

BOOK REVIEW – *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*

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Abstract

This piece is a review of a recent book of essays on Nollywood titled: *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* edited by Mathias Krings and Onookome Okome, and published in 2013. The review-essay was delivered at a gathering during the second edition of the “Nollywood Conferences” organised by Kwara State University, Malete, Ilorin and convened by Prof. Onookome Okome of the University of Alberta Edmonton, Canada, between the 27th and 30th of November, 2014. The conference, which was themed: *African Cinema and the Supernatural*, attracted several scholars and authorities on Nollywood, both local and international scholars, including academics from outside the humanities. The review-essay summarizes the ground-breaking essays in this rare collection and also, critically but succinctly addresses the various dynamic dimensions through which Nollywood could be adequately understood. The essay shows how the book delineates and illustrates in great measure, the interesting transformations which Nollywood has undergone in more than twenty years since its emergence, and how it has influenced and contributed to the growth and reputation of African Cinema in the twenty-first century.

The Nigerian Video Industry, Nollywood, has emerged into a cinema culture that is reckoned with internationally. Following Nollywood’s remarkable transformations are radical production prowess, unconventional forms of exhibition, and distribution. Piracy had become a necessary conundrum to its very popularity and reputation of

being Africa's most transnational film industry, among other industries in the continent. The aforementioned characteristics further qualify the industry as sub-cinema, and Nollywood has emerged from the unknown to the popular – something fascinating and significant. Much like Hollywood, Nollywood has grown from strength to strength, and from glory to glory.

At the centre of Karin Barber's seminal essay published in 1987 'Popular Arts in Africa' is the notion that, "‘popular arts’, ‘popular culture’ and ‘the people’ are very much linked and fluid, and are permanently evolving fields rather distinct categories. Barber defines Popular Art, as that which emanates from or by the people targeted at the people by studying and addressing issues that are part of the yearnings of the people, simply accessed by the people, enjoyed, consumed and discussed by the people" (Barber: 1987).

With reference to its gradual maturity over the past twenty years, Nollywood, by all accounts, has consistently evolved through the dynamics of what constitutes our everyday epistemics and bearing the burden of illustrating the hopes, impediments, the plight, the joys, the sorrows, and the 'postcolonial predicaments' (Haynes: 1999), of the Nigerian people, and invariably a large section of the African Continent.

In addition to its phenomenal strides is the eloquence of the critical reception it has garnered overtime, by longstanding critics and scholars. These include Hyginus Ekwuazi, Frank Ukadike, Onookome Okome, Jonathan Haynes, John McCall, Brian Larkin, Kenneth Harrow, Moradewunmi Adejumo, and a large number of evolving scholars in the making, and also the controversial 'cultural mediators' as categorised by Onookome Okome in a somewhat critical essay, 'Nollywood and its Critics' (Saul and Austen, 2010). There are also, beginning to emerge in reasonable numbers, critical books and essays in journals that explore significant issues surrounding Nollywood, from various perspectives, which enrich the quality of the academic and scholarly endeavours that have gradually and painstakingly evolved a critical filmic ambience and arena for essential and core debates.

Another interesting book of essays on Nollywood, has been added to the repertoire of the emerging studies on Nollywood. The book is

titled; *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of An African Video Film Industry*, edited by Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome. Published in 2013, by one of the most important publishing outfits in the world, Indiana University Press, Bloomington & Indianapolis, USA, *Global Nollywood* is essentially a collection of apt, interesting and yet ground-breaking essays about the plurality, transnationality, and transnational studies of Nollywood. The essays appear lucid and as such, distil positions and arguments, constructed and pushed forward by brilliant scholars on the indefatigable influence this industry constantly exerts over a good number of other African film industries and how this influence, in various ways, granted such societies the rare opportunity, to see their altered and deprived self, in relation to the epistemics of their everyday reality.

The book is divided into four major parts, and each is given adequate and equal treatment with elegance, clarity and coherence. Each part has a title that serves as the theme, which sheds light on each essay. But the current reviewer would rather sum them up as five, given the quality of the book's 'Introductory Part'. The 'Introduction' not only offers in 'precise brevity' the crux of the entire book, but also touches on the significant and yet controversial issues surrounding the emergence of Nollywood, and the *Neo-Nollywood* productions, popular culture, the differing modes of production among and between Nollywood practitioners and auteur African cinema industries respectively, migrant themes and diaspora-filmmaking, as popularised by Hamid Naficy in his *Accented Cinema* (2001), to mention a few.

The first part involves two essays in two chapters. The first chapter with the title: From "Nollywood to Nollywood" by Alessandro Jedlowski studies the challenges involved, in the circulation and consumption of Nollywood products in specific parts of the world. He also privileges the role of trans-nationalisation, in the processes of marketing. The second chapter with the title: "Nollywood's Transportability: The Politics and Economics of Video Films as Cultural Products" by Jyoti Mistry and Jordache Ellapen, considers

Nollywood in its radical forms and as strictly unconventional. The contributors critique Nollywood as a cinema where there is a paucity of films that lack themes dealing with the ideological and the political for which the first generation of filmmakers were known. They assert that this glaring lack of political ideological conception of filmmaking, is partly steeped in the concept of "third cinema", as instituted within the discourse of film studies by Gabriel Teshome. There is a knack for self-representation of the everyday life, and the significance of entrepreneurial endeavour that subverts conventional modes of exhibition and distribution. But in spite of their notions and personal observations, McCall (2007) and Haynes (2011) have specifically warned against these biased and not too objective notions.

Part Two, which has five essays, considers Nollywood productions as texts. In other words, textual analyses are done from the point of view of the exilic cinema critic. In the third chapter titled: "The Nollywood Diaspora: A Nigerian Video Genre", Jonathan Haynes, critiques a huge number of films, stating that these films were partly or wholly made in diaspora, in consideration of the themes of how Nigerians conceive of life in the First World. The same thing can also be said for Sophie Samyn in Chapter Four, with her essay 'Nollywood Made in Europe'. What is interesting about her essay is that her investigation are the reasons why filmmakers from Nigeria would rather go to the First World nations to make films, rather than stay at home. She posits that the deplorable situation and conditions back home are responsible for such exilic decisions. This leads us to Chapter Five. The essay 'Made in America: Urban Immigrant Spaces in Transnational Nollywood Films' by Claudia Hoffman, analyses, with case studies, how Nigerian immigrant filmmakers imagine and illustrate the 'cities' in their films. In other words, the representation of metropolitan cities such as: New York, Los Angeles, and Atlanta, have become locations for the filmmakers to tell their stories, thereby constituting the entire production as transnational works. Such immigrant communities will automatically become cinematic apparatus and manifestations of transnational movements of money, labour, goods, media, and people, while the actual city space, with its buildings and other landmarks and facsimiles of urban life, becomes a

place where social lives “negotiate the affinity between the local and the global.”

In the sixth chapter Onookome Okome, in his essay “Reversing the filmic Gaze: Comedy and the Critique of the Postcolony in *Osofia in London*”, superbly illustrates how the ‘ridiculous’ becomes, a ‘figure-strategist’ for postcolonial subversion of Western hegemony. That is to say, Okome explicates the film from the point of view of the post-colonial critic, stressing the significant notion of the ‘African Mentality’ over that of the ‘Western Mentality’. Also, not essentially to privilege the combative nature of ‘culture clash’ or ‘cultural antipathy’ (as it exists between the two prominent characters Osofia and Samantha), but perhaps to also show the reversal and shift, of hegemonic powers of the African who conquers the West, even on Western turf.

The seventh chapter which considers Paul Ugor’s “Nollywood and Postcolonial Predicaments: Transnationalism, Gender, and the commoditisation of Desires in *Glamour Girls*”, emphasises further the problems that have bedevilled Nigeria, which the Nigerian girl is confronted with, and which also threatens her survival in a postcolony. These problems frustrate and force Nigerian girls into prostitution, and not just an act that is confined to the local ambience, but also at the international level. The present reviewer is of the view that, through the lens of Chika Onukwufor’s film, *Glamour Girls 1&2*, we are able to come to terms with an issue that constitutes part of our social history.

The third part of the book deals with, ‘Nollywood Audiences’ outside Nigeria, within other African countries, up to the Caribbean and also to Europe. Heike Becker and Katrien Pye look at the nature of audience of Nollywood texts in South Africa and Kinshasa respectively. Jane Bryce and Giovanna Santanera consider those of Barbados and Italy respectively, while Babson Ajibade, looks at the plurality of Nollywood audiences in the West in general.

The final part involves three essays by Abdalla Uba Adamu, Matthais Krings and Claudia Bohme, and how they examine the nature of the

subversion, re-writing, the appropriation and adaptation of Nollywood films within the country and beyond.

There is no doubt that this is an extraordinary book, which has given much credibility not just to the industry, but also to the nature of the scholarly enterprise of the field in Nigeria. The book will heighten and instigate more debates in various forms, and at various levels, in areas like film theory and criticism, third cinema, postcolonial studies and popular culture, based on the phenomenal growth of a popular film industry that has greatly shocked the culture of filmmaking in Africa. Can we then refer to Nollywood as that which is gradually tilting towards a 'cinema engage' as constructed by Ken Harrow? (Harrow, 2007: 2). During an interview with Uzo Esonwanne, Tunde Kelani, emphasized his love for the celluloid as a trained cinematographer, but since the possibility of shooting with it proved abortive and for economic reasons, he confessed that he could only shoot with the alternative technology: the video technology, which currently is experiencing tremendous transformation all over the world. He also explained that the format will eventually become the future of African filmmaking (Esonwanne, 2008: 26). That future is here. That future has been made possible by the dynamic growth, development, reputation, and plurality of Nollywood, as it creates other *woods* in Africa. (Mathias, Krings and Onookome, Okome, 2013, 'Introduction').

That future is also partly documented in this book (and among others to come), which will give answers, to the poser by Jonathan Haynes about four years ago, with the title: 'What is to be done? Film Studies and Nigerian and Ghanaian Videos' (Saul and Austen: 2010). That book is *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, which the editors, Mathias Krings and Onookome Okome, offer you today in this present time of contemplating Nollywood as both a national and transnational film industry.

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