two films industries to assert that development of Hollywood film characters is influenced by the culture of western individualism, as opposed to those of Nollywood that are greatly influenced by the communal and moralistic cultural lifestyle. The study, consistent with Hall's Representation theory, shows that representation is a culturally encoded construct and not a neutral reflection of reality. It also shows that films are culturally encoded based on their industries and are decoded by audiences differently, supporting Hall's polysemy claims. This study recommends that similar research should be conducted using other films produced by different industries. Further research could be conducted with more characters as units of analysis and more films to draw a more generic conclusion.

Keywords: Character Development, Films, Screenwriting, Cultural Influence, Hollywood, Nollywood.

Introduction

Film characters are strong determinants of how well or not a film will be received (Eder, 2010). Therefore, their creation is discussed by filmmakers, particularly screenwriters to discover how best to communicate meaning and elicit a response from viewers. Eder (2010) shows the import of creating interesting characters, as he considers them to be of central importance to viewers' film experience. From a commercial standpoint, a recent study by You (2024), emphasizes how characters (especially superheroes) attract viewership leading to the commercial success of the films. So as a screenwriter it is important to know that how these characters are formed or developed matter greatly. Character development as seen through the eyes of a filmmaker is composed of several aspects, which basically includes screenwriting and working with actors to bring the character development into live experience. But the main development starts when you think of a character and start to script his or her characteristics and introduce him/her to the world of the story. So the concept starts with screenwriting.

This study, which aims to identify cultural influences on character development in the cinematic traditions of Nollywood and Hollywood, examines how the cultural contexts, where the two industries operate, influence the development of characters. One thing that is certain is that both industries exhibit a commitment to crafting characters that their target audiences can relate with on emotional and intellectual levels.

Reflecting on Hollywood, Valverde-Maestre and Perez-Rufi (2022) used the film narrative analysis methodology to analyse characters in 64 films from six genres in classic Hollywood cinema. Their results showed that Hollywood's main characters are sculpted to suit the story needs, implying that the characters are defined by how they adapt to the genre. According to Hambly (2020), Hollywood is generally regarded as being the global standard for measuring quality of screenplay and film. Therefore, their films are crafted to meet the sensibilities of a large audience. Hambly conducted a study to examine the cultural differences in screenwriting of the Australian film industry and Hollywood. Findings of his study revealed that cultural narratives, idioms and mythologies of Australians embedded in screenplays and films made a difference in appealing to the Australian audience. This showed that cultural considerations come into play to make a screenplay desirable to specific target audience. However, there is need to properly compare how culture affects the development of characters in the two industries of film and how the interactions of cultures interplay in developing characters.

The study shall help screenwriters to understand the cultural influences on developing screenplays hence improving their ability to tailor their scripts towards specific audiences. The study will give further insight into the concept of hybridization of characters, which is quite relevant in modern times where pluralism has made people become products of several cultures.

The scope of this study covers a selected Nigerian film (*Road to Yesterday*) juxtaposed against a selected American film (*Room*) both produced in 2015. According to Ebewo (2007), most Nigerian films fall within the genres of comedy, romance, melodrama and historical epic. Knowing that Nigerian films are restricted in genre, possibly due to inadequate technology, skills and financial resources, his study selected only Hollywood and Nollywood films of thriller and drama genres respectively that have made box office in their countries.

Theoretical Framework

Stuart Hall's Representation theory holds that representations of people or occasions are complex and multifaceted, not confined to a true single identity or interpretation (Hall, 1997). Instead representations can be in several ways, being constructed using signs and symbols to convey ideas, thoughts, emotions and nuances. Often the media sells ideas to the public using representations. However, there is no fixed meaning as representations could mean different things to different audiences depending on how they interpret them. Therefore, in the process of making films or developing characters, screenwriters get to choose the actions, behaviors, speeches, and traits of the characters to represent how the character is understood and interpreted. This study is anchored on this theory.

Literature Review

Impact of Cultural Differences on Character Development in Hollywood and Nollywood Films

Over the years, film has been recognized as a product that represents people's culture, that represents the way of life of the people depicted, aside attracting global culture. The impact of cultural differences on character development in Hollywood and Nollywood films is a critical aspect that shapes the portrayal of characters within these cinematic traditions. Characters are not just individuals within a story; they are representations of the societal norms, values, and cultural beliefs that influence their actions and decisions. In Hollywood films, characters often reflect Western ideologies of individualism, heroism, and self-actualization, leading to the development of complex protagonists with intricate story arcs. On the other hand, Nollywood films tend to focus on communal values, family dynamics, and spiritual beliefs, resulting in character development that emphasizes interconnected relationships and moral dilemmas within a collective context. The cultural backgrounds of filmmakers and audiences play a significant role in shaping these character portrayals, highlighting the diverse narrative approaches present in global cinema.

Cultural differences not only determine how characters are formed but also how they evolve and undergo transformation throughout the narrative, reflecting the intricate tapestry of human experience across different cultural landscapes (Ryan et al., 2014). In Nollywood, character development is essential for representing the diverse cultures and traditions of Nigeria. By portraying well-rounded characters with depth and authenticity, Nollywood films can resonate more strongly with local and international audiences. Nigerian films usually showcase African idioms, proverbs, costumes, artefacts, and cultural images. Nigerian film genres often include horror, humour, urban legends, myths, love and romance, juju, melodrama, and historical epics (Okome, 2014).

As an example, the epic narrative *Pearl Harbour*, a Hollywood production about the United States of America's exploits in World War II after being attacked by the Japanese Army, exemplifies how America can protect its interests anywhere in the world and make itself attractive and useful globally. Such examples from Hollywood have previously been proposed and used as models by Nollywood film makers. Now epic themes of high quality and appreciation such as *October 1* and

76 are being churned out by the industry for better promotion of Nigerian cultural values, democratic principles, among other peculiar elements that are shown to the audience instead of always producing what Okunna (2016) refers to as themes that revolve around infertility or childlessness, polygamy, inheritance, prostitution, philandering, and adultery (Akinwale, 2013).

Nollywood has numerous cultural influences, both home and international, yet it is inherently unique (Alamu, 2010). Popular culture provides a setting for defining and changing the national identity especially for those who align themselves with the culture and civilization paradigm. Culture is more than just a restoration to traditional traditions. It reflects people's perspective on the future of traditional values in the face of new technology, which is crucial for growth and advancement. Our national development goals prioritize self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and a natural identity. Culture serves as the foundation for all policies, including education, social, political, and economic, that people regard as their own (Adjunmobi, 2010). Critics like Akande (2009), Balogun (2005), and Iroh (2009) have criticized the quality and narrative value of Nigerian films for various reasons. Iroh, for example, criticizes the industry's lack of imagination, ideas, innovation, and a cohesive strategic strategy." Akande, on the other hand, argues that the subject of Nollywood films is predictable and always centers on issues like "conflict between mothers-in-law and their sons' wives, sequences dealing with police combating criminals, burial and consultations with local physicians", and so on.

As clearly explained, films are export materials that convey cultural, political, social, religious and sometimes technological impact of the producing nations for world spectators to appreciate. This means that films are hardly produced for localization since they are cultural commodities and tools of communication and diplomacy. This is clearly illustrated in the Hollywood example which Ayakoroma (2014) opines has always remained true to the mirroring of the American way of life culturally, politically, technologically, economically, socially etc. The American Hollywood template can be seen as the reason why Nollywood should continue to churn out films of good cultural and moral standards in order to make every Nigerian and the rest of the world proud. This means that Nigerian products should not undergo American manipulation, but it also means that such cultural tools as films can be qualitative given that lessons on how themes on cultural promotion are learned from where high quality standards are strengthened. By extension, it would suffice to associate this with the need to leverage on the effects of globalization, which Kellner (2012) strongly applauds as the extension of cultural interaction; which ultimately fosters the promotion of languages, international cultures and multiculturalism through news, music and movies in the media.

Hybridization of Characters in Screenplays

Character hybridization refers to the blending of different character traits, archetypes, or personalities within a single character. This technique is used to create multifaceted and complex characters that resonate with the audience (Kaplan, 2019). By combining contrasting characteristics or motivations, writers can challenge stereotypes and create more relatable and dynamic characters. Globally, it is observed that there is interrelationship everywhere. This influences our cultures and customs, which gradually become modified to incorporate other cultures (Yoshinaga, 2019). This leads to the concept of hybridity. According to Bhabha (2004) hybridity and multiculturalism cannot be avoided in our modern times because every character will somehow exist in a third space, which is the blend between its culture and other external cultural

influences. Some nations tend to be more influenced. Nollywood is an example of an industry that showcases such hybrid characters, who express the Nigerian culture and those of other cultures in their films. This can largely be related to colonialism in the past. According to Smith (2012), post the industrial revolution, colonialists moved round the world influencing people and eventually making them adapt the colonialists' culture. Through several mediums this acculturation has taken place, creating the 'third space'. Therefore, this must be reflected in character development.

Some empirical studies conducted that are related to this research include

Li (2023) states that the portrayal and character development of women's roles express in China express an absence and resistance of women's image in society. The study looks at movies that talk about girls breaking free from societal demands, mothers burdened by their families, etc. Findings reveal the transformation of women's images in films in very recent years though slowly, reflects the diverse growth of contemporary women in the evolution of history, and women are gradually becoming voices from the voiceless to the active. This indicates that the topic of women's lives and growth cannot be ignored in movie character development.

Giarrusso (2022) explores the world of multiculturalism and diversity through the lens of filmmaking and screenwriting. He explores pedagogic methods used in the research project "Zooming In: Multiculturalism Through the Lens of the Next Generation". The study discovers that the process of screenwriting and character development in filmmaking, is conditional around individual agency. It also determines that the outcome of screenwriting practice requires a pedagogic and and ragogic design that recognizes and engages with complex functions and meanings. While Giarruso's (2022) study takes into cognizance multiculturalism, it does not specifically compare cultural influences to character development in Nollywood and Hollywood. This necessitates the filling of this gap to provide a more nuanced understanding of effective character development processes.

Lee and Liu (2021) looks at Character Development from a sociocultural perspective. This study uses Eastern and Western narrative theories to classify the character development (characterization) methods that various creators employed on this Chinese story in three distinct media (i.e., novel, antique book with illustrations, and temple painting). They make use of the folk story titled, "The Romance of the Three Kingdoms". The study identifies the creation processes involved in characterization when adapting a literary work into movies.

According to Giwa (2014) character development in Nollywood movies are greatly influenced by the societal norms of the environment or culture of the society being portrayed. Findings of this study indicated how the cultural and societal norms depicted in each movie shaped the casting and characterization of the movie characters. An observable gap is the need to conduct a cross-cultural study across different film industries. Also, an analysis can be conducted on different Nollywood films produced over different periods to observe the emergence of a grounded theory that will better explain character development in Nollywood.

Doghudje (2019) conducted a study titled *Balancing Gender Stereotypes in Nollywood* to uncover the relationship or influence of cultural norms on character development. She deployed the content analysis methodology using the movie *Lion heart* as her case study. Findings of the study revealed

how the cultural/societal norms depicted in movies shaped the casting and development of female movie characters. Female characters in Nollywood movies are affected by gender stereotypes defining what a woman can and cannot do or become in the society. The movie proves that a woman can fit into the shoes of a man in the corporate world.

The comparison of character development in Hollywood and Nollywood films reveals significant differences in the way characters are formed and evolve throughout a story. While Hollywood tends to focus on individual character arcs and complex psychological motivations, Nollywood films often prioritize communal and cultural values in shaping their characters. This difference reflects the broader cultural contexts in which these industries operate, with Hollywood being rooted in individualistic Western narratives and Nollywood drawing from collective African storytelling traditions. Despite these disparities, both industries exhibit a commitment to crafting dynamic and multifaceted characters that resonate with audiences on emotional and intellectual levels.

Methodology

This research is basically qualitative in approach. The Thematic Analysis (TA), as a method, is useful in theme identification, analysis and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). This work uses TA to observe and identify elements that make up characters in the selected Hollywood and Nollywood films: Hollywood - *Room*; Nollywood - *Road to Yesterday*.

Using the coding sheet and observation notes as data gathering tools, this study underwent Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-stage process of conducting thematic analysis (Familiarization with data; Search for themes; Review and refine themes; Define and name the themes; and Write the analysis/report). Data from both industries were then analyzed to adequately address the research question.

The population of the study comprises characters in the selected Nigerian and American Films produced in the year 2015 and of the genres psychological thriller and drama. The films selected have been shown on cinemas and made box office hits in their respective countries of production. The purposive sampling technique was used to identify films that fall within the genres of psychological thriller and drama, from the population. In purposeful sampling, participants are selected on the basis of some predefined criteria necessary to answer a particular research question, in this case, 'What are the cultural influences on character development in the selected Hollywood and Nollywood films?' Therefore, in purposive sampling it is best to have data collection run concurrently with data evaluation and analysis (Mack et al., 2005). The sample for this study is one Nollywood Film (*Road to Yesterday*) and one Hollywood Film (*Room*). The units of analysis are two characters in each of the films: The protagonist (lead character role), and the main antagonist. Therefore, two characters are analyzed from each film.

For this work, the memo and codebook are used as instruments for data collection. MAXQDA is used as an application for coding and further analysis such as categorization of codes, and development of themes. The codebook allows for testing reliability and enables replication of the research (Decuir-Gunby et al, 2011). It has to be developed by the researcher to suit the study. Based on Bernard and Ryan's (2010) suggestions, the codebook for this study is developed with

two columns for each code. The first column lists the items, while the second column gives space to be filled appropriately. The codebook was designed to have the following items/sections: Short Description of the code (code name); a detailed description of the code; an inclusion criteria; an exclusion criteria; typical exemplars (examples of data that represent the code); atypical exemplars (special examples that fit the code); and “close, not no” (data that are similar but do not suit the code). The memo was used to take note of any observations that can help explain some themes or identify codes from the films studied, as well as note ideas that come up from the data.

The study uses MAXQDA qualitative analysis application to conduct the code identification and subsequent analysis. Coding took place at some key points in each of the selected films: Introduction, Inciting incident, plot twist points, character interactions, conflicts, turning points, climax and resolution. This was to enable the answering of the research questions. The coding process was reiterative, and led to the discovery of more codes.

This study presents the data in the textual forms and in coding tables. Data collected will be analyzed using textual analysis techniques and MAXQDA application. It incorporates the comparative analysis since data were collected from characters in the selected Hollywood film and Nollywood films. The characters form the units of analysis. Themes were identified from each of the two characters in each film. Examination of each character was carried out across narrative actions, dialogue, moral positioning, emotional expression and relational dynamics. This allowed for a comparison of character development that are culturally grounded.

Every research is guided by ethics. Ethical considerations are the basic principles that guide a research in design and practice (Bhandari, 2022). This study does not involve human subjects and so would not need to consider factors such as confidentiality, beneficence, and respect for autonomy/anonymity. However, some of the following ethics were considered in the course of the study:

- i. Respect for communities: Considering that this study revolves around creative works from Nigeria and America, there was no form of castigation or ridicule of any of the peoples or their works.
- ii. Copyright Principles: Another consideration is the fact that the films selected are subject to copyright and therefore they were strictly used for research purpose, and were not shown for any pecuniary benefit whatsoever.
- iii. Avoidance of bias: Comparisons were made in all objectivity and the films selected were based on set criteria.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The emergent themes from codes identified are presented here.

***Room* (Hollywood Film)**

Synopsis:

In the film *Room* Brie Larson features as Ma (protagonist) who, alongside her son Jack (played by Jacob Tremblay), is held captive by a man, Old Nick (antagonist) in a small room. She stages an escape with her son feigning dead. They are successful in their ploy, but have the new experiences

of the outside world and post traumatic syndrome to battle with. She almost commits suicide, but is rescued by her son and works towards inner healing. The film is a 2015 production directed by Lenny Abrahamson in collaboration with Film4 and Element Pictures

Results:

Presented here are the structured emerging themes for the protagonist, Ma, and the antagonist, Old Nick, from *Room* (2015).

Table 1: Emergent themes from Hollywood Film - *Room*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Action/Dialogue evidence
Focus on Western Individualism	The character's identity is fashioned around personal survival, autonomy, and self-driven action, rather than a communal one	Ma (the protagonist) says during the interview, "When Jack came everything was different...I just knew I had to keep him safe" (1:29:43) "You're gonna help me trick old Nick" she tells Jack (37:15)
Focus on culture of therapy	Psychological trauma is verbalized openly. The characters utilized emotional articulation and self-reflection for therapy or healing. This is seen in the character Ma.	Ma weeps and tells her mother, "I don't know what is wrong with me. I was supposed to be happy" (1:25:44). "You have no idea what is going on in my head" (1:26:08).
Characters being reflections of consumer culture	The mediation of characters is through institutional systems, such as the hospital, law and media. This reflects a culture of spectacle and scrutiny by the public.	Post escape, Ma is questioned and pressurized by the Media and is expected to suit a certain expectation (1:30:00). Ma is being quizzed by the media in an interview, "Did you think of him having a normal childhood?" (1:30:57)
Cultural identity is present but nuanced	Indicators of cultural identity are subtle or subliminal. Therefore, culture is not evident in overt symbols such as language and dresses, but	Old Nick assumes patriarchy or husband and father figure over Ma and Jack, he asks Ma "Who pays the power bill?"

	are rather embedded in ideological perceptions. This is evident in the character of Old Nick (the antagonist) who expresses the culture of patriarchy.	Who pays for everything....” (20:21) Old Nick tells Ma, “Maybe if you could stop complaining and be a little grateful...” (20:00)
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The emergence of these themes from this film is a reflection of how Hollywood characters consistently define selfhood through autonomous action, psychological depth and institutional interaction. This reflects the Western humanist ideology of liberalism embedded in representation.

Road to Yesterday (Nollywood Film)

Synopsis:

Road to Yesterday, is a 2015 romantic film directed by Ishaya Bako. It is about an estranged couple (Victoria and Izu) who embarked on a road trip for the funeral of a relative. While on the trip, they hope to work out their marriage, only for secrets to be unveiled that would test the bond of their relationship. The film ends tragically as the husband gets involved in a car crash that claims his life. They therefore never get to resolve their differences, and the road trip never happened, as the film utilizes the trip as a plot twist. Genevieve Nnaji stars as Victoria, and Oris Erhuero plays Izu in this film produced by The Entertainment Network.

Results

The following themes are drawn which emerged from the thematic analysis of the **protagonist (Victoria)** and **antagonist (Izu)** from the film *Road to Yesterday*.

Table 2: Emergent themes from Nollywood Film - *Road to Yesterday*

Themes	Sub-Themes	Action/Dialogue evidence
Tied to Communal Values and kinship	Character identity is relational and characterised by shared responsibility, marital responsibilities, and responsibility to family unit. This is visible through the character of Victoria (Protagonist)	She sends an SMS to Izu her husband “Please come home” (12:40). In the flashback, she tells Izu her plans “Hopefully married with two children...” (38:17).
Focus on blending with Local language and identity	Cultural hybridity and social negotiation are revealed through the shift from Pidgin English to Standard English.	Victoria speaks to police officer “How work?” (29:25) “Na God go bless you...”(29:41)

Morality and religion	There is a relationship between moral judgement with not just punishment, but also forgiveness, endurance and some form of reflection. This is seen in the Antagonist (Izu).	In the bar with his friends, Izu philosophises, “Man, woman...we lie, we cheat.... There is no difference” (15:23). Izu tells Victoria, “I have no family, I have no daughter” (1:05:29).
Gender roles and societal expectations	Agency of the female is expressed through negotiation and some form of restraint, as this is the socio-cultural expectation of wifehood.	Victoria pleads with Izu “I’ll cook. We’ll talk. Just don’t go out” (08:26). She still tells him with his consent “Yes, I am going to drive” (24:37).

Answer to Research Question

What are the cultural influences on character development in the selected Nollywood and Hollywood films?

This section answers the research question in the comparison of cultural influence on character development across the selected films. To explore cultural influences embedded in character portrayals; this study uses thematic analysis to answer the question.

Table3: Cultural Influences on Character Development in Hollywood Films

Hollywood Characters	Cultural Influence
	Focus on Western Individualism
	Focus on culture of therapy
	Characters being reflections of consumer culture
	Cultural identity is present but nuanced

Hollywood

The following points highlight themes of cultures that influence character development in Hollywood:

Focus on Western Individualism: Hollywood characters are often crafted to be autonomous focusing on their personal growth. Ma’s identity is fashioned around personal survival, actions that are self-driven, and so she keeps saying ‘I’ or ‘me’. The identity is not based on communality.

Focus on culture of therapy: Character development in these movies focus on therapy, self-help and trauma processing. (This is mostly observed in the character of Ma overcoming trauma in *Room*). Even after the escape Ma verbalizes her psychological trauma openly. This culture of self-reflection and emotional articulation is used as therapy.

Characters being reflections of consumer culture: Ma’s values, actions and mental state of mind are shaped or are a reflection of appearances, urban settings and lifestyle choices in tandem with

societal consumer culture. Characters are mediated through institutional systems. Ma in *Room* is being questioned, scrutinized and pressured by the media, reflecting a culture of scrutiny and spectacle made public. She is therefore tied to pressures from societal consumerism, which leads to her attempted suicide.

Cultural identity is present but nuanced: Some form of identity of culture is evident, only that it is often covert or nuanced. It is not overtly expressed in dressing and language but embedded in ideology. In *Room*, the culture of patriarchy is expressed by Old Nick playing the role of a father and husband to his captives (Ma and Jack).

Table 4: Cultural Influences on Character Development in Nollywood Films

Nollywood Characters	Cultural Influences
	Tied to Communal Values and kinship
	Focus on blending with Local language and identity
	Morality and religion
	Gender roles and societal expectations

Nollywood

The following points highlight themes of cultures that influence character development in Nollywood:

Tied to Communal Values and kinship: The behavior of characters is greatly influenced by societal norms, family heritage and kinship.

Character identity is relational and characterized by shared responsibility, marital responsibilities, and responsibility to family unit. This explains why in *Road to Yesterday* Victoria still yearned for her husband to return home after staying out late, and she yearned to restore their marriage and family after the rift between her and Izu.

Focus on blending with Local language and identity: Emotional depth is expressed through dialogue, dress, language mixing, and performative confrontation. The identity of characters is a product of a blend of culture and language. Therefore, dialogue is in English with local languages like Pidgin English, Yoruba, and Igbo. In the case of Victoria, we observe a code switch between standard English and Pidgin English, when she speaks with the police. Victoria's identity is a negotiation between two cultural frameworks. This is reflected in her language code switching, dressing and mannerisms. Her hybrid expression highlights the tension many modern Nigerian women face when asserting individuality within traditional gendered expectations. Also, this hybrid personality resonates with a lot of characters in Nollywood films.

Morality and religion: In Nollywood, characters are embodiments of values and decisions which are shaped by their traditional beliefs, religious ideologies and societal standards of morality. This is seen in the character of Victoria, where she seeks for forgiveness. Also, her mother tells her to go and talk things out with Izu, a product of religious foundations that emphasize endurance and forgiveness in marriage. So in Nollywood moral judgement relates to forgiveness, endurance and some form of reflection. The reflection aspect is seen in the character of Izu where he sits in the bar with his friends and philosophizes on morality in relationships.

Gender roles and societal expectations: Patriarchal norms are in the forefront of issues that Nollywood characters grapple with. In *Road to Yesterday*, Izu judges Victoria over infidelity as a woman, while he was not innocent of the same act. In the film, the traditional role of cooking by a woman is revealed when Victoria, pleading with Izu, says she would cook so they could talk.

Female agency is often expressed through some form of negotiation as is the socio-cultural expectation of wifhood. Therefore, cultural duality is seen in characters navigating both modern and traditional norms as depicted in the character of Victoria.

Discussion of Findings

The theoretical framework that underpins this work is the Representation Theory by Stuart Hall. According to the theory, representation is a system that utilizes signs and symbols to represent nuances, ideas, emotions and thoughts. Hall's theory presents representation as a dynamic approach to encoding and decoding cultural connotations using signs and symbols. He posits that representation is never neutral, instead it is open to several interpretations depending on the socio-cultural context and disposition of the audience. Therefore, meaning is not fixed. Hall (1997) posits that there is no true single identity or way that people or events can be represented; instead there are several ways. He suggests that representation is how meaning is produced and exchanged in culture.

Therefore, in making films, the screenwriter can choose the actions, traits and behaviors that represent the character or its development. This implies that characters are represented as determined by the screenwriter. Utilizing this theory as a lens for this study provides for a foundation to understand and interpret how characters in Hollywood and Nollywood industries are constructed along ideological and cultural lines.

Hollywood characters mirror Western ideologies such as agency, transformations that are individualistic, and therapy culture. Therefore, these characters are fashioned by the norms of their society that place value on fitness, emotional restraint, rational problem-solving and self-actualization. In *Room*, Ma's character development is shaped by therapeutic coping strategies. Therefore, cultural identities in Hollywood characters are embedded in subtexts and understated references, requiring some form of cultural competence to be decoded (Prysthon, 2022). In contrast, in Nollywood, cultural identity is quite explicit.

Characters in Nollywood are characterized by communalism, kinship, and morality and all these are clearly encoded through their attires, language switching and direct moral discourse. Also, due to the postcolonial modernism witnessed, characters challenge societal status quo. In *Road to Yesterday*, Victoria juggles cultural duality between the modern and traditional identity. This overt layering of cultures agrees with Hall's concept that representation may produce multiple meanings depending on the context (socio-historical or cultural) (Hall, 1997; Okome, 2007). Also, the portrayal of gender roles (as is seen in *Road to Yesterday* where Victoria subtly suggests the societal expectations, by telling Izu she will cook for him while they talk) is a reflection of current strains in the society bordering on patriarchy and modernization. This aligns with feminist media critiques that have been meted against African cinema (Nwachukwu, 2016). In Nollywood, characters are culturally constructed visually and audibly by using costumes, language switching, and community dynamics and religious leanings (Krings & Okome, 2013). Victoria in *Road to Yesterday* is represented as a Western-Nigerian hybrid character.

One other thing Nollywood films do is openly critique societal structures. Victoria in *Road to Yesterday* challenges patriarchy, and cultural gate keeping. She conveys some resistance and reveals her aspirations despite the evident social constraints she faces (Nwachukwu, 2016). So, Hollywood characters operate within new-liberal frames of personal agency and psychological depth, while Nollywood characters weave through social structures, communalism and moral responsibilities. Hollywood characters are engaged in performance of selfhood, while those of Nollywood perform communal and cultural duties. This supports Hall's theory which posits that representation is not fixed; instead it is situated in culture.

Conclusion

Based on empirical evidence from this research, Hall's framework, that demonstrates how character representation is culturally specific and can be decoded differently (Hall, 1997), stands validated. This shows how Stuart Hall's Representation theory is still very significant in cross-cultural media analysis. Screenwriters, in both industries encode ideological meanings in character traits, arcs and narrative structures, allowing for audiences to decode based on their cultural and social contexts, thus giving it varying interpretations.

Generally, findings from this research substantiate the Representation theory and build on it. Through this cross cultural film analysis, character development is revealed as a dynamic process through which cultural, ideological and identity meanings are constructed, negotiated and communicated. Also, this research is a contribution to cross-cultural studies in film by showing that differing representational codes influence the manner stories are communicated, as well as determine how audiences interpret and understand the motivations, the identities and values of characters. This highlights the cultural bifurcation between Hollywood and Nollywood approaches in character development which reflects the unique contexts (socio-cultural, historical and cinematic) of each industry. Ultimately, the study shows that representation is a culturally encoded construct and not a neutral reflection of reality.

As a recommendation, this study suggests that further studies be conducted comparing cultural influences of character development across other industries and societies. Also, other future related studies should have more broad scopes by analyzing more films and characters in the studies. This

will give a more representative conclusion. Film makers and screenwriters across the globe should take note of these findings to ensure that their narratives have characters that are developed considering the specific milieu.

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