

Book Review

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Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome eds. *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013, 371pp. ISBN: 978-0-253-00935-7. Price N/A

A plethora of critical literature currently exists on the Nollywood phenomenon since its emergence in Nigeria in the late twentieth century. However, *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* is the first international collection of critical essays that focus “entirely on the diasporic dimension of Nollywood” (p.viii). The book has a four-part structure featuring fifteen chapters by various contributors and an introductory chapter by the editors.

Part One of the book makes a bold attempt at “mapping the terrain” of the discourse (because of the increasingly elastic and amorphous terrain of Nollywood). Part Two explores the diverse continental nexus of Nollywood practice. Part Three examines the “foreign” audience profile of Nollywood in diverse environments while Part Four ties up with an interrogation of the “appropriations of Nollywood” using case study analyses of the adaptation of the Nollywood aesthetics and style by Nigerian and East African producers.

In the introduction, Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome provide a backdrop to the book’s critical kernel and establish the transnational character of the Nigerian video film industry (Nollywood). They attribute its global expansion to the films’ popular appeal in the diaspora facilitated by their visibility through satellite television, the Internet and piracy-induced informal outlets. This visibility of Nollywood, as Alessandro Jedlowski discusses in Chapter One, reduced the sale of original video copies but paradoxically raised the international audience of Nollywood,

thereby creating a “diaspora market”. But to benefit from the transnational access of its products, Nollywood needs to formalize its industrial processes through shooting in celluloid formats, exhibition at cinemas and forming international partnerships for co-production, distribution and marketing.

Furthermore, Jyoti Mistry and Jordache Ellapen in Chapter Two examine the political economy of Nollywood as a transnational practice and underscore the need to enhance its pan-African transportability as a cultural product by domesticating some “competing and complementary forces” such as conditions of production, distribution, content and budget. In Chapter Three, Jonathan Haynes extends the discourse on such “forces” in Nollywood’s transnational connections, focusing on the trend of co-production and expatriate projects. Haynes observes a marked change in styles, content, and narratives of recent Nollywood diaspora films and attributes these changes to “historical evolution rather than nationality” (p.96). In Chapter Four, Sophie Samyn continues on the issue of Nollywood diaspora practice, drawing examples from Europe. Samyn observes that Nollywood films made in Europe serve as instruments of cultural diplomacy and connect the makers and viewers with home and abroad. This nostalgic connection with “home” is considered a typical feature of diasporic films worldwide and a factor of Nollywood’s transnational development.

But Nollywood is not only connected with what the immigrants do but where and how they live. The urban space is a significant index for interrogating cultural productions. Hence, Claudia Hoffmann in Chapter Five explores “urban immigrant spaces” and how American cities have become sites for the negotiation of Nollywood’s diasporic filmmaking and transnational linkage. Viewed through the lens of diasporic Nollywood, the American city space assumes a contradictory identity of attraction and frustration. The films become a canvas on which the allure of the urban centre, by extension America, as “a dream destination” is deconstructed and repainted as “a confusing, alienating, oppressive and claustrophobic” space for African immigrants. This deconstruction is also found in the transnational comic video film as discussed in the sixth chapter of the book by Okome. Illustrating with *Osuofia in London*, Okome argues that transnational Nollywood films reframe ideological and cultural boundaries, becoming an “act of deconstruction” and reversal of the (post)colonial image and stereotype. Therefore, Osuofia’s “victory” over London is symbolized in his “conquest” of Samantha Wood; and this implies conquering his colonial past.

From deconstruction of the past to (re)construction of the present, Nollywood offers stark commentaries about diaspora Africans in the

context of labour, mobility and livelihoods. In Chapter Seven, Paul Ugor uses the global sex trade, the trafficking of women and its Nigeria-Italy connections as reflected in the film, *Glamour Girls*, to interrogate the unfair intercourse between Africa and Europe, within the global backdrop of exploitation and abuse of “disadvantaged global citizens” (p.172). But, as transnational products, how are these films consumed and who are the audiences?

Heike Becker in Chapter Eight found that “the transnational consumption of Nigerian video films” in Cape Town and Windhoek is assuming “localized form”, thus, the films create a space for southern African audiences “to debate their Africanity” and reimage the concept of “home”. In Kinshasa and Barbados, the audience attitudes are characterized by a paradox of yearning and trepidation as Katrien Pype and Jane Bryce argue in Chapters Nine and Ten respectively. Nollywood circulation in Kinshasa and Barbados is linked to Christian Pentecostalism and social morality. The films create a hybrid popular culture influencing the audience lifestyles. But in engaging with Nollywood images and narratives, Nigeria, to the popular imagination of the local Kinshasa Kinois, becomes “at once an African El Dorado and a dangerous country” (p.211).

A similar paradox of “fear and desire” frames the experiences of Nollywood audiences in Barbados where the politics of power is veiled in the Pentecostal aesthetic of prophecy and miracle as opposed to the bogey of occult (*obeah*) economies. Hence, the “desire” evoked by opulent lifestyles and the “fear” conjured by the *obeah* (occult) representation in the films create a complex experience for Barbados audiences. This ambivalence locates the existence of Nollywood at the ambiguous margins of acceptance and rejection.

Based on stereotypes entrenched by Nollywood films, especially *Glamour Girls 2: The Italian Connection* (1996), Italy to the average Nigerian, is dominated by an overarching image of women trafficking, pimping, drug mafia and sex trade. However, as Giovanna Santanera discusses in Chapter Eleven, the Nigerian diaspora audience in Italy often views Nollywood depictions as reflections of their struggle for survival. This aligns with Paul Ugor’s thesis (in Chapter Seven) on the “exploited” and “disadvantaged global citizens”. Nollywood provides a referential base for reinterpreting their existence, negotiating their “immigrant experiences in the context of migration”, and coping with the absurdities of their situations in Italy.

In Chapter Twelve, Babson Ajibade argues that Nollywood is yet to cultivate a Western audience. The study underlines a semantic difference between “Western audience” and “audience in the West”, arguing that

the sale of Nollywood video films in the West may not necessarily mean that Westerners are consuming the product. From the experience of a "recut" (re-edited) Nollywood video screened in Switzerland, Ajibade concludes that Nollywood producers planning to reach Western audiences need to embrace the transnational challenge, imbibe global "filmic principles" and "rethink how they make videos".

The appropriation of Nollywood video films by other film industries affirms its transnational popularity. The Hausa filmmakers in northern Nigeria, as Abdulla Adamu discusses in Chapter Thirteen, have abandoned their imitation of Indian (Hindi) films to appropriate Nollywood narrative styles and visual techniques. But in "transgressing" these cultural and aesthetic "boundaries", the northern producers infuse Islamic culture, substituting "Christian imagery" with "Islamic symbolism". This "Islamization of Nollywood", Adamu argues, creates a "distinct" form, known as "Kanywood" with a transnational focus at appealing to Arab and Asian communities in Nigeria and Hausa speakers abroad.

Another appropriation trend obtains in Tanzania where narrators perform live translation of Nollywood films. In Chapter Fourteen, Krings argues that such video narration is a form of mediation that domesticates Nollywood, reconfiguring the medium to "bridge cultural gaps" and suit local Kiswahili audience needs. In the last chapter of the book (Fifteen), Claudia Bohme investigates the "adaptation" of Nollywood "video horror film" by Tanzanian filmmakers and submits that the Tanzanian horror video film is a "bricolage" which draws from various local and global sources and iconographies.(p.332). But despite this "stylistic identity", the "parallels with Nollywood are nonetheless visible". In essence, the Tanzanian video industry amply reflects Nollywood in both form and aesthetics.

Global Nollywood... interrogates the transnational character of the Nollywood industry with its diverse dimensions as reflected in content, conditions of production, modes of distribution, pan-Africanism, audiences, and aesthetic influences on the video film industries in other countries. The book equally raises cognate discourses on migration, citizenship, culture, race, religion, labour and diasporic economy; and how these are viscerally connected to the popular artistic dynamism of the Nollywood film industry. As a new form of representation emerging from postcolonial environments, Nollywood has become a transnational commodity and practice within the gamut of transnational media flows thereby connecting the "homeland" and the diaspora. But to sustain its presence as a global cultural product, Nollywood, it is argued, needs to domesticate piracy and formalize its transnationality.

Although the transnational connection of the Nigerian video film has been observed by some earlier studies (See Philip Cartelli's study on Nollywood in the Caribbean (2007), Moradewun Adejumo's work on Nollywood as "minor transnational practice" (2007) as well the study by Samuel Ayedime and Victor Yankah (2011) on the international "creative intercourse between Nigerian and Ghanaian filmmakers"), nevertheless, the current volume edited by Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome is the first book to comprehensively articulate, in a systematic manner, the transnational dimensions of the Nollywood industry and its diasporic tentacles in Africa, Europe and the Americas. The originality, coverage and seminal influence of the compilation make it a landmark contribution to the literature on Nollywood practice. The book is strongly recommended for researchers, practitioners and students of African film, popular arts and the postcolonial and Diaspora experience.

References

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- Cartelli, Philip (2007), "Nollywood Comes to the Caribbean" in *Film International* Issue 28