

Tyranny of the small-screen: a reading of Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart*

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the critical reception and disqualification of Genevieve Nnaji's film, *Lionheart* (2018), at the 92nd Academy Awards. It examines the tension between the film's nomination by the Nigerian Official Selection Committee (NOSC) and its rejection at the global Oscar platform. Deriving its theoretical framework from Peter Harcourt's three-tier model of film appreciation which evaluates films based on specific artistic/aesthetic criteria, the paper is a close reading of *Lionheart*, situating the film's text and the director's work against the cinematic profile of Nollywood and juxtaposing these with global cinema practice. The major finding is that while Nnaji's *Lionheart* justified the NOSC's decision by competently conveying the Nigerian experience of cinema, the film remained too circumscribed by its local Nollywood technical conventions to have made any significant impact on a world-class cinematic stage like the Oscars. The paper recommends that Nigerian filmmakers need more informed awareness of the comparative limitations of their choice narrative and narration formats in order to enhance their competitiveness on global cinema praxis.

Keywords: Nollywood, Nigerian Oscar, Genevieve Nnaji, *Lionheart*, Bong Joon-Ho

Introduction

The disqualification of Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* at the preliminary stages of the Oscars in 2019 generated widespread debate. Most commentators admitted that the disqualification was technically valid, given that *Lionheart* indeed violates a standard criterion of the Oscars International Feature Film category, which requires that entry films' dialogue track be predominantly non-English language. Some critics - especially from the Nigerian, African and black diaspora cultural sectors - read sinister 'imperialist' and 'racist' motives behind the disqualification, citing the Oscar's history of political manipulation and bias (Tsika, 2019; Biakolo, 2019; Hirsch, 2019). However, the counter-arguments about *Lionheart*'s disqualification largely remained at the level of emotional rhetoric: little critical attention has been paid to the formal credentials of the film that impressed the NOSC to select and submit it for the Oscars in the first place.

The validity or otherwise of the NOSC's estimation of *Lionheart* could not be interrogated because *Lionheart* was not able to test its strength against the best efforts of cinema cultures around the world: its disqualification occurred before the 92nd Academy Awards nomination phase. It is in view of the foregoing that this paper's overarching objective is to review the formal credentials of Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* against its birthing cinematic culture, Nollywood, and the fundamentals of the film form as defined by global practice. The findings of this study will not only comment on the NOSC's estimation of *Lionheart* as a competent representative of the Nigerian cinema experience for the year 2019; they will also be constitute a retroactive overview of Nollywood formal, aesthetic and operational identities in the late 2010s.

Theoretical framework

A competent critical lens to examine the cinematic qualifications of *Lionheart* may be Peter Harcourt's multifaceted concepts of film criticism that coalesce into his three-level model of film appreciation, which he demonstrates in his influential book, *Six European Directors: Essays on the Meaning of Film Style*. This model helps to determine *Lionheart*'s self-contained formal identity and to review the strengths and limitations of Nnaji's directorial effort against the cinematic attributes of film texts that traditionally compete at the International Feature Film category of the Academy Awards.

Peter Harcourt's three-tier model of film analysis is not a formal theoretical proposition or a pedagogic methodology. Rather, the concept encapsulates and synthesizes his core ideas about the form and aesthetics of film both as a cultural product and a tool of communication. A significant part of Harcourt's foundational work in film criticism derives both from Bathesian semiotics and from his study of literature in the humanistic and culture-focused tradition, which he shared with his mentor, F.R. Leavis at Cambridge University in the 1960s.

Feldman (2014) submits that Harcourt's most profound contribution to film theory may have been his famous essay, 'The Innocent Eye', published in 1965, in which he tries to define the essential formal and aesthetic 'signature' of the Canadian cinema. His central argument in the essay is that filmic expressions bear certain resonances that reflect and sometimes define the national or communal culture/philosophy in which the films are made. Just as Leavis prescribes that the critic's personal feelings about a literary text should not be denied or discounted but integrated into an educated engagement with the text (Guy, 2019), Harcourt essay also advocates that the critic should interrogate a film text with their 'feeling and judgment, sensitivity and intelligence moving together'.

In his later work in film analysis, Harcourt (1977) foreshadows New Historicism's emphasis on situating cultural texts within the historical and cultural contexts of their creation. He aimed "to describe relations between national cultures and the films made in those nations." This prescription also informs this paper's reading of *Lionheart* within the operational

principles, creative ethos and technological ambience of the Nigerian film industry from which the film emerged in 2019.

Harcourt's *Six European Directors: Essays on the Meaning of Film Style* is generally regarded as his magnum opus. Bringing together all the strands of his concept of film analysis, the book introduces and demonstrates the three-tier model of film appreciation that supports his major arguments: that a cinematic text bears specific cultural imprints; is both a reflector and a product of the socio-historical ambience of its creation; and that a critic's personal but informed response to the text is both a valid and invaluable tool of criticism. Harcourt's later work is considered to be a continuous elaboration of this three-tier analytical methodology he has demonstrated in *Six European Directors* (Morris and Dorland, 1994)

Specifically, Peter Harcourt's three-tier concept prescribes that an engagement with a film text starts with the film's tangible elements like plot, dramatic structure and characterisation: this is the Level of Incident. At the second level - the Level of Imagery - the analysis contends with the film's aesthetics of narration in its mise-en-scène, that is, the technical conveyors of meaning through lighting, set and sound designs, cinematography, costuming and editing. Harcourt inscribes his notion of 'the innocent eye' at this second level of film appreciation, advising the critic to appraise the images as primarily expressing not just the story but also the filmmakers' perspective on the world as their culture trained and demanded them to. At this level, the film critic may interrogate the connotative and denotative cultural meanings coded into or suggested by the film's iconography. In this context, this paper's reading of Nnaji's *Lionheart* engages with such iconographies that reflect subtexts of specifically Nigerian culture and philosophy in the film.

Harcourt's Level of Argument, is the third, most abstract and most interpretive point of engagement with a film text. This is where the critic deconstructs the film's central theme or its principal proposition about its subject. The critic distils the film's argument from the interplay between the film's incident and imagery. Essentially, for Harcourt, the film's argument represents and reveals the 'attitude to life' held by the filmmaker and the culture/history in which the film was made.

Narrative scope of *Lionheart*

The dramatic universe of *Lionheart* may be the first platform of engaging with its intrinsic value as a film text. Applying Harcourt's Level of Incident, the narrative canvas of Nnaji's debut film appears rather narrow. This contrasts strongly with the narrative scale of all the films that made even the first shortlist for the 92nd Academy Awards for Best International Feature. Both Nnaji's *Lionheart* and Bong Joon-Ho's *Parasite*, which eventually won the contest, can be classified as family domestic dramas; yet the story-world of *Parasite* contains wide-ranging universal resonances in its intense story that examines class conflict and social inequality between ordinary citizens of the same community. On the other hand, *Lionheart*

merely encodes an exclusively Nigerian cultural experience in its story of Adaeze, a young woman trying to prove herself by helping her incapacitated father out of a corporate crisis.

Also, the story-world of *Lionheart* is largely a self-referencing entity, denoting only the melodramatic passions of its characters without subtextual or intertextual connotations. This constitutes a technical limitation because beyond the aesthetic innovations in their crafting, the true power of all significant films lies in their subtext; the mute essence of their narrative that sells itself without words and without any visual artifice, directly to any audience. Known as the ‘enigma code’ in Bathesian semiotics, it is the subterranean quality of the film narrative that not only structures and coheres the plot, but also drives and sustains the audience continuous engagement beyond the surface events of the story. For instance, beyond its epic opulence, it is the subtext of Masaki Kobayashi’s *The Human Condition* trilogy, which, according to Scott (2008), stirs its audience to an “understanding of what it is to be alive.”

Apart from having several layers of subtext, virtually all films that have won the coveted Best International Feature Oscar, including *Parasite* at the 92nd Oscars, also present themes that reverberate beyond their own story-world. The universal resonance in these films embed both in the ideological underpinnings of their stories and the global political conversations that their themes and treatment provoke. Whereas Bong Joon-Ho structures his award-winning *Parasite* as a bold, riveting allegory of the absurdities and human cost of late-stage capitalism (Bean, 2020; Eugene, 2021), Nnaji’s *Lionheart* is clearly apolitical and devoid of any compelling ideological significance, as it hardly engages the audience beyond its sentimental exhortation for filial and tribal integrity. In this context, *Lionheart* seems to present a less competitive profile against such films it would have competed with if it had reached the selection stage of the 92nd Academy Awards.

Structural orientation of *Lionheart*

A remark, credited to popular American film critic, Roger Ebert, may be apt to preface an analysis of *Lionheart* under Harcourt’s ‘Level of Image’. Ebert (1997) writes that ‘it is not what a movie is about; it is how it is about it’. Invoking the perceptive logic in this statement, it may be argued that beyond the limited scope of *Lionheart*’s narrative as analysed above, its structural form would have also severely weakened its competitive strength at the 1992 Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film. *Lionheart* did fulfil the Academy’s requirement that competing films must have a regular theatrical release prior to submission. Yet, many features of the film’s narration suggest that its grand design orientates less to standard cinema, and more to the small-screen formats of home media modes of television and video consumption.

The small-screen orientation of *Lionheart* becomes more understandable in relation to the historical and formal origins of the Nollywood film industry, which produced both the film

and its director. In their earliest engagement with Nollywood, and well into the late 2010s, academics and professional critics generally conceived Nollywood as what Ogunsuyi (1999:72) calls “a form of small media technology of popular discourse”. There were various, valid reasons for this conception. From its severally documented ‘humble’ beginnings in the 1990s as a pragmatic alternative to a national cinema industry that had gone comatose, the seminal Nollywood output was mainly crafted and consumed under the home-video technology. Also, for the first decade of its existence, most of the directors and producers of Nollywood video films came from the television medium. Secondly; early Nollywood mainly serviced a vast sit-at-home audience, distributing and exhibiting through portable home media devices of CD, DVD and consumer-grade video projectors. Also, except for their feature-length duration, the formal structure and narrative scope of early Nollywood ‘films’ were virtually indistinguishable from the regular fares of television drama (series and serials) in the Nigerian television broadcast space (Ogundele 2000). Finally, since a large number of the current generation of Nollywood’s leading directors and producers began their careers as actors, editors, scriptwriters and technicians in the television soap-opera format, the dynamics of small-screen narration has shaped their understanding of the art and craft of cinema. Genevieve Nnaji is one of the earliest and most enduring star-actors of Nollywood and *Lionheart*, it must be remembered, is her directorial debut.

Legacy of the small screen in *Lionheart*

Several studies in audio-visual narration have outlined the technical and technological differences between the classic cinema and television formats. Other studies have demonstrated how such differences impact the form, aesthetics and narrative potentials of film and television content. Long before the advent of digital video, Schroeder (1973) had provided one of the earliest outlines of what he calls the ‘inherent limitations of television as an art form’. Nicholl (1978), also infers a categorical opposition between film and television when he writes that: “the cinema is larger than life, the TV image is smaller than life. Both literally and metaphorically. One medium is essentially heroic, the other domestic; one is played out on Olympus, one is on the hearth.” More recent researchers who have come to similar conclusions on the differentiating dynamics of digital video and classic cinema iteration include Comerford (2023), Lavik (2024) and van den Oever (2025)

Haynes (2000) brings the scholarly comparison of film and television formats closer to our discourse here. First, he describes Nollywood films as an odd hybrid, calling it ‘something between television and cinema’. Then, he delivers his categorical verdict that Nollywood films “provide little of the visual poetry of true cinema”. By fostering Nnaji’s *Lionheart* almost two decades after Haynes’ verdict, the Nollywood industry appears to be still more oriented towards the structural dynamics of the small-screen than the formal precepts of classic cinema.

The dynamics of small-screen narration manifest in *Lionheart*, first, in terms of plotting and thematic preoccupation. For instance, the narrow scale of the film's narrative space and thematic concerns may be located in how the conflict of television drama and soap-operas usually revolve around stakes that are low-key, personal and more emotional than social or political in nature, or communal and universal in scope. In the main, Nollywood filmic stories have remained melodramatic roller-coasters of the trials and tribulations of individuals, in which the stakes rarely rise beyond the levels of family disruption and reconstitution. Nnaji's *Lionheart* fits snugly into this template. The stakes of the film's conflict remain rooted in the ambition of Adaye, the heroine, for personal growth amidst her family's struggles to maintain its dynastic status of wealth and influence.

Analysed at Harcourt's Level of Incident, the plot design and pattern of characterisation in Nnaji's *Lionheart* also appear basic and conventional, in accordance with its television heritage, especially in the soap-opera format. Hellerman (2019) observes that to navigate the difference between film and television narrative genres, 'the secret is in the tropes'. *Lionheart*'s story is a trope of the dutiful child, the heroic scion who rises to the challenge of saving the family honor and dynastic legacy. Perhaps the most successful manifestation of this trope in soap opera history is *Dallas* (aired on CBS between 1978 and 1991, then reprised on TNT between 2012 and 2014).

Similarly, the character design of *Lionheart* can be located in the established conventions of television drama. In the classic structure of the soap opera, not only are characters clearly delineated in the broad strokes of heroes or villains; the plot also exists just to serve the characters' needs (Pribram, 2020; Frazer, 2024). Ultimately, the conflict in the dramatic universe of *Lionheart* is the epic battle between the forces of Good and Evil: young and morally flawless Adaye Obiagu struggles to prevent the vile and unscrupulous Igwe Pascal from seizing her family's business. The film's plot simply collates the heroic and villainous plans of Adaye and Igwe to achieve their opposing objectives.

Yet another television soap opera convention found in *Lionheart* is the effusion of coincidences, especially at the critical plot turning points of complication and resolution. The film resolves its central conflict through one of such contrived coincidences when Godswill, Managing Director of Lionheart Limited, suddenly becomes a lecherous old man as he follows a curvy lady into the dressing room of a swimming pool. There, he 'stumbles upon' and prevents a bunch of crooks from fleecing a man. The man he saves is Hamza Maikano, a character who will later repay Godswill's good turn by facilitating the much-needed funds that saves Lionheart Limited from bankruptcy.

Lionheart also pays homage to the 'cliff hanger' principle of soap-opera narration in its overall plot segmentation and in its intra-scene deployment of story information. Here again,

appraising this narration device at Harcourt's Level of Imagery, *Lionheart* invites a juxtaposition with *Parasite*. Both films liberally use the 'cliff hanger' technique. *Lionheart* employs the technique exactly how weekly television soap operas use it - to regulate the flow of adrenalin in the audience according to their plot outlay. On the contrary, *Parasite* uses the 'cliff-hanger' to vary the tempo of action flow and to create or sustain tensions that deepen the tensile strength of its existential drama of class struggle and basic human instincts. In *Parasite*, suspense maps the plot as an ascending ladder of complications in the race of life: in *Lionheart*, suspense maintains a high-octane pace from one dramatic moment to another, spellbinding the audience to only the changing fortunes of the protagonist and her beleaguered family.

Two instances may suffice to contextualize *Lionheart's* use of the 'cliff hanger' narration device within the television soap opera convention. As the Board of Lionheart Limited listens with bated breath to a recorded message from their Chairman announcing his successor, an unidentified man heads for the Board Room. Here, *Lionheart* uses portentous music over parallel editing to reveal the visitor's body gradually as the Board members' anticipation listening to the message increases. Finally, the narration fully reveals the person to be the cantankerous character, Godswill, just as Chief Obiagu's recorded voice identifies him by name as the long-awaited successor. The 'cliff-hanger' protocol continues in *Lionheart* to the very last plot turning point that leads the narrative into its denouement. This time, the film employs the time-tested principle of 'last minute rescue' in crime dramas: just as his corporate rival pronounces a takeover of his company, Chief Obiagu leads in his victorious camp, armed with legal instruments and the force of law to dislodge the impostor.

Formulaic and conventional mise-en-scene

Virtually all the directorial choices in *Lionheart* are demonstrably conventional and formulaic, drawing on well-known cliches of screen narration. Here again, Nnaji is simply responding to both her formal heritage in Nollywood as well as the tyranny of the small-screen that spawned the heritage. Nollywood did not only develop within the formal crucible of the small-screen media; the immediate audience pool for Nollywood films was also fluent in (and expected) a certain prototype of screen language, which it learnt from television since the nation's cinema collapsed due to several socioeconomic factors. Therefore, from inception, Nollywood had wholly adopted the paradigmatic elements of television drama story-telling, including lineal, cause-effect narration, character-driven and hero's-journey narratives, as well as a screen language whose syntax is irrevocably immersed in the Continuity System. Nnaji's grid of framing and picturization as well as her cutting pattern neither flout nor attempt to deconstruct the classic television/Nollywood conventions of storytelling enumerated above, making *Lionheart* a faithful reflection of classic television/Nollywood formal identity. Lacking the wide range of dynamic camera work usually associated with the film format, *Lionheart* largely presents the static camera setups that are common to studio-based sit-coms and low-budget soap operas. Also, whereas mise-

en-scene designs in the film form tend to be explorative, detailed and consciously oriented towards visual aesthetics, the television medium's mise-en-scene tends to be functional tableaux, guided by the need to communicate only such immediate story information that moves the plot. Nnaji's mise-en-scene in *Lionheart* is basic, even placid sometimes, and only services the plot thrust of the character-driven story.

Additionally, even as the cinematographic design of *Lionheart* employs the modern cinema compositional gauge of 16:9, the director often seems to envision her mise-en-scene for the foundational 4:3 aspect ratio of the classic television screen. This is evident in her centralized framing, her full-frontal figure placement as well as her near obsession with compositional symmetry. There is also the copious use of a scene transition convention - developed largely through television sit-com - of panoramic shots of city traffic to signify the passage of time between story points. The latest embodiment of this television convention in Nollywood is the view of a cityscape from a slow-moving drone, serving as Establishment Shot or to signify the passage of time. *Lionheart* also generously employs this convention, as do virtually all Nollywood films from about year 2013.

Reinforcement of stereotypes and conservative ethos

With another reference to Harcourt's Level of Argument, which interrogates a film's central theme as an interplay of its story and the way it is told, this study finds that *Lionheart* remains so enmeshed in the tenets of television and classical Nollywood screen narration conventions to the point of subverting its own textual aspirations. An age-old critique of television is that it mechanically retains, reinforces and recycles the dominant ideologies and cultural constructs of the society (Chiumbu and Iqani, 2019). This tendency echoes in Nollywood, which has traditionally constructed its dramatic universe in total, unapologetic deference to patriarchy, and in defense of dominant cultural values, morality and ethos. One of the most ubiquitous conservative ethos in Nollywood films is the portrayal of women in the traditional constructs and stereotypes of gender identity. Many critics of Nollywood have noted this, including Garritano (2000) and Ogundele (2000). The Nigerian Oscar Selection Committee may have presumed that *Lionheart* appears to be a revisionist Nollywood film in this context, especially in the profile of its lead character, Adaeze Obiagu, as a high-flying female holding her own in a traditional male terrain. Some reviewers also enthusiastically read feminist iterations into the film. There is, for instance, Bams (2020), who writes that *Lionheart* has "a satisfactory story to tell in favor of feminism".

However, a nuanced reading may reveal that *Lionheart* actually uses its female characters to reinforce and recycle several traditional images and constructs of women that are deeply ingrained in Nigerian cultural ethos. The very title, *Lionheart*, perhaps inadvertently, echoes the tendency across ethnic groups in Nigeria to describe powerful, high-achieving women as 'men in women's skin'. With this title, Adaeze, the film's heroine ostensibly has the heart of a lion, the archetype of masculine power. Also, *Lionheart*'s narrative only highlights the

aptitude of Adaeze; it does not project her as *capable*. She possesses the right combination of business intelligence and admirable corporate ethics to help her father out of a desperate financial gridlock. Yet, it is not Adaeze's actions that actually resolve the conflict: it is the film's *deus ex machina* in the person of Hamza Maikano, a male, that does this. Also, the only other notable female character in *Lionheart* is Adaeze's mother. Lacking any individuality, this character is wholly submerged under the Nollywood stereotype of woman as contented home builder, ardent supporter of husband and nurturer of children.

Still contextualizing *Lionheart* in Harcourt's Level of Argument, the film is not only explicit in its self-determined 'culture preservation' agenda; it also emphasizes the religio-cultural ideologies that rule its story space. In one instance, director Nnaji and her editors visually stress this emphasis by framing Adaeze's Mother in a big closeup when she tells her dispirited daughter that; 'God never gives you a burden He has not equipped you to carry'. There is also the painstakingly staged family dinner scene. Here, a group of unblemished characters, all members of a highly successful, proudly Igbo family eat a communal meal. At the head of the table sits Chief Obiagu, the all-knowing and authoritative father, wearing the full Igbo traditional costume signage of wealth and status. Sprinkled with Igbo proverbs from the elders, the dinner talk centers on desirable traditional codes of dressing and courtship that the current youth generation recklessly disregards. Also, early in the story, a scene shows the intractable Godswill boldly disrupting the hustle of two young Igbo scammers, then, admonishing them to 'stop tarnishing the image of Igbo people'. Set against the profound universality in the cultural references of its competitors, this cultural particularity of *Lionheart* might have somewhat diminished the film at the competitive stage of the Oscars in 2019.

Nollywood verbiage

Lionheart also reflects its Nollywood heritage in the way that words become the primary source of story information, characterisation, themes and authorial intent. Verbiage manifests in the typical Nollywood narration either in oral overkill of story information or in using words to repeat visual elements of narration. Again, scholars have noted this defining feature of the Nollywood film, with some attributing it to the dominantly oral nature of self-expression in Nigerian indigenous cultures. Ekwuazi (1991:90) succinctly frames such attribution with his assertion that "the silent film could never have originated from Africa". This, he explains, is because "in an oral culture, speech is golden: no less a premium is placed on seeing than on hearing". This may, perhaps, explain why the typical Nollywood narration feels the need to verbalize characters' state of mind and their intentions.

In *Lionheart*, the two-minute melodramatic conversation under the moonlight between Adaeze and her father, Chief Obiagu, is superfluous in the sense that it only expresses in words what the film has already emphasized in different ways: that Adaeze is the apple of her father's eyes. In another example of redundant wordiness; it is obvious that Adaeze feels

disappointed when her father bypasses her to appoint her uncle as Managing Director of Lionheart Limited; yet, the film makes Adaeze's Personal Assistant prompt her to verbally express her disillusionment.

A product for mass consumption

Perhaps the overwhelming influence of Nollywood and television's formal and aesthetic traditions on *Lionheart* becomes more understandable against director Genevieve Nnaji's admission that she aimed the film at a 'mass audience'. She tells *Essence*, an online magazine, that her film is basically "a good human story with relatability from anywhere (that) will travel far and resonate with viewers". Perhaps it is significant that Nnaji uses the word 'viewers' here, a term more associated with television content consumption than film box office attendance. Nnaji's desire to make *Lionheart*'s story accessible to 'universal' viewers is also rooted in an enduring operational philosophy of the Nollywood film industry. In the same way that television (and most commercial film cultures of the world) identifies primarily as a channel of entertainment, most Nollywood films seek to serve their audience with safe and wholesome entertainment (Odedina, 2023; Okome, 2025). This philosophy conditions both the content of the Nollywood text and its formal attributes. The director of *Lionheart* speaks to this when she explicates her directorial concept in the same interview with *Essence*. According to Nnaji, it was important that *Lionheart* be "light-hearted and warm, so the environment in which it was told was crucial as well". One of Nnaji's options to make *Lionheart* 'light-hearted and warm' may be the film's strained effort to generate comedy (especially through the characterisation of Godswill). Also 'the environment' in which *Lionheart* is told is the standard backdrop of most made-for-television drama: a categorically middle-class milieu, being the repository of cultural and ideological conservatism (Kevers, 2017; Samuels, 2023;) and therefore, a totally safe platform of discourse for the mass audience.

Finally, even if it is against the grain of contemporary world-class film narratives, *Lionheart* retains its formal roots in television drama and Nollywood narratology by clearly underlining its own didactic significance. At his second, 'providential' meeting with Hamza Maikano, Godswill intones; "It's a small world . . . Just do good to any human being you see anywhere because you never know what tomorrow will turn out to be". This contrived meeting is not only the 'reward' for the 'do-gooder' character, it is also the final path to plot closure and a conventional happy ending for *Lionheart*, director Nnaji's charming tale, which, like all great allegories, finally fades in a lavish celebratory dance involving all the 'positive' characters of the film's story-world.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the holistic profile of Genevieve Nnaji's *Lionheart* validates Nigerian Oscar Selection Committee's selection of this film as presenting an accurate Nigerian experience of the cinema in 2019. The film competently addresses its primary audience because its

worldview (in terms of its themes and argument) as well as its treatment (in terms of its form and aesthetics) resonate within an unmistakably Nigerian cultural experience. However, the same criteria that make *Lionheart* excel as a *Nigerian film* would have severely limited its chances if it had featured in the competitive stage of the 92nd Academy Awards. This is because while all the other texts competing for the prestigious Best International Feature Award were crafted under a definition of film as a narrative form expressed in cinema's unique language, *Lionheart* self-consciously defines itself in the tradition of television soap-opera; as a form of domestic entertainment and light discourse.

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